

Public Health Association Media release

31 August 2011

Tamariki Ora – Children know what’s best for children

The Public Health Association’s annual Conference was told today that health professionals need to listen to children and young people – and integrate their views into health planning and service delivery.

“The health sector is currently predicated on deficit thinking,” said Massey University’s Dr John Waldon.

“When we think about child health, we tend to think about what makes them unwell – things like disease and their experience of violence in the family. So we are always acting after the fact and focusing on what’s wrong. Rarely do we act to develop wellbeing.

“We need to move to a more holistic and positive view of child health. In other words how do we understand the wellness of children? What are the indicators that they are healthy and thriving?

“We also need to incorporate the views of children and young people into our programme planning and design. Children understand a lot about wellbeing so we should listen to them.”

Dr Waldon worked with parents and three groups of Māori children and young people as part of his study into how children assess their wellbeing. Along with their parents 152 children and teenagers from 12 schools in communities in Waimana, Taneatua, Kutarere, Palmerston North, and Waitohi were interviewed.

The study, which took place over three years, was revealing.

“Children’s understanding of wellbeing is very reliable and this is very true of young Māori. This study looked specifically at children in kura kaupapa Māori.

“Healthy relationships with others emerged as the key concern within the cohort, but overall we found that these kids were well. They have good levels of self-esteem, they are physically active, and they enjoy the company of their peers.

“When we questioned them about behaviours outside the norm, some appeared confused however. So we asked them how often they did things that disrupted the activities of the group for example. Because they generally conform, and acceptance within the group is important, the question was counter-intuitive for them.

“When we re-interviewed them in groups they remembered the survey and were able to identify how they had changed. So we came to the conclusion that this type of survey can be a formative experience for children and young people.

“It is foreign for us to talk to children and young people. We must however learn to engage with them, and create a multi-part dialogue about children’s health issues.”

Media are invited to attend the whole or any part of the conference.

To arrange interviews with John Waldon or any Conference speaker, please contact Penny Cooper (Conference media liaison): 0274 547 584.

Links:

- [Conference website](#)
- [Conference handbook and programme](#)
- [Presenter abstracts and information](#)
- [Presenter abstracts only.](#)