

# Message from our Chief Executive

## A strategic plan for the OSCAR sector.

Out of School Care and Recreation (OSCAR) programmes are playing an increasingly significant role in the lives of tens of thousands of children and their families throughout New Zealand. At least 80,000 primary school-aged children per annum experience their first OE (OSCAR Experience) by participating in these programmes.

For many families, OSCAR programmes are an essential childcare service that allows women and single parents to take on paid work or study. But the importance of OSCAR goes beyond this. It goes way beyond childcare. Programmes provide vital social and recreational opportunities and role models for children, plus support and help for families who have moved away from traditional family networks.

This growth mirrors significant transformations in family make-up and our society generally. Women's expectations of paid work, increasing numbers of single parent families and the movement of families (including immigrant families) away from familiar communities and support networks, are all having a profound impact on how our children are cared for. New Zealand is not alone in experiencing these changes. The OECD predicts that within a generation, the primary responsibility for educating and caring for children will have passed from the biological parents to professionals. We need to be ready for this.

The number of OSCAR programmes in New Zealand increased exponentially in the late 1990's and does not appear to have peaked. The introduction of the OSCAR subsidy has improved access to existing programmes for families on low and middle incomes and underlined the expectation that childcare services will be available to support working parents. The "Evaluation Report of the Ministry of Social Development's Package of Assistance to OSCAR Programmes" in 2004 resulted in increased funding to the sector and the number



f programmes applying for government grants went up from 377 in Oct 2004 to 560 in Oct 2005.

Primary school children spend more than half their waking hours out of school. As New Zealand children spend an increasing amount of this time in formal care, OSCAR is becoming a defining influence in their childhood. The quality of care for children cannot be separated from the long-term effect on their families, communities and eventually all of society. An investment in a long term strategic plan for the OSCAR sector will be an investment at all these levels.

As mentioned earlier, at least 80,000 children participate annually in OSCAR programmes. It is with some concern that I read recently, that a similar number of children, ie. more than 80,000 per annum, are witnesses of family violence. Further, there is a \$5.32 billion per annum fiscal and economic cost to NZ on the long term effects of childhood abuse.

At the present time, government funding into the OSCAR sector is either through:

- Development and/or Assistance funding for the programme providers.
- Funding for The OSCAR Foundation to provide advice and support services, either directly or through our networks.

**This constitutes only 0.25% of the \$5.32 billion mentioned above.**

Wouldn't it be great to see a change of emphasis in the direction of providing a more robust fence at the top of the cliff, rather than a fleet of ambulances at the bottom?

### **Why should The OSCAR Foundation lead the Sector Strategic Planning process?**

The OSCAR Foundation's vision of "Enriching Childhood" underlines our commitment to ensuring that primary school children enjoy quality experiences in their out-of-school time. In accordance with our constitutional objective that we act as the recognised national consulting body, we have played a pivotal role in the development of the OSCAR sector in New Zealand since 1995.

As the National Association for OSCAR we:

- Provided the foundation for uniting hundreds of previously isolated programmes under the OSCAR banner, through meetings, conferences, newsletters and events such as OSCAR Week.
- Promoted the establishment of numerous OSCAR programmes.
- Provided training, support and information to programmes both in conjunction with regional networks and through our own OSCAR Advisors.
- Developed specialised resources for programmes, notably "Go Kids!" in partnership with Coca-Cola, which includes activities, equipment, staff training and on-going updates to encourage children to be physically active in their recreational time.
- Forged a strong and enduring relationship with central government; in particular we have:
  - Worked in partnership with CYF to produce minimum operating standards and liaised with programme providers to implement them successfully.
  - Played a major role in the introduction of government grants to programmes including establishing the criteria for funding; processing grant applications and participating in a two tier decision-making process in which recommendations are made by a funding committee comprising our members.
  - Worked closely with Work and Income New Zealand to introduce and then improve access to the OSCAR subsidy to all families who need it.
  - Been contracted as the government's provider of choice to carry out an advisory and support service to programmes throughout New Zealand.
  - Worked with The Open Polytechnic of New

Zealand to introduce the OSCAR Certificate, a nationally recognised training qualification.

- Encouraged excellence of service provision through the publication of a professional magazine, "School's Out!" and national awards for outstanding programmes, support organisations and individuals.

**Following this promising beginning** we have undergone a short period of consolidation, growing and strengthening our internal organisation.

Clearly however, many of the fundamental issues for the sector identified over ten years ago: sustainable funding, effective regulation, staff training, recruitment and wages are still with us. Although it is widely acknowledged that the standard of care for children is directly related to the quality of the staff, poor working conditions and lack of an attractive career path encourages high staff turnover. While a small minority of OSCAR programmes could be held up as examples of excellence, the service provided by many others could at best be described as adequate. Some even fall short of this.

It is definitely timely that NAOSCAR has become The OSCAR Foundation; the adoption of the new name and ethos heralds an opportunity to lead a second wave of action on behalf of the sector. Our relationship with the Ministry of Social Development, a key government player in the OSCAR sector, and our other strategic alliances means we are in the ideal position to undertake this project.

A comprehensive strategic plan will provide detailed knowledge of the sector that is currently lacking and a plan of action based on the needs of families and communities. It will also provide an opportunity to involve key stakeholders as partners, to achieve our vision of "enriching childhood."

A Project Team has been recently appointed by The OSCAR Foundation Board to develop a strategic plan that will define:

### **"What is OSCAR, what is the OSCAR sector and what should each of these look like in ten year's time?"**

The project team will define OSCAR (as a concept); and the OSCAR sector (people, services and amenities) and how these work together.

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