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we're a family: how lesbians and gay men are creating and maintaining family in new zealand

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UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY, CHRISTCHURCH**

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lives. Their willingness to share their experiences is greatly appreciated.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project explores the ways lesbians and gay men create and maintain family in contemporary New Zealand society. Its purpose was to illuminate successes and challenges experienced by lesbians and gay men as they created and maintained families together. The phrase 'creating families' in the context of this study refers to the ways in which adults establish themselves as parents (or in parenting roles) in relation to each other and their dependent children. 'Maintaining family' refers to the ongoing process of family preservation over the long term.

Twenty interviews were conducted with parents from 19 families. The majority of interviews were with lesbian mothers either parenting as single women or as couples. Two of these couples were also parenting with single gay men. Only one of these men was interviewed. One interview was with a gay couple. Unlike all other parents, these men were not actively parenting at the time of the interview.

The interview transcripts were subject to qualitative interpretive analysis to explore three related themes: how families formed; how they were being maintained; and associated significant successes and challenges.

Creating families

Families were formed by either bringing children into the world or by bringing children and adults together into new family clusters. The shaping of families took place in one of four ways, highlighting multifaceted relationships and processes. Firstly, families were created where parents planned children who were then born as a result of sperm donation (donor families); some parents chose a known donor and others an unknown donor to help them conceive. Secondly, families formed when parents with children from previous opposite-gender relationships re-partnered and planned further children born as a result of sperm donation (blended and donor families). Thirdly, families were created by bringing together parents with children from previous opposite-gender relationships (blended families). Lastly, families formed when they received children through whāngai relationships (whāngai families). Across all families, parenting was taken up in diverse ways that encompassed in some cases, the

involvement of more than two adults and/or more than one household.

Challenges in creating families

Significant challenges associated with creating families differed for those who engaged in assisted reproduction, in comparison with families where children were conceived in the context of opposite-gender relationships. For donor families, the challenges focused on how best to navigate assisted reproduction. Three aspects of this process were particularly challenging. The first was access to sperm. Access was not automatic, regardless of whether sperm was sought through fertility services or via known donors, causing delays and frustration. The second challenging aspect was donor availability. The numbers of donors available via fertility services prepared to assist lesbian couples to conceive, as well as the numbers of men approached through social networks who were willing to help, were limited. The third challenging aspect was the time it took for inseminations to proceed. Approval processes and waiting lists at fertility services, coupled with lengthy searches for, and negotiation with, potential donors, were the key contributing factors to delaying inseminations. For blended families, challenges related to the taking up of parenting roles by non-biological parents. These challenges were most evident during discussion about the ways in which family lives were maintained.

Successes in creating families

Successes in the ways families were created included parents having a readiness and commitment to engage in planned parenthood together. This was particularly evident for donor family parents, where a high level of planning and persistence in pursuing their goals was necessary for parenthood to be achieved. Family formation successes also included the actual or expected ability of children to both recognise and value social diversity, and respond to prejudice and discrimination as an outcome of growing up in a non-traditional family. Further to this, a broadening of the concept of what family meant, in both the conceptual and actual sense, was significant. The breadth of adult involvement in children's lives was seen as advantageous in terms of the numbers of people who loved the children, and could be called on in times of need.

How families were being maintained

How lesbians and gay men maintained complex family lives, once these had formed, was also explored. Consideration of how parents maintained families and managed households, parenting responsibilities, employment, recreational activities and daily life, drew attention to how the families' lives were organised. Family organisation impacted on family wellbeing. The families in this study were organised in one of three ways: as families from single households where two parents and children lived together; as families where adults who parented alone lived with one or more children; and families where two or more parents shared the parenting of children and purposefully distributed themselves across more than one household.

Challenges to family maintenance

Some families experienced challenges in their attempts to achieve parenting. Plans made to form multi-parenting families were never fully realised or broke down altogether. Legal advice or attempts at legal remedy in these situations did not bring resolution; rather they raised important questions about the status of donor fathers in particular. There were also challenges in forming blended families, particularly in the early stages of the family coming together. Former opposite-gender partners' responses to the new family structure could be testing; non-biological parents did not always welcome a parenting role and at times children resisted the newcomer and their roles too. Families were also subject to challenges about the validity of their family make-up, and experienced heteronormative and homophobic responses to their family unit. Several faced challenges when they went to formalise roles and relationships. For the most part, turning to the law did not help constitute families or protect parents' access to their children and children's access to their parents.

Successes in family maintenance

Families had many successes, three of which were particularly significant. The first of these, relevant to donor families, was donors securing involvement in children's lives in ways that were considered satisfactory. This included securing options for later contact or, in the case of unknown donors, being able to trace them in the future through fertility services' processes. A second success was the capacity to minimise challenges to family legitimacy by actively portraying families in a positive way. This usually meant being publicly open about family make-up. The final success was experiencing a united approach to family life. This was evidenced through joint responsibility for parenting and childcare to enhance household functioning, and enable employment and choices of leisure time activities.

Conclusions

The findings focus on several main points emerging from the study's data. The sheer accomplishment for same-gender parents of what it means to 'create family', let alone maintain it, and in forming multi-parenting arrangements, is noted. Issues with donor fathers' recognition as parents, associated with the registration of births and securing of additional guardianship are discussed. The importance that many lesbian parents place on men's involvement in children's lives is examined. Lastly, attention is drawn to the continued prevalence of homophobia and heteronormativity, and at least one potentially useful strategy is identified, which families are taking up, to counteract discriminatory and negative attitudes and responses.

Before the report concludes, limitations of the study are discussed and two conclusions are identified that would advance the interests of families parented by lesbians and gay men in New Zealand.

1. INTRODUCTION

Families led by lesbians and gay men¹ have gained increased recognition within New Zealand society in recent years. The support of new and progressive legislation has been an important contributing factor, most significantly the Civil Union Act 2004, the Relationships (Statutory References) Act 2005, the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology (HART) Act 2004, the Status of Children Act 1969 as amended by the Status of Children Amendment Act 2004, and the Care of Children Act 2004. It is likely that as this legislation is bedded in, the visibility and presence of such families will continue to grow as they take up their rights. In this context, both government and the public will be confronted more often with the complex realities of family lives that differ from the traditional forms and norms of those headed by heterosexuals.² It is already acknowledged that official statistics for understanding different family types are needed (Statistics New Zealand, 2008), and that policy issues exist in relation to families led by lesbians and gay men in New Zealand (New Zealand Law Commission Report, 2005, cited in Statistics New Zealand, 2008). Research that facilitates the understanding of these family lives is timely, particularly given the fact that the impact of the legislative reform is yet to be fully explored. Furthermore, lawmakers are still to wrestle with the ways in which any ongoing reform might need to respond to the existence of these families (Young, 2005). This study's purpose was to illuminate successes and challenges experienced by lesbians and gay men as they created and maintained families together in the present climate.

Families in which lesbians and gay men parent are diverse (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Most of the existing research literature relevant to these families is from international studies. Typically, these studies focused on the structure of such families and the outcomes for children. Stacey and Biblarz's (2001) review of some 20 studies is illustrative. With particular reference to outcomes for children, Stacey and Biblarz note that the "body of research, almost uniformly, reports findings of no notable differences between children reared by heterosexual parents and those reared by lesbian and gay parents, and that it finds lesbian and gay parents to be as competent and effective as heterosexual parents" (p. 160).

Several recent international studies place emphasis on a wider range of aspects related to parenting by same-gender parents. For example, the studies considered the importance of legal safeguards for same-gender and donor parents (Goldberg, 2005; Hare & Skinner, 2008; Short, 2007; Tolleson, 2006), as well as the planning necessary to achieve parenting in same-gender families (Mitchell & Green, 2008; Ross, 2005).

In the New Zealand context, Saphira's (1984) volume *Amazon Mothers*, about lesbian parenting in New Zealand, was a significant text reporting aspects of lesbian parents' lives as they were in the early 1980s. We know of no similar research publication pertaining to how gay men have or are parenting in New Zealand. With the exception of Henrickson (2005), there was no evidence found of recent New Zealand research about same-gender parenting. It is worth noting that in July 2008, a study entitled *Work, Love and Play in Diverse Family Life in Australia and New Zealand* was launched out of The Bouverie Centre at La Trobe University in Australia. The survey, reportedly the first of its kind in Australia and New Zealand, will explore the ways lesbians and gay men negotiate and organise parenting and household responsibilities. As such, it should make a positive contribution to future research literature.

Henrickson's (2005) *Lavender Parents* research offers some initial insight into lesbian, gay or bisexual parenting in this country. Data were gathered as part of the Lavender Islands: Portrait of the Whole Family, study, the first national strengths-based study of individuals identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Henrickson, Neville, Donaghey, & Jordan, 2007). The study included a minor component relating to lesbian, gay and bisexual parenting. Henrickson (2005) noted that this was a step in the right direction in terms of beginning to describe and understand such parents, but concluded that there is a need for further research. As he states, "the issue of LGB [lesbian/gay/bisexual] parenting requires specific additional research in New Zealand and its unique policy and cultural environment" (p. 80). Areas he felt would be useful to focus on included relationships related to multiple-parenting models and, in particular, donor fathers' contributions to parenting children raised by lesbian couples. We consider this emphasis warranted given that a donor is not able to become a legal parent to a child conceived and born with the

¹ In the context of this study, the terms 'lesbian' and 'gay' are used to denote women and men who take up same-gender relationships and claim identities as same-gender attracted. When used specifically in relation to this study's participants, this was the case for them at the time of participation in this project.

² In the context of this study, the term 'heterosexual' is used to refer to women and men who take up opposite-gender relationships and claim identities as opposite-gender attracted.

assistance of reproductive technologies. And that because of this, he is unable to be named on a child's birth certificate.³

A key theme in the family literature is "the changing nature of contemporary family life" (Patterson, Peace, Campbell, & Parker, 2007, p. 9). The Families Commission has an interest in supporting the production and dissemination of high-quality research that reports on matters of importance to families, including the ways in which present-day family life is shifting. As noted by the Families Commission (undated), the Blue Skies Fund⁴ enables researchers "to examine contemporary and emerging family issues and thereby add to the knowledge about families in New Zealand" (p. 6). This project therefore aims to add to knowledge about families in New Zealand where lesbians and gay men parent dependent children. If knowledge to government and the public about such non-traditional families is to be promoted, an understanding is needed of who these families are, the forms they take, what their achievements and difficulties are, what problems are affecting them and how to address them and the related social and policy implications.

It is well documented that "the 'taken for granted' nature of families has changed" (Pryor, 2006, p. 5) and families are increasingly diverse and complex (Breheny & Stephens, 2007; Callister, 2006; Patterson et al, 2007; Pryor, 2006). Growth in family diversity and complexity creates increased acceptance that family structures are changing and that this alters the contexts in which children grow up (Dharmalingam, Pool, Sceats, & Mackey, 2004). However, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) (2004) notes that the lack of statistical data about newer family structures from, for example, Statistics New Zealand census data, contributes to "a growing gap between the available information and the information required to reflect the often complex realities of contemporary families" (p. 125). Statistics New Zealand recently recognised a need to understand different family structures, noting that specific work in the area of same-gender parenting will likely occur through research (Statistics New Zealand, 2008).

Particular knowledge gaps about new family structures include a lack of information about blended families;

an area identified as of interest by the Families Commission in 2007. Some lesbians and gay men create families when they form relationships with new partners who bring with them children born into previous opposite-gender relationships. As Henrickson (2005) states, the challenges experienced by these same-gender partners "have become the routine challenges of living in blended families" (p. 78). Yet same-gender parents have the added complexity of sometimes negative responses to their same-gender attracted relationships to negotiate. Another identified knowledge gap (Henrickson, 2005; Ministry of Social Development, 2004) relates to the effects on family wellbeing and on children of same-gender partners where decisions are made to create families through assisted reproductive technologies.

Both these identified knowledge gaps are addressed to varying extents in this project through an exploration of the ways in which women and men in same-gender relationships are making families, what life looks like within these families and their unique rewards, demands and concerns. In particular, the project investigates how the parents concerned created and maintained family within the limits of the present legislative framework. For the purposes of the report we clarify the use of the terms 'legal parent' and 'guardian'. Legal parenthood gives rights, powers, duties and responsibilities to adults in relation to children. Legal parenthood usually denotes a genetic connection to the child but legal parenthood can also be assigned. For example, under the Adoption Act 1955 an adopted child is deemed to be the child of the adoptive parents as if he or she were born to them. For children born as a result of an Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) procedure the common law and the special rules in the Status of Children Act 1969 apply.

In particular, there is a statutory presumption of parenthood in section 5 of the Status of Children Act which provides that where a child is born to a woman during her marriage (or within 10 months of the marriage being dissolved by death or otherwise), in the absence of evidence to the contrary, the child is presumed to be the child of its mother and her husband (or former husband). The presumptions do not explicitly extend to children born of de facto relationships. (The definition of de facto relationship in the Interpretation Act 1999 includes same sex couples.)

³ See Appendix 1 for an overview of the relevant current legal framework and pp. 8-9 for clarification of the terms 'legal parent' and 'guardian'.

⁴ This project was funded through the Blue Skies Fund.

Legal parenthood is not the same as guardianship. The benefits of legal parenthood to a child are rights of citizenship, inheritance and maintenance. Guardianship is the right to day-to-day care of the child and the right and responsibility to make major decisions in relation to a child's upbringing; for example, education, religion, major medical treatment and where a child lives.

We have used the term 'parent' throughout the report to reflect the parenting undertaken by lesbians and gay men in the contexts of the families who participated in the study. Where we want to distinguish between this and legal parenthood or guardianship, we use the appropriate terms. 'Creating family' is used to mean the ways in which adults establish themselves as parents (or in parenting roles) in relation to each other and their dependent children. The term 'maintaining family' refers to the ongoing process of family preservation over the long term.

It is anticipated that this research will be significant for two primary reasons. Firstly, the research begins to fill the identified gaps and, secondly, it enables consideration of ways to proactively respond to changing both New Zealand society and legislative reform. This will be of importance to both the

lawmakers and the families in question who will, through the evidence of this research, contribute to policy development that is supportive of family diversity in New Zealand, and responsive to emerging issues. The study will also be of importance to all those concerned with the wellbeing of families generally, no matter their form.

This project, the first step in ongoing research at the University of Canterbury, adopted qualitative methods, as opposed to the quantitative methods used in the previously mentioned Lavender Islands study (Henrickson et al, 2007). This proved ideally suited to both expand on initial understandings and address the kinds of questions already noted in the literature as important. The findings of this project will inform the development of further studies designed to positively impact on the experiences of New Zealand families in which lesbians and gay men parent. This will include a study exploring how education settings contribute to the recognition of such families and the best experiences these families have had with social agencies. We are interested in finding out what works for these families, and how social policy can assist the development of practices that support all families in contemporary New Zealand society.

2. METHOD

This project is a small-scale qualitative interview study seeking to explore non-traditional family life in contemporary New Zealand society, with a particular focus on families where lesbians and gay men parent dependent children. The study aims to investigate how families are created, and how they are maintained. It explores ways to build on identified successes while addressing challenges and emerging issues in these processes. The report will discuss related social and policy implications.

The research questions were:

- > In what ways are lesbians and gay men 'creating families'?⁵
- > What does life within these families look like?
- > What successes, challenges and issues do these families experience?
- > What supports parenting in these families?
- > What is needed to support parenting in these families?

The methodological orientation of this project is qualitative and interpretive. Qualitative research demands the gathering of extensive data rich in detail that enables in-depth study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002). Interpretative analysis, filtered through subjective experience, makes the world visible in different ways to different observers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), at the same time as striving to make sense of social life and the ways people make meaning (Neuman, 1997). The open-ended, semi-structured interview is considered an appropriate tool to achieve these ends. Typically, in reading data from such interviews, the researcher is able to identify and explore sequential themes, pose contextually relevant questions in order to develop deep understandings and engage in flexible and reflective processes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gillham, 2000; Opie, 2003; Patton, 2002). In the case of this study, the data readings enabled exploration of several related themes that highlighted the ways the parents made meaning about their families: how families came into being, how they were

being maintained and associated significant successes and challenges.

2.1 The researchers

A team of four researchers working in three New Zealand universities conducted the study. As insiders to lives lived outside of the norms of heterosexuality, we recognised that our current and past positions as parents, partners and family members in diverse (including opposite-gender and same-gender) families, would impact on how we produced, made sense of and presented the data arising from this work. Nevertheless our 'insider' (Sears, 1992) status offered us access to participants and created rapport within interviews; it encouraged our interest in the subject matter of the study and it was helpful in sustaining collaboration within the research team. At worst it made the study more vulnerable to assertions of researcher bias blurring the ability to maintain the integrity of participants' voices, and to present a balanced account. Mindful of these tensions, we have documented the methods and procedures of the study carefully so as to provide an 'audit trail' (Merriam, 2002) necessary for reliability.

2.2 Accessing and recruiting participants

Snowball sampling was used to access and recruit participants, and is a particularly useful technique for accessing difficult-to-reach populations. It allows researchers to identify potential participants who are then asked to recommend others (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Neuman, 1997). In this case, the sampling strategy secured the involvement of parents in 19 families in which lesbians and gay men parent. We sought equal numbers of families led by lesbians and families led by gay men, however nearly all the families who participated were lesbian-led. Three participant families included gay men: in one of these families, the men weren't actively parenting and in a second, the gay male parent was not interviewed. Diversity was also sought in terms of the type of family formation and the age range of the children within families.

⁵ We have taken 'creating families' to mean the ways in which adults established themselves as parents (or in parenting roles) in relation to each other and their dependent children. This is in no way intended to negate other families, nor should it be taken to imply that families are predicated on the involvement of children. It is simply for the purposes of this study that we have constituted families in this manner.

2.3 The participants

Thirty-three parents from 19 families living within or close to three New Zealand cities (Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch) were recruited for this study. Thirty of the parents were lesbians and three of the parents were gay men.⁶ Across the families there were 36 children, 33 of whom were aged under 18 years and living at home.

Parents were interviewed as couples if they wished, or individually if they were the principal or single parent in their household. Participants were allocated a pseudonym for the purposes of the reporting of the research. Those who participated in interviews are listed in Table 1. For a full list of family members, refer to Appendix 2.

TABLE 1: Interview participants

Interview	Participants	Interview	Participants
A1	Nerida and Belinda	L1	Queenie
A2	Celia and Ginny	L2	Cindy and Candice
A3	Heather and Cate	L3	Whitney and Louise
J1	Crystal and Nola	L4	Damien and Caleb
J2	Trudi	L5	Kari and Sacha
J3	Xanthie	L6	April and Sandra
J4	Bette	N1	Laine
J5	Moana	N2	Dawn and Pia
J6	Annaleise and Ruth	N3	Renee and Neve
J7*	Anneke and Chloe		
J8*	Kirk		

*Anneke and Chloe, along with Kirk, were involved in multi-parenting children together. Their interviews were conducted separately and for the purposes of counting families, their family unit was counted once.

2.4 Data gathering

Open-ended semi-structured interviews were used with the full research team contributing to the development of the interview schedule (see Appendix 3). Using the schedule, a total of 20 single audio-taped interviews were conducted with participating parents. The semi-structured interview schedule ensured that the interviews were comparable and produced related data whilst at the same time enabling the participants to reflect freely on particular interests pertinent to their families. General lines of enquiry concerned:

- > how and when families were formed
- > who made up the families
- > the roles of family members and in particular, the roles of the adults in regard to the children

- > children's ages
- > what daily life looked like
- > successes
- > challenges and issues faced.

We also asked parents what parenting supports were in place within their families, and what they thought was needed to support parenting.

2.5 Data production

Most interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber with the assistance of one of the project's principal researchers. In two instances, an associate researcher completed the transcription of interviews that they had conducted. A total of 20 transcripts were produced and returned to the relevant interviewer for checking.

⁶ A fourth gay man was actively parenting in one of the 19 families but was not interviewed. His parenting is present in this study through the voices of the lesbians he parents with.

Where participants had requested the opportunity to read transcripts, and where necessary make alterations for accuracy, an electronic or hard copy of the transcript was provided to them. If the transcript was not returned within a week it was assumed that the participants consented to its inclusion as it was provided to them. In one case a transcript was returned with minor adjustments.

Once all transcripts were confirmed, paper copies were printed and bound into two single volumes for each of the principal researchers' reference. An electronic copy of the interviews was then imported into qualitative data analysis software for analysis (QSR NUD*IST Vivo [nVivo], 2008).

2.6 Approaching analysis

All interviews were subject to content analysis using the research questions as broad coding guides in the first instance. Working together, the principal researchers extracted and classified text from each of the interviews relating to the main research questions. Using nVivo, the text extracts were coded as project nodes (or categories). This process organised the data so as to account for how families were created; what life looked like within them; what successes, challenges and issues they faced; what supported parenting; and what was needed to support parenting.

This data arrangement allowed us to produce a quick reference matrix about the participant families. It accounted for the methods by which families had formed, how children were conceived, who the parents in the families were (day-to-day parents/parents more broadly⁷), who the children were and how families and parenting were distributed across adults in different households. The matrix is included in Appendix 2.

Following this, successes, challenges and issues raised by the participants were identified and coded to project nodes. The items in these nodes were then compared for significance. For a success or challenge to develop significance, it meant that at least one-quarter of the families had either spoken very similarly about, or had identified a substantially similar, success or challenge. The rationale behind limiting the data in this way ensured that the factors identified as successful or challenging were more likely than not to be recognised

as such when tested in member checks (Merriam, 2002). It also meant that atypical experiences expressed by participants could be recognised as such.

At a meeting of the entire project team, all the successes or challenges raised by participants were tabled for discussion. This provided an opportunity to test the trustworthiness of the interpretations that were being formed, and it allowed us to further refine our understandings of the successes and challenges, including identifying emerging issues. Once agreement about the significant successes, challenges and issues had been reached, the data pertaining to these were retrieved and nodes were printed for reference purposes.

2.7 Presenting findings

The study's findings are presented in two parts. The first part presents data on how lesbians and gay men create families, along with associated challenges and successes. The second part presents data about how families are maintaining themselves, and identifies significant challenges and successes associated with the maintenance of family lives. This distinction, between creating and maintaining family, allows for a consideration of family lives in two ways. First, it enables us to think about how people in same-gender relationships have been able to navigate assisted reproduction; and second, it enables us to illustrate unique family formations that transcend traditional boundaries, and what it might mean to live and contribute to contemporary family lives.

2.8 Ethics

Approval for the study was obtained from the University of Canterbury's Ethical Clearance Committee. Participation in the study was voluntary, with informed, written consent obtained from the participants prior. All participants had the right, without penalty, to withdraw from the study at any stage and/or withdraw information or data, or correct inaccuracies in data pertaining to them. In one instance, participants took the opportunity to clarify data in their interview transcript. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and as such real names and other identifying information are not used in this research report.

⁷ 'Day-to-day parents' refers to those parents who actively parented on a daily/weekly basis inclusive of overnight care. 'Parents more broadly' refers to those parents whose involvement ranged from daytime visits to irregular contact. Our use of the word 'parent' in this way is not the same as the description of 'legal parent', as outlined in the Introduction.

Appropriate security provisions have been taken to ensure all records and data remain confidential, with access to this material restricted to the researchers and the transcriber(s). All material from this study will be archived electronically and retained indefinitely.

2.9 Quality research design

The planning and conducting methods employed in this study have a positive impact on the study's capacity to produce trustworthy data and authentic interpretations (Merriam, 2002). The question of trustworthiness or "dependability" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 35) concerns a study's usefulness or authenticity. That is to say, if a study were to be judged trustworthy, the knowledge generated by it would more likely be put to use (Merriam, 2002). A number of design features contributed to the study's quality.

- > The insider status of the principal and associate researchers provided potential positive impacts on rapport with participants, and collaboration.
- > The use of a semi-structured interview schedule enabled comparability between interviews.
- > Limiting the number of people producing transcripts enabled style consistency and assisted in data reading.
- > Principal researchers worked together to conduct content analysis, allowing interpretations to be scrutinised by the associate researchers before agreement on the significant findings was reached.
- > The research process was transparent.

Combined together, these measures contributed to, and supported, an exploration of how lesbians and gay men in New Zealand are creating and maintaining family.

3. FINDINGS PART A: CREATING FAMILIES

The findings of this study are presented in two parts. In Part A, we present data about how the lesbians and gay men in this study established their families and took up parenting roles in relation to each other and dependent children. We also describe some of the challenges and successes of establishing family together in the ways outlined. In Part B, the focus shifts to consideration of how daily life in the families is maintained. Concentrating on living arrangements, in order to illustrate the unique nature of distributed families, we address how employment and childcare are shared and give reflections on daily life. Finally, we lay out several successes and challenges associated with how families maintain themselves.

3.1 How are lesbians and gay men creating family?

One of the main areas of study in this project was to explore the ways in which lesbians and gay men create families. As explained in Section 2, 'creating family' meant the ways in which adults established themselves as parents (or in parenting roles), in relation to each other and their dependent children. The establishment of parenthood and parenting roles often involved diverse parenting models. We found parents parenting alone and parents involved in co-parenting, multi-parenting and shared care.⁸ Their descriptions of creating family frequently centred on conception and birth stories of children, and on the ways in which blended families formed. From the interviews it became apparent that families formed in one of four ways:

- > donor families where adults planned children who were born as a result of known or unknown sperm donation
- > blended and donor families where there was a combination of children from previous opposite-gender relationships and planned children born as a result of known or unknown sperm donation
- > blended families where children were born as a result of previous opposite-gender relationships
- > whāngai families where the one family in this category had a child as a result of a whāngai relationship.⁹

The creation of these families highlighted complex relationships and processes.

3.1.1 Donor families

Twelve of the 19 families in this study only included children who were conceived as a result of sperm donation (eight families where the lesbian parents knew the donor(s) and four where the donor or donors were anonymous). In the case of families where lesbians conceived with donated sperm from an unknown donor, fertility clinic services were utilised after the children's mothers made conscious decisions about which of them would try to conceive. Annaleise explained how she and Ruth began their family. Theirs was a typical account of how unknown donor families formed:

...We had been together for a long time, about 10 years, and I told Ruth one morning that I was going to have children, ... and so we talked about it and decided that it was time to ... have a family and we went ahead and got pregnant and had Erin ... we went to a fertility clinic and we didn't really consider any other options in any great depth because that was the way we wanted to have our child. We didn't have anybody else significant in our lives [who] we wanted to be another parent for our child.

Three known donor families also conceived children with the assistance of fertility clinic services, while the remaining five couples used, what one participant described as "the home science method", and inseminated privately.

3.1.2 Taking up parenting in donor families

In three of the four unknown donor families, the lesbian couples were committed to establishing themselves as 'equal parents' to their children without the involvement of other significant adults. Being equal parents entailed shared responsibility and involvement in ongoing decision-making. For one of these three families, being equal parents also involved the purposeful positioning of the non-birth mother and the birth mother in ways that meant this was indistinguishable. Nola said:

...because I wasn't the birth mother, [for] want of a better word, to me it was extremely important that I developed a strong natural bond with Claudia, and I made that my life's mission ... to make sure that ... there was no difference ... I never wanted people to

⁸ Co-parenting occurred where two or more parents shared parenting of children within a single household. Multi-parenting involved two or more parents planning shared parenting across more than one household prior to the birth of children. Shared care parenting was when children lived part-time in more than one household following changes to previously co-habiting parents' relationships.

⁹ In a whāngai relationship, a child is given to, cared for and raised by someone other than her or his birth parents. Often, the child and caregiver/s are related by birth (McRae & Nikora, 2006). Caregivers are not recognised as legal parents without an adoption order. They may, however, seek guardianship through the Family Court (Whitireia Community Law Centre, 2008).

be able to come in and go 'Oh well, that's definitely the biological mother' –

Crystal: You can tell.

Nola: – and that's not. That was really important to me.

In the fourth family, it was Laine, birth mother to Jaclyn who was known as Jaclyn's mother, although both she and her partner Carlotta engaged in day-to-day parenting activities. In all but one of the eight known donor families, we found that either a single lesbian or a lesbian couple took up parenting. In Caleb's situation, this kind of arrangement was not what was first intended when he had agreed to donate sperm to lesbian friends three years earlier. He explained, "I had a child to an old friend of mine, and it was supposed to be a [multi-parenting] arrangement, and it went very bad, and the [multi-parenting] disappeared very quickly. And so I mean, I have a biological son, but we've seen him a handful of times only."

Keen to progress a parenting relationship with Caleb's biological son, Caleb and his partner Damien were sensitive to the stresses, both on themselves and the child, that attempts to proceed in this regard could bring. Caleb commented, "...in the fullness of time, if he makes a decision that he wants to seek us out, we'll be very welcoming of that... I can't see a way in the immediate future of where we would want to be re-entering that sort of level of hostility and conflict, either for ourselves, or for him."

With the exception of Mike, who was multi-parenting Fergus along with Whitney and Louise, none of the known donor families men took up an active parenting role in relation to their children even though contact between donors and children did occur in the context of broader social networks. In the family that Mike, Whitney and Louise had established, Fergus (aged five) and his older brother Farrell (also conceived with the assistance of a known sperm donor), each had relationships with their donors who had donated sperm. Farrell's relationship with his donor was, according to Louise, more like an "uncle relationship" but where Fergus was concerned, Mike was firmly established as his dad.

In all but one of the donor families, families were constituted around a single lesbian and her children or a lesbian couple and their children who lived in a single

household. Just over half of the families accessed fertility clinic services to help them conceive. With the exception of Mike, men who donated sperm to these families did not take up an active parenting role in children's lives.

3.2 Blended and donor families

Two of the families in the study included children born from previous opposite-gender relationships as well as planned children born as a result of sperm donation. In these families, three or four parents were involved. The lesbian mothers took up parenting in relation to all children, whereas fathers' relationships centred primarily around their biological children only.

3.2.1 Taking up parenting in these families

The ways in which parenting was taken up in these families was dependent on the relationships between the birth mothers of children born as a result of previous opposite-gender partnerships, these children's biological fathers, the mothers' new same-gender partners and their subsequent planned children born through sperm donation. The effect of this was that there were parallel family groupings operating within the single family. For example, in Celia and Ginny's family, they co-parented Erica but they also engaged in shared care parenting of Joanna with Bevan, Celia's previous opposite-gender partner and Joanna's father. This meant that Ginny saw herself as more of a "step-parent" to Joanna, and Bevan took no parenting responsibility in relation to Erica. Explaining how they imagined their children would describe the family's complexity, Ginny and Celia said:

Ginny: Erica would say she had two mums.

Celia: That's what she does say.

Ginny: And she had a sister, and you know she'd be quite, she'd have a really strong sense of the family. Not sure about Joanna.

Celia: Joanna would say I'm her mother and Ginny's my partner. That's how she'd describe it...

In the second blended and donor family there were five parents across three different households involved in raising children. Oldest children John and Jarrod, biological children to Chloe and her previous opposite-gender partner Alan, spent 50 percent of their time living with their dad and his new partner,

and 50 percent of their time with Chloe, Anneke and their younger twin sisters, Tabitha and Cerise. Whilst legally the boy children's parents were Chloe and Alan, practically all of the adults, inclusive of both Anneke and Alan's new partner, engaged in day-to-day parenting activities when the boys were living with them. Where Tabitha and Cerise were concerned, Chloe and Anneke were the legal parents, but Kirk, the gay male friend of the couple whose biological children were the twins, was also involved in the girls' lives as their dad. Kirk had regular contact with them that included providing overnight care on a regular basis. He also cared for John and Jarrod in the absence of their lesbian mothers during times he looked after the twins at their mothers' home.

Again, in this family, parenting roles were constituted differently within the family in relation to the various children. Like Ginny, Anneke saw herself as taking on more of a step-parenting role in relation to John and Jarrod. This meant that while she engaged in day-to-day caring of the boys there were times when she also stepped back, particularly as the boys got older, to allow Chloe and Alan to fulfil their parenting responsibilities. On the other hand, both Anneke and Chloe saw themselves as equal parents in relation to Tabitha and Cerise. Kirk explained his role as "father to twin girls", but in terms of formal arrangements he was not recognised as a father/other parent. Anneke explained:

I actually demanded that security. I wasn't going to have Kirk be on the birth certificate, just from a stakeholder point of view, you know you have to do disaster and recovery planning, and if things go pear shaped ... I'm not going to be a stakeholder to this degree and not have any rights, so we thoroughly investigated that one.

Not altogether satisfied with the arrangements but still interested in possibly pursuing guardianship of the children, Kirk said, "...I think that the Government has probably gone too far in terms of women's right to choose, like the father has no say, if he's not living with the woman at the time of birth, as to whether he can even get his name on there..."

Pursuing parenting in the absence of automatic legal protections represented a substantial risk for Kirk. Even though he was actively parenting his daughters,

positioning himself as their dad, and being understood by family and friends as their father, because Anneke was Chloe's partner at the time of the girls' births and they together had agreed to the procedure that had led to the pregnancy, it was they who were recognised as legal parents (to the exclusion of Kirk) under the provisions of the Status of Children Act 1969 as amended by the Status of Children Amendment Act 2004¹⁰. This was reconfirmed when the girls' births were registered and birth certificates issued naming the mothers as parents. Pursuing fatherhood had left Kirk without rights in relation to his children within the multi-parenting arrangement he, Anneke and Chloe had planned. Further consideration of Kirk's position, and of others with similar experiences is found in Section 4.2.3. See Appendix 1 for clarification of the current relevant legal framework pertaining to legal parenthood and guardianship matters.

In both of these blended and donor families the families existed across more than one household and they involved multiple parents who took up roles differently in relation to various children. In addition to the family nexus (the household where the lesbian parents and children lived for all or part of the week together), there operated second and, in the case of Chloe and Anneke's family, third family groupings that formed around some children and adults in the family. Such arrangements attest to the kinds of family complexity that can develop when lesbians and gay men enter into co-operative and multi-parenting relationships together.

3.3 Blended families

Four of the families in this study formed blended families when mothers in same-gender relationships began living together with their new partners and the children. In two of these families the new relationships ended prior to the mothers' participation in the study. Parents in blended families had or were engaging in shared care of the children with the children's fathers.¹¹

Cindy and Candice, one of the two families led by lesbian couples, talked about how their family came to be. Cindy began by stating, "Ours is a bit of an accidental lesbian family because I had two children already with a man... My children were five and three when I decided that I was a lesbian, or faced up to the fact that I was a lesbian, and so Candice came along six years ago when they were nine and 11."

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 Status of Children Act 1969, 3.

¹¹ In one of these families the children's dad had been very involved in their lives but he had since passed away and the parenting responsibility now lay solely with their mother, Bette.

Building on her partner's comments about how the family began, Candice went on to say, "We had no choice. Cindy had two children. We fell in love. And therefore, when two adults want to be together and fall in love, whatever accoutrements or accessories they have, fall into play."

Trudi, who had left her previous heterosexual partner after beginning a relationship with a woman, was a lesbian parenting alone. Bette, the second parent who was raising children alone from a previous opposite-gender relationship, had on the other hand, left her husband to live as a single parent with children. Since then, she had entered into several relationships with women, one of which had included co-habitation.

In Trudi's family, each parent had custody of one child, a son lived with his father and Trudi's daughter (Bianca) lived with her (an older son lived independently). Bianca's father was not involved in her day-to-day parenting, and Trudi wasn't involved in the day-to-day parenting of her youngest son. In Bette's family, the children's father had remained very involved in their lives and in parenting them:

Bette: He just lived up the road actually. Yeah, so no, this was his home, he wouldn't leave his children, he was very much involved in his children's lives, yeah with sports, schooling and...

Interviewer: So when you split up, you went to live in separate houses and he still had a big role, and you had a girlfriend at the time, and you were kind of, the significant people in their lives?

Bette: Yes.

3.3.1 Sharing parenting in these families

Amongst the blended families, parenting responsibilities and roles were (or in the case of Bette, had been) jointly shared between lesbian parents and children's fathers. But not all lesbian partners of children's birth mothers were eager to take up parenting. In Nerida and Belinda's family, for instance, the second of the two families led by a lesbian couple, Belinda had never intended taking up parenting in relation to Nerida and Donald's (Nerida's former opposite-gender partner) children. Nerida said:

...When Belinda and I got together, she was very adamant that the kids weren't her thing, and that she was in a relationship with me, but not the

children, and I found that really difficult. But you know, that's how we were, and over time the roles evolved to, she's kind of created herself a role ... to the point where the kids think that's great, and I think it kind of works for Belinda as well, because she doesn't want all that extra responsibility, but wants to be involved...

Belinda highlighted how her decision about not taking up active parenting had come to be:

...I did a bit of reading and stuff ... and a lot of the reading ... kind of talked about kids finding it really hard with replacement parents. And I didn't want to be a replacement parent ... you know, like they had a dad, and [they've] got a mum, and I just didn't want to be anything. I just wanted to be with Nerida.

Yet as the family took shape, Belinda realised that it was to become impossible for her to try and separate out a relationship with Nerida, as distinct from her children. As Belinda said, "I couldn't have a relationship with Nerida and not with the kids." Over time, her place in the family in relation to the children had taken its own form. Belinda did take some joint responsibility with Nerida; for example, keeping children's health appointments, meeting day-to-day needs, collecting children and transporting them to outside-of-school activities. Nerida said that the children, Rupert and Bonny, sometimes saw Belinda as:

...someone they can talk to, 'cause she's not quite in that parenting role, and so, sometimes she'll come to me and say, 'Oh well I'm not sure about whether you should do that because Rupert's really worried' ... so her role into the decision is more, it's like an advocate for the kids ... they have a confidant in some ways...

Belinda's reflection was, "I guess my role is about, like lightening things up sometimes ... you know if Nerida's stressed or whatever, as their kind of full-time mum, I feel that I can sort of support the kids to kind of talk to her..."

In Cindy and Candice's family there had also been some hesitation about how Candice's relationship with the children might form. In the six years since their family established, Cindy, birth mother to both children, had taken up a role in her and Candice's household, as the primary parent. Candice was available to be called

on for assistance with parenting on an as-needed basis when the children were staying with them:

Cindy: ...I gave birth to them, I pretty much take full responsibility for getting them going.

Candice: You're a primary parent within the blended family.

Cindy: Right I am. And if I want Candice to take over I ask her. So I say 'Look, I've got a meeting at 7.30, can you make sure he gets off to school, with a pen'...

Parenting in the blended families was not necessarily taken up easily. It seemed that biological parents retained their status as parents in the legal and formal sense with new partners taking up a different kind of parenting role. It couldn't always be assumed that new partners would want to take up parenting. It took time to work a way into a structure that would both preserve a sense of parenting as it had originally existed before new blended families had formed, and that would accommodate new adults who, over time, developed vested interests in the family unit.

3.4 Whāngai families

The final family in the study was made up of a separated lesbian couple (both of whom had re-partnered) whose child had come to them at birth through a planned whāngai relationship, and following unsuccessful donor inseminations at home. As noted earlier, in a whāngai relationship a child is given to, cared for and raised by someone other than her or his birth parents. Moana, the parent who participated in the study, explained how Tania had come to her and Sue:

The maternal grandmother rang us and said, 'Lily's pregnant, she's due in a month, and the parents who were going to adopt [the baby] have just got cold feet and it's fallen through – do you want a baby?' 'Shit!' We rang her back within five minutes and said 'Yep'. And she was born two weeks early, so two weeks from that phone call we had a baby! In that two-week period we went down and saw the birth mother a couple of times and went down for one false alarm, came back for a baby shower [laughs], went down that night she was born. So we got there I think, maybe a couple of hours after she was born. And Lily went into a mother's room after giving birth and she needed to be there for a couple

of days. Baby was there for three days in a neonatal unit of some sort. They had parent rooms attached to that unit so we stayed in there. Basically, from two hours old, we were there and parenting her.

Moana's experience of forming family was clearly very different from that of all the other participants. Coupled with same-gender parenting the complexity of forming relationships in the context of whāngai arrangements added to the deliberate steps that Moana and Sue took to form their family in the early stages. Moana said:

...When we decided to have Tania, after saying yes in five minutes, one of the things that I talked with Sue about, was – for me, I wouldn't be birthing her ... it felt even more important for me to establish that main mummy role. And I was still of the belief that from birth, and in those initial days and weeks, the baby really needed to bond and establish relationships and that would be easier if there was a main caregiver...

Later, Moana and Sue were to turn to the Family Court to establish formal arrangements for Tania's day-to-day care.

3.4.1 Taking up parenting in this whāngai family

Tania, Moana and Sue's daughter (aged three), lived mostly with Moana and Moana's new partner who, according to Moana, didn't parent Tania but was "more like a whāea or an aunty to her". Tania had "every other weekend", or "alternate week overnight stays" with Sue (an arrangement established through Family Court proceedings). Sue and Moana were maintaining connections between Tania, her birth siblings and birth parents. Tania had developed a strong sense of how all the parents in her life related to her and to each other, "She calls me mummy and Sue mamma," Moana said. As for her birth parents, Moana remarked, "She knows that she's got a birth mother and a birth father and what their names are. She doesn't, with me, call them mum and dad. I think she might when she's with Sue ... With me she calls them Whāea Lily and Matua Sid."

Again, the experience of taking up parenting in this family was clearly very different from other participants in the study. Maintaining recognition of all the people in Tania's life who parented her (in the day-to-day sense and in the broader biological and lived sense) was critical to how parenting was taken up by Moana, Sue and others.

3.5 Summary of creating families and taking up parenting

This study documented four different types of families in which lesbians and gay men were parenting: donor families; blended and donor families; blended families; and family created through whāngai relationships. Donor insemination was the most prevalent method of bringing children into the world for same-gender couples creating families together. Lesbian couples living in a single household took up parenting in 10 of the 19 families. In a further three families lesbians were parenting alone. Shared care between lesbians and previous opposite-gender partners (children's biological fathers) occurred in three families,¹² and in another two families, previously co-habiting lesbian parents engaged in the shared care of their children. Two families engaged in multi-parenting whereby donor fathers actively parented children for part of each week. The formation of these families represented significant success for many of them, but it hadn't necessarily been an easy accomplishment. The next section of findings addresses the significant challenges that families faced as they took steps to form.

3.6 Challenges faced in creating family: Navigating assisted reproduction

While all but one of the families in this study had themselves eventually been successful in creating, there were obstacles to be negotiated along the way. The study aimed to identify these obstacles, and for the purposes of the findings, the most significant of these are presented here. For the family where a child had come to parents through a whāngai arrangement, or where children had been born in the context of previous opposite-gender relationships, significant challenges related to the negotiation and taking up of parenting roles once the family began to form. Evidence of the kinds of difficulties parents negotiated in this context is presented in Section 3.3 and is built on in Section 4.2.1.

On the other hand, for the parents in families where sperm donation had occurred (14 of the study's 19 families), the first significant obstacles to be negotiated concerned how best to navigate assisted reproduction. How would the women access donor sperm and which

reproductive technologies might they employ to assist with a successful insemination? Specifically, reported issues concerned access to sperm, donor availability and the time it took for inseminations to proceed. Each challenge was cumulative and reflected the complex processes involved when creating family through non-traditional means. In this section, we present data about participants' challenges and how the families overcame them.

3.6.1 Challenges accessing sperm

For parents who used fertility services to help with conceiving children, gaining access to sperm and/or fertility treatment involved participating in a counselling session, after which the couple's suitability to receive fertility services would either be endorsed or contested. Not only did this add extra stress to the process, it also meant that services could be withheld on the basis of other people's interpretations of participants' lives. Further, couples had to work hard to figure out how the interviewer or counsellor's position was being informed. Sometimes this included being subject to and letting pass, discriminatory attitudes. Laine recalled:

First of all we had to meet the specialist. That was not so bad but not easy. Then we had to have an interview which we were sort [of] required to pass with a social worker ... the social worker we did have was ignorant in the extreme. She said to me at one point, 'Do you not think it would be better to go over to the West Coast and sleep with someone, and at least then your child would have a father?' ... we very quickly sussed out the things that matter[ed] to her, and we gave her that...

For parents using known donors, even after an expression of interest had been gained from the donor, access to sperm was not guaranteed. Difficulty could arise when negotiating about whether or not and how best to proceed with inseminations. Several parents talked of donor agreements that had ended once the subject of insemination was raised, and prior to beginning actual inseminations. Either the potential donor withdrew from the agreement because of his growing realisation of the process and commitment, or the women withdrew because they had come to a decision that the agreement was in some way unsatisfactory to them and the arrangement would likely fail. Sacha said, "A lot of donors said yes and then

¹² One of these families was Anneke and Chloe's who engaged in both shared care and multi-parenting arrangements with fathers of their children, hence this family is represented twice in this summary.

when they realised the ins and outs of it, said no ... they sort of chickened out or decided they didn't want to do it ... and that's fair enough." In Sandra and April's case, where one of a gay male couple had agreed to donate sperm, it was the women who put an end to the arrangement. As Sandra said, "We sort of talked to them... We just thought, no, they just want far too much commitment. Once they sort of started asking what kind of nappies we were going to use, the alarm bells were going and it wasn't what we were looking for anyway, so yeah, we decided ... that's not going to work."

Kirk had originally turned down Anneke and Chloe's request of him to donate sperm, but second time around things had changed. He explained, "Initially I said no, for a number of reasons, and then they approached me again a couple of years later ... and I had thought about it during that time, and the circumstances in their relationship had changed a little bit to something that was more favourable to me, and so I agreed."

The something "more favourable" that Kirk referred to was unclarified. As his comment showed, consent to sperm donation was, however, a delicate matter, the success of which was reliant on careful negotiation and the capacity to address everyone's needs as far as they could be foretold. The final decision about whether or not to donate rested with Kirk. For Anneke and Chloe, access to sperm remained, therefore, out of their control.

Difficulty accessing sperm was also an issue for Neve and Renee, although their problem became an issue with accessing viable sperm that would survive the process at the fertility clinic. After making significant investments in each other and in the process of creating family with their first known donor, initial tests with the fertility clinic resulted in the discovery that their intentions weren't going to be realised. As Neve put it, it "turned out that his little swimmers didn't like to be frozen".

3.6.2 Challenges with donor availability

When access to sperm involved finding a known donor, complex processes were involved. Donor access was the second of three significant challenges that many parents faced on the way to creating family. As Dawn explained, it took effort, "You know, as a lesbian, you don't just get pregnant, what's that expression, fall

pregnant. It doesn't just happen. You know it takes conscious effort."

This "conscious effort" typically included the need to persist over time as social networks were probed and approaches to friends, acquaintances and unfamiliar men were made. Pia and Dawn's account is illustrative:

Dawn: Well we searched for, Pia wanted to have a baby, desperately...

Pia: All my life.

Interviewer: Okay!

[All laughing]

Dawn: It took her a long time to get one but we found...

Pia: A friend of a friend of mine had known that I wanted to have children and she knew of a friend of a friend of hers who knew of a man who thought he might like to have children. And so we met Conrad and we had ... tea with them ... every other week for about 10 or 11 months and then I got pregnant.

Donor availability was also a factor for some families that chose to access fertility services for inseminations. Neve said:

It was the donor thing that actually slowed us up the first three to four years, potentially ... the donors were limited, and so we were actually going to be better off finding someone we knew, a known donor, rather than just taking one off the register because, some of them ... didn't necessarily want their sperm being raised in an alternative family, or whatever you want to call it.

Others also made comment about the limited number of anonymous donors at fertility clinics who were willing to donate their sperm to non-heterosexual couples. Ginny commented, "We had a choice of two donors who were prepared to give their sperm to a lesbian family", and Nola said, "We had to choose the donor from files and there was sort of only eight choices as opposed to other straight couples who were going through fertility at the time ... they had many, many more choices."

The limited numbers of donors willing to have their sperm contribute to same-gender-led families also provided another challenge to creating family through this means. Where several geographically proximate

families access unknown donor sperm through fertility services, an increased chance of half-siblings being born into geographically and socially connected communities exists. In the short term, this can provide challenges for children, donors and parents should some families be less inclined than others to want to facilitate children's tracing of and contact with their donors. A situation like this faced one family who participated in this project (refer Section 4.3.1). In the long term, a more serious challenge for these children could be their unknowing development of intimate relationships with half-siblings.

Even when donor agreements were successfully in place and inseminations underway, attempts to conceive were sometimes discontinued before the desired outcome of pregnancy was actually achieved. Some families stopped inseminating as they revisited their commitment to known donor inseminations because of a growing recognition that it was not in the best interests of all parties to continue. Sometimes this was due to a sense that the arrangements in the longer term would likely fail, or because one or more of the parties' circumstances had changed. Laine says, "We tried with him [their original choice of known donor] for probably three times I think but it became really obvious to me, and probably to him too, and even more so to his partner, that it wasn't a good idea. So we stopped that process."

Whereas Xanthie and her former partner Kristen's known donor arrangements ceased because of a change in circumstances in their donor and his partner's lives. Xanthie explained, "Initially we tried ourselves, with the – and it was a heterosexual couple ... But it wasn't successful so eventually that couple went overseas so we had to sort of start again, finding a donor."

Sacha's recollection of the break-up of her and Kari's first donor arrangement alluded to the pressures on donors that agreeing to donate sperm could bring:

And we did eventually find a donor who was a friend of ours and who was in what he thought was a stable relationship and so we did it a couple of times... And then his relationship broke up and he actually couldn't cope with doing it anymore ... So it was all so hard that we sort of shelved the idea.

The challenge of actually being able to proceed with a known donor insemination added another layer of complexity to the women's desires to begin families. This was a complexity that couldn't always have been predicted or ameliorated.

3.6.3 The time it took to achieve pregnancy

Issues with donor access meant that for some lesbians the length of time involved between deciding to create family together and actually conceiving children was considerable. Renee estimated that it took approximately six years from the time she and Neve began talking about raising a family until they actually found out that Neve was pregnant. For Sacha and Kari the time had been longer still:

Kari: Well I think that I... Sacha had decided to get pregnant a long time ago...

Sacha: Well it was quite a long time ago ... and it was really hard to find a donor 'cause we wanted someone who would be known to the child and have some contact with the child...

Not wanting to give up, the couple tried again, this time with Kari as the parent who would become pregnant. After another lengthy process of trying to find a known donor, and of meeting with success, their son Reggie (now aged four) was born. It had taken the couple 11 years.

When lesbians had used fertility clinic services to assist with pregnancy the length of time it had taken for some couples to access sperm and insemination services had also been considerable. Cate remembered, "We started thinking about having kids at 21. Yeah, and then we got on the waiting list for sperm, at about 23..." However, unexpected circumstances, family events and an unsuccessful pregnancy at age 34 for Cate, interrupted the couple's plans. It wasn't until Cate and Heather were aged 35 that Cate became pregnant with the couple's first child Penny. While thrilled at the result of their now two successful pregnancies, Cate and Heather had been through a great deal in their attempts to bring children into their family and they had persisted over many years:

Cate: All those terrible muck-ups. Lots and lots of disappointments ... and lots of heart-break. We did all sorts of things, didn't we? We started looking at fostering and all sorts of other options.

Heather: It was very stressful.

Annaleise and Ruth's time on the waiting list for a sperm donor had also seemed lengthy and Annaleise commented that for them, it had been "quite a mission". She added:

We went on a waiting list and we waited for a sperm donor, and I thought that it would never actually happen because it seemed to take so long, and I think it's very hard for anybody waiting for a sperm donor, for an anonymous donor ... and we eventually did get our sperm donor and went and had donor insemination, and I got pregnant...

3.6.4 Summary

The length of time it took to get pregnant, coupled with the challenges of donor availability and access to sperm, illustrated how these parents occupied positions of vulnerability in attempting to realise their desire to create family. For the women involved, this was because their capacity to have children, irrespective of whether they were doing so with a known or unknown donor, rested largely upon the decisions of others. The resolve of these women and men did eventually lead to success albeit in some cases it took years of persistence to achieve parenthood. In this light, it is worth noting that having children, in itself, represented significant achievement.

3.7 Successes in creating families together

In our analysis, successes in parents' experiences of creating family together were interpreted on the basis of responses to questions about what they thought were benefits or advantages of their family forms. Successes were considered significant when reported by at least one-quarter of the participant families and included: readiness and commitment to engage in planned parenthood together; recognising and valuing social diversity; and the capacity to broaden meanings of family, in a lived sense. Each of these successes is outlined in the following sections with examples of the kinds of reflections given by participants that exemplify these.

3.7.1 Readiness and commitment to engage in planned parenthood

Parents in five of the study's donor families spoke about the considerable preparation needed, and how their eagerness and dedication to creating family together

was advantageous. April and Nola's descriptions each sum this up:

April: Making a decision to have children in the way that we did, I guess that's kind of perhaps the difference, it's so planned and lots of negotiation and talking with people, including our families, and [the] donor and his family, and just really wanting this to happen.

Nola: I suppose the advantage we see, and I believe this strongly, is the fact that here are two people who have gone out of their way to have children, who have chosen to have children. There are no accidents, no unplanned pregnancy. We decided, right, this is what we want, so you know, you're going to completely adore your children and make them top priority, if you go down the road of actually creating them, of conceiving them, and because of that, we think that's an advantage.

From the perspective of being a donor building a family with lesbians, and who was intent on entering into a multi-parenting arrangement with them, Kirk appreciated the fact that he was able to choose women whom he thought would be good people to parent with. He said, "You know you can sit down and say, 'Well, I think they're going to be good parents', or whatever, 'I'm not having kids with them just because it's the person you marry', you know. So you know, you're a little more selective."

On the other hand, for the parents in families who had used unknown donors, their ability to access donor sperm through fertility clinic services had supported them in their goal to parent alone. As Crystal said:

So we both jointly decided we'd do it ourselves. We didn't want to have any outside influences, so we decided to go down the road of an anonymous donor... But that was the most important thing, that we didn't have anybody else raising the kids, just us two, we didn't want there to be any other significant role model in the kid's life.

Similarly for Annaleise and Ruth, as Annaleise explained, "We didn't really consider any other options in any great depth because that was the way we wanted to have our child, and we didn't have anybody else significant in our lives that we wanted to be another parent for our child."

The conscious decision-making reported by parents in the study was taken as a successful measure of their entry into parenthood.

3.7.2 Recognising and valuing social diversity

In our analysis, a second success, spoken about by parents in eight of the study's 19 families, related to the benefits to children, in terms of being able to recognise and value social diversity, that being raised in a non-traditional family had already or would likely bring. Chloe and Neve's remarks each reflected the kinds of comments parents made:

Chloe: I think it's quite special what's been created. I think the kids are very, very open and accepting of people. Like they have been exposed to quite [a] diverse range of people, or ideas around things. They are quite inquisitive about stuff, and open.

Neve: I think they'll turn into more accepting, open little people... They'll be open and honest and accepting and not, hopefully, judgemental, because of where they've come from and their journey and all that.

Other parents commented that in creating their families in the manner they had, they were also establishing a context within which children would be able to learn how to respond to prejudice and discrimination should they encounter this in the future. Crystal's comments are illustrative of this:

You know, I think that our philosophy as parents is to make sure that our kids are safe and secure, because, we've created a family that could expose them to prejudices and things like that later on and that was our biggest concern when we decided to have kids, that our choice to have kids was going to impact on them. So we've strived really, really hard, to make sure that our kids, 'cause we can't, we can't protect them from what people say on the outside because they're going to say things like, 'You've got two mummies and that's weird', or whatever, but so we, our goal as parents is to try and make these kids really safe, loved and secure at home in themselves.

Heather's reflections about how she and Cate were raising their children also conveyed a sense of how their family make-up encourages them to think differently about social diversity:

I think we're thoughtful people. I think we have to think differently about how to raise our children, and we do think differently... I think our heterosexual friends wouldn't have any sort of concept of that. Their life is fluid and easy, and, it's not that ours is hard, but I think that we are making more thoughtful decisions for our children's futures because of the difference that they're coming from.

These forward thinking decisions included the deliberate choice to provide children with strategies to counter prejudice and discrimination. As Nola said, she and Crystal had to "make sure that they [the children] can handle that [prejudice], and have strategies to help themselves". At the same time, several parents commented on children's understanding of diversity and that learning about injustice through first-hand experience of adversity was in itself a valuable life lesson. As Chloe put it, the family could be, "a strength and a builder for them [the children], of learning about harassment and discrimination and prejudice, and it's not okay".

3.7.3 Broadening the concept of family, in a lived sense

Parents in five of the study's families made specific reference to their own and their children's broad sense of family, beyond the immediacy of the households they primarily lived in. Identifying this as a successful element of the way in which they created their families, the breadth of adult involvement ensured children were well loved by many adults. It also increased the number of adults available to call on to help out with childcare. Pia commented that, "Rhianna and Lena have seven grandmothers ... and they've got three grandfathers ... they've got this incredibly diverse and colourful large family, and it's just all full of love really. You know, they're so lucky".

For Xanthie talking about Emma's sense of family, it was that family had become more than biology that was celebrated. She says, "What I like about it is that there are people who are part of Emma's family who have no biological link to her, but there is no doubt that they are her family ... she feels that, you know ... like this family is just hugely diverse."

Reflecting on the positive outcomes for Emma of living in a lesbian-led family, Xanthie commented that, "... she's having a whole range of different models of being

and relationships, that I think can only be an advantage for her, and she's extremely secure, she knows who she is, she knows who the people in her life are, and what her family looks like."

In Kirk, Chloe and Anneke's family, Anneke valued the purposefulness associated with welcoming new members:

Kirk's whole family has enclosed Chloe and I, in their whole family. So they've just sucked us in, like we laugh that we're kind of Kirk's wives, 'cause we boss him around in a funny kind of way ... and every single person in his family is very open. And my family's very accepting of Kirk and the girls and Chloe. My parents formally welcomed Chloe into the family.

For Tania, Moana's account of the benefits of family breadth was extensive:

Well, she grows up an incredibly loved child. Like, loved and known by her birth family to whatever degree they can. Loved absolutely by both mothers that she has now. Loved I'm sure – I have nothing to do with Sue's partner, unfortunately we haven't been able to meet at all or anything, but I'm sure she has great input with Tania as well, and she's a fluent speaker of Māori so that's fantastic. Obviously loved and gets all the benefits from my partner as well. She's got extra sets of grandparents. She's got a really close relationship with her older sister because she's been able to be whāngai-ed into a family who I'm really good friends with, and they're lesbian as well, so Tania has other models of lovely lesbian families. She'll have two Mother's Days,

she'll have two birthdays all the time, you know, those things are really cool.

Bonny, one of the children in Nerida and Belinda's family, could narrate the pleasure she took in her own diverse family, for herself. Belinda said:

...you know, when Bonny's going to bed and she has one of her little talky things, she'll often say, 'Oh aren't I lucky, I've got a Dad, a Mum, a Belinda, I've got a Carrie and a Monte', you know which are other significant adults in their lives, 'I've got a Donna and a Blair and I've got Grannie Audrey', you know, so she's really clear that she's actually got a Mum and a Dad, plus a lot of other caring adults.

3.7.4 Summary

Achieving family together was imbued with success for many of the participants. Being ready, able and committed to parenting together was, in our analysis, a significant success. Mindful of the potentially negative consequences that choosing to bring children into same-gender-headed families might bring to their children, parents nevertheless read optimism into the benefits that raising children in families like theirs might bring. Being able to recognise and value social diversity was viewed as a positive outcome of being a member of a family where lesbians and gay men parent. Finally, and celebrated by several of the study's families, was the way that their expressions of family helped to broaden, in a lived sense, what was taken to mean family in contemporary New Zealand society. The breadth of these families' facilitated connections between children and many invested adults is both successful and positive.

4. FINDINGS PART B: MAINTAINING FAMILY LIVES

The second focus of this project was to discover what life looked like inside families where lesbians and gay men parented. Accordingly, we asked participants to talk about their daily and weekly lives.

4.1 Maintaining families and managing households

The range of activities and responsibilities that participants talked about when they responded to questions about what daily life in their households looked like, spanned the domains of childcare, housework, employment responsibilities and recreation. We have presented an overview in this chapter of some of these domains. As Annaleise said, their family was “like a typical family, it’s very busy and everyone works very hard”.

4.1.1 Participants’ households: Who lived where, for how long and with whom?

With the exception of Caleb, who, although originally intended, explained that he and Damien had no regular contact with Caleb’s biological son (he lived with his lesbian parents), the other 18 families in this study comprised parents and children who normally lived together for all or part of the week. These families were organised in one of three ways:

- > as families from single households where two parents and children lived together (nine of 19 families)
- > families in more than one household where two or more parents were involved in the shared care and parenting of children (six of 19 families)
- > or families where adults who parented alone lived with one or more children (three of the study’s families).

In families where more than two parents were involved in children’s lives, two families were established across more than one household and parents had entered into deliberate multi-parenting arrangements. In Mike, Whitney and Louise’s family, the children lived mostly with their lesbian parents, but Fergus also stayed one

night a week with his father who had been a sperm donor for Louise. This family also enjoyed the support of a grown niece who helped out with childcare on a regular basis. In terms of practical arrangements it worked well. Whitney explained:

So with three parents it’s really handy because, like dividing up the holidays, I mean other parents are tearing their hair out, and we’ve got Fergus’ cousin Jennifer, the one who lived with us, and Mike, so we’re really lucky. And in the week, there’s you know, I pick him up once, and Mike picks him up twice, and Jennifer picks him up once and ... comes for tea...

Anneke, Chloe and Kirk’s family also practised co-operative and multi-parenting distributed across more than one household (in relation to their daughters). Also involved as a parent in this family, was John and Jarrod’s father who cared for his sons for half of each week. Like Mike, Kirk enjoyed his children having overnight stays with him on a regular basis. He also visited his children in their mothers’ home, and when there, contributed to childcare and parenting routines. He had, for instance, cared for the girls full-time for two weeks while their mothers holidayed overseas.

In the families that included lesbian couples with children from previous opposite-gender relationships, shared care arrangements with those children’s fathers existed. However, the shared care arrangement didn’t necessarily extend to all children in the family; rather, it took in children from previous opposite-gender relationships only. Where shared care with children’s fathers existed, the children lived approximately half time with their lesbian parents (and possibly their siblings), and half time with their fathers.

Of the lesbians who were primarily parenting alone, only Trudi had children who spent time with their father. Queenie’s son’s father lived overseas and the father of Bette’s children had died.

4.1.2 The employment status of parents in the families

Parents in all the families were in some kind of employment. In all nine of the families where two parents and children lived together in the same household, we found that at least one parent was in full-time (or near full-time) employment, and if her partner was employed, it was in a part-time or flexible

full-time capacity. In the families where single lesbians parented alone, two of the mothers worked regular part-time hours and the third had flexible hours that allowed her to accommodate both work and parenting responsibilities. In families where the care of children was shared between households, all but one of the parents was in paid employment.

4.1.3 Reflections on daily life

The daily life of families was spent in a mix of employment, household and recreational activities. Cate and Heather's description of their family life with children under five years of age is illustrative of the kinds of explanations of daily life that participants with children of this age gave:

Cate: Yeah, there's something every day. Something social every day ... antenatal, catch up with the antenatal people ... once a month, and then Sam's Plunket group once a week, and toy library on a Saturday. You take them to the toy library.

Heather: Yes. And I'm on the Plunket committee, and the kindergarten committee.

Cate: Saturday and Sunday you do more parenting.

Heather: Yeah.

Cate: And I take a back seat. And I've started to go to the gym in the evenings, so that means you have them from about a quarter to six for an hour, an hour and a half probably. Just standard stuff.

Parents of older children talked about daily life in terms of getting children ready for school, transporting them to sports and recreation activities, fitting in appointments, maintaining the household and getting to work on time. When asked about what a week in their family's life looked like Celia and Ginny's response was typical. They had this to say:

Celia: It's bloody busy.

Ginny: It's very busy. It's just stepped up a notch this year. Erica's just started intermediate so that's quite a change for her ... we've had to put a lot more energy into settling her into school, and she's got a lot more homework. And Celia's got a lot more responsibility at her job and I'm doing a new job, so there's been quite a lot of change in the house... So Celia mostly organises Erica in the morning ... and Erica gets herself to school, and we take turns

at ... [being] the one who's home ... or Erica will go to my sisters ... or Celia will be home, or take her to swimming ... to flute and netball...

Celia: Water-polo, tennis...

In families where two parents lived with children in a single household, the proportion of time that each parent spent engaged in parenting, household and recreation activities varied according to who was working outside of the home, when and for how long. In all but one of these families (where each parent worked .8 FTE of a full-time job outside the home), parents had developed an arrangement whereby one parent took more responsibility for childcare by working or studying part-time, or not at all. Where a single parent was raising children, responsibility for facilitating children's activities and balancing domestic and employment responsibilities, fell solely to the parent involved. In families where multi-parenting or shared care arrangements occurred, the activities were shared depending on what was scheduled for the days and nights that children were with the various parents involved.

4.2 Challenges faced in maintaining family lives

Once families had formed, the maintenance of them over the long term was an ongoing process that required negotiation and flexibility to accommodate changes in life circumstances and children's developing needs. Challenges to maintaining families came from many directions and each family had different stories to tell of those that had confronted them as they had begun raising children. In this section of the report, three challenges of significance are outlined. They are:

- > challenges to achieving multi-parenting and forming blended families
- > challenges to the validity of the family form
- > challenges and uncertainties in institutionalising roles and relationships.

4.2.1 Challenges with achieving multi-parenting and forming blended families

For some families, the plans they made to form a multi-parented family were never fully realised. Sometimes this was attributed to the parents' naivety when entering into agreements with donors. How parents would

actually be in relation to each other and children, once the children were born, was unknown and what eventuated could lead to a breakdown of plans. Kari, for instance, reflected:

We had this kind of naïve idea that we would kind of ... that he would participate in the child's life, but we didn't know him that well and ... found out that he wasn't very good at communication. So after our boy was born, yep, we found out ... he didn't really understand that he couldn't have the baby immediately, I needed to feed the baby or change its nappy ... he just wanted the baby and it was almost like a handbag, you know, 'I've got my thing or my art object' or something...

For other parents, different decisions, that they saw as out of their control, led to their multi-parenting plans breaking down. Caleb's account was a particularly salient example of this. His and Damien's experience is also illustrative of the broader sense of loss that could ensue when the family was unable to establish and maintain itself in the manner intended:

Well we had been friends for many years ... together back in the mid 80s, and we'd talked about ... [multi-parenting] ... then ... and we started talking about it again four years ago ... we were very clear that it was supposed to be a, very much an equal sort of child-rearing experience, you know, we'd live in separate houses and she and her partner would be the principal caregivers, but we would be very strongly involved within the child-rearing as well, and the decisions about parenting. But as the pregnancy progressed, we were more and more shut out, after the baby was born ... unilateral decisions were made about naming the child, silly games about when we could see him...

Seeking remedy in the courts, Caleb and his partner Damien then withdrew from proceedings after agreeing that they were:

Caleb: ...not willing to, to go through that and to have a parenting experience which is marked by that sort of tension.

Damien: And I think, not wanting to put a child through, what really is, you know, two couples that can't get on, for whatever reason.

The consequences for Caleb were lasting. Characterising the experience as "probably the most horrible experience [he'd] ever had in [his] life", Caleb and Damien went on to talk about the emotional investments by members of Caleb's wider family that had been lost when the planned multi-parenting agreements failed:

Caleb: ...the child was the first child of that generation, they were very invested in the whole process...

Damien: Hugely invested in it, you know to the point where they came over from the Islands to see ... the youngster, and for us ... I guess it was tough enough for them to understand our relationship, and then for the little one to come onto the scene and the first child of the generation, and not allowed to be anywhere near it ... is very tough for them.

In Kirk's relationship with Anneke and Chloe, multi-parenting was working in the practical sense, although plans for formalising the parents' intentions, prior to the birth of their daughters, were dropped after seeking legal advice. This diminished Kirk's sense of security with regard to his parenting status in relation to the girls. He said:

...I went to a lawyer, at Anneke and Chloe's suggestion ... [to] talk ... about my legal rights, ... and also because ... all three of us [were] interested in writing up some kind of contract that guarantees everybody's position in the relationship... We never actually went through with it because the lawyer basically said that we could write up whatever agreement we liked, but in a court of law, it wouldn't hold up. It's only with ... who is actively involved with the kids over a period of time [who] can actually claim any kind of rights ... in the kid's lives ... It was a little concerning going into it knowing that my rights in the whole thing weren't guaranteed in any way.¹³

In Laine and Carlotta's family, reaching agreement about how parenting would be established in their family did occur, but the challenge there was how best to preserve the sense of commitment that Carlotta was prepared to make in regard to parenting Jaclyn. Laine explained:

¹³ Appendix 1 has an overview of the current legal framework pertaining to legal parent/guardianship status, rights and responsibilities. Provisions for accessing some parenting and guardianship rights for Kirk do exist under the Care of Children Act 2004, however these had not been accessed by the family at the time of the study.

...it took probably 18 months of negotiation for her to feel like she was willing to go through and that negotiation came down to physically writing a contract that said what she wouldn't do really. Which was fairly specific and all encompassing really. Turned out to be far from the truth of it, but that was what she needed to be able to go through with it.

Parenting could also be challenging to establish when previous relationships broke down and parents, children and new partners worked to create blended family lives. Challenges could come from within the family nucleus; for example, when new partners actively resisted the taking up of parenting roles in blended families (see 3.3.1), or when children provided resistance to their parents' new partnerships. Or, they could come from outside the immediate family, by way of former partners' responses to new relationships and partners. Nerida's comments about how challenging it had been to establish blended family arrangements that worked for everyone, were illustrative:

Belinda probably sees them [the children] a couple of times with their dad and the rest of the time you see them when they're with us. And that's been an evolving arrangement ... when ... we got together ... it was very rigid at the time, and very difficult, and their dad didn't have anything to do with Belinda, whereas now you can go round to Donald's house, and she goes and picks them up in the mornings sometimes if I'm ... away or something.

Later, Belinda exemplified the challenges they had faced early on in her and Nerida's relationship as they talked about the pressures that the children had been asked to carry after their parents had separated:

Belinda: At the beginning, you know like, I mean Donald was really hurt and very angry, and the kids weren't allowed to mention my name in the house...

Nerida: I think Bonny's pretty much forgotten a lot of that, whereas Rupert still holds that a bit...

Cindy and Candice also recognised how challenging it had been in coming to terms with living in a blended family:

Cindy: ...it's a difficult structure. It's not easy. And we deal with that every day... You find your little pieces of perfection where you can.

Candice: ...for me, entering the family, you always feel like you're an adjunct, or I did ... but over the years, this is our family...

Further, they acknowledged that these difficulties weren't necessarily particular to them as lesbians forming a blended family, but would likely be shared by all kinds of blended families. As Candice said:

...the blended family is ... valid because you don't have to stay together because you happened to, you know, fall in love and have children ... and then [fall] out of love ... the legitimacy of our family is that we're together because it's bonded by love ... Our family didn't get together by accident. Cindy had the children... But we got together deliberately, and we stay together deliberately...

Maintaining step-parenting roles (when these were taken up by new partners) could be an ongoing challenge for some family members. Anneke reflected on this:

As the boys have gotten a bit older and they've gone through a few difficult stages, I've chosen to step back and have Chloe, as their mother, step in and sort things with her ex-husband, because if I get involved, then I just get grumpy, and I don't enjoy the kids.

For Celia and Ginny, step-parenting hadn't always been smooth either. Celia said, "We've had some pretty rocky times with step-parenting, aye, and you know, like they've been pretty hard, and we've kinda hacked it."

Explaining further, Celia went on to talk about how she and Ginny had successfully sought and received support from others to help manage and maintain positive family dynamics.

4.2.2 Challenges to the validity of the family form

A second challenge to maintaining family came from the resistance that lesbians and gay men received from others about the validity of their families. Awareness of and/or direct experiences of others' views around the authenticity of their families was problematic to parents in seven of the study's donor families. Xanthie described this succinctly: "You do become aware through media and other mechanisms that there is a strong view out there ... we should not be ... you know, bringing up children, that our family arrangement is not legitimate."

One of the perceived problems with the kinds of families that lesbians and gay men were building was the ‘oversupply’ of mothers in the families, and further to this, the perceived absence of a father. Parents were regularly challenged with questions about the ‘real’ mother and the subsequent framing of the non-biological mother as ‘other’ to the real (biological) mother. Kari and Sacha, as respectively biological and non-biological mothers to Reggie, made comments in reference to a visit to a childcare centre that illustrated this:

Sacha: ...and they did sort of turn around to me and say ‘And who are you? Grandmother or something?’ I can’t quite remember what they said, but something like that...

Kari: ...the non-biological [parent] of the child gets a lot more discrimination in the sense that they are not seen as the mum or parent...

The emphasis on biological connections within family relationships troubled Heather. She put it this way: “This funny woman asked me the other day, I was out somewhere and she said, ‘Does Penny look like her father?’ and I said, ‘I don’t know. She’s not my biological child.’ And it kind of bothered me that somebody would ask that question.”

The possible implication that Heather was Penny’s biological mother and concomitant to this, that she would know about family resemblances, could explain Heather’s disquiet. It’s reasonable to suggest that Heather perceived a challenge to the validity of her and Cate’s family that was doubly experienced because of her position as the non-biological mother. As Heather said, “I didn’t want that question asked in her [Penny’s] presence... When other people ask questions like that ... I think it makes [the children] start to think, ‘Oh, there’s something different in this picture.’”

In Moana and Sue’s family where neither of the women were biological mothers to Tania, the ‘real’ / ‘other’ mother binary was still evident in others’ perceptions of them as parents. Moana described it this way: “I’m responded to quite differently I think than Sue is. She looks much older so she’s often got the thing of, ‘Oh, are you Tania’s nana?’ ... So, because they don’t expect two mothers, and she looks the older one, so she’s sort of seen as nana, so that gets her upset and stuff...”

Heteronormativity and homophobic responses¹⁴ also posed challenges to parents who were attempting to maintain a strong sense of family together. Families led by same-gender parents sometimes faced blatant discrimination about their family form. This was the case for Anneke and Chloe. As Anneke said, “Chloe’s parents have been quite, ‘Oh my god, two women raising children, just disgusting, and what gives you the right to think that you can parent, or raise remotely human or well-balanced children’.”

Sometimes, internalised assumptions held by lesbians and gay men themselves could allow questions to form about their abilities to contribute successfully to family lives. Kirk’s comments about the grief he experienced in ‘coming out’¹⁵ brought with it an assumption for instance, that as a gay man, he would never have children: “...One of the big sort of grieving processes I went through was the fact that I thought I’d never be a dad, and I have three brothers all who were fathers, and that’s kind of what I wanted for my life.”

Being unable to fit families parented by lesbians and gay men into already existing notions of what could and should count as family also provoked homophobic responses made to parents about their families. Kirk and April’s comments are illustrative:

Kirk: I’ve had one person say to me, ‘Oh you know I think it’s nice that you’ve got kids Kirk, but to be honest I’m not really sure that gay people should be allowed to have kids.’ I’ve had someone say that to me.

April: There’s been a few comments like, I remember one woman saying to me, ‘I dunno whether to call you mum or dad’, you know, stuff like that. There’s been a few of those comments...

The family form was also challenged by puzzling responses to the way some families organised their lives. In Candice and Cindy’s family, this was manifested in the response that Candice and their son Gilbert’s father received from a school teacher when they went together to school to talk about Gilbert’s schooling:

Candice: I went up there, Cindy was in a meeting, I went as the parent for this side of the family, and I was with his father, and he [the teacher] implied, and I guess I inferred from his implications,

¹⁴ Heteronormativity is the notion that heterosexuality is an institutionalised, superior and privileged standard. Homophobic responses are those based on homophobia, an irrational fear of lesbians and gay men.

¹⁵ The term ‘coming out’ is typically used by lesbians and gay men in reference to coming out of an imaginary closet through disclosure of sexual identity.

that there was something slightly unusual about the home life... The guy was just very awkward about how he was approaching me. And he was just like, 'Oh well, you know, the less than regular home life.'

Cindy: It was something more pointed than that.

4.2.3 Challenges and uncertainties when attempting to institutionalise roles and relationships

Another significant challenge faced by families in this study when working to maintain their family form, centred around institutionalisation or formalisation of roles and relationships within the family. There were several ways in which this proved challenging:

- > Advice about contractual agreements having no or very limited legal standing could place parenting plans in jeopardy.
- > Same-gender parents' experiences in the Family Court could undermine their attempts to formalise lasting relationships.
- > When relationships were formalised, some parents were troubled by terminology.
- > Problems in taking up rights could test parents' resolve once relationships were formalised.

In all of the families where parents had taken deliberate steps towards creating multi-parented families distributed across more than one household, donor fathers and lesbian mothers considered drawing up contracts that might help formalise and maintain the family structures that they were planning. While Whitney and Louise didn't talk specifically about the contract they had developed with Mike (except to say that they had drawn one up and that it had worked for them), Kirk, Caleb and Damien all had something to say about their experiences in this regard. Kirk learnt in his discussions with a lawyer, that without his name on the birth certificate, there would be no certainties about his status as a legal parent in relation to the children (see Section 4.2.1). Like Kirk, Caleb and Damien soon realised that any such contract would also be of little use in supporting them to assert and protect their fatherhood rights, even though Caleb himself practised the law. As he said:

Oh and go figure, a lawyer, former partner in a big litigation department, you know, made a huge

decision on the basis of trust and that turned out really badly. It was a very stupid and very naïve thing to have done... Even if there had been a written agreement you know ... all it would have been would have been an evidence of intention, it wouldn't have been in any way binding in a court if we'd sort of taken it that far.

Deflated by the fact that the advice they had received suggested their intentions, with respect to multi-parenting with lesbian couples, couldn't be protected or guaranteed, the men took significant risks in continuing to pursue fatherhood through sperm donation. Without automatic legal protections, Kirk, Caleb and Damien were reliant on informal agreements with all involved and the honouring of these. For Kirk, this was working well, though he did note that in the event of Anneke and Chloe separating, or, if they were to die in an accident, his position in relation to his children could come under question. For Caleb and Damien on the other hand, it had never worked. The consequences of this are lasting and have been highlighted previously (see Section 4.2.1).

Caleb and Damien, along with Kirk, reflected on the gaps in the legal system for donors who wished to parent alongside a lesbian couple. Caleb noted, "... there's a real problem with recognition..." and in his reflections about the law, Kirk commented:

I don't think that [the legislation] is very supportive of my role, I think it's more supportive of Anneke and Chloe's role, and I'm happy about that because theirs is, that's the relationship that we need to keep together and make sure the law gives them the rights to stay together and raise the kids so that's very important. But yeah ... I'd like to see something change in the legislation... What I kind of found when I was talking with the lawyer is the law was more in terms of like, two women together and a donor who's not involved, but it didn't actually seem to encompass two women together with a male who is actively involved, it didn't seem to kind of stretch to that area.

As well as being challenged by advice that claimed any pre-insemination or pre-birth contracts might not hold up and work to protect parents' rights if they were ever contested in court, some parents, who later went on to formalise relationships, found engaging with the Family Court system challenging. Heather and Cate eventually

secured Heather as an additional guardian to their first child Penny, but the couple had been deeply troubled by their experiences. Penny was born mid-2004 which meant the couple were trying to progress their application in the court system during the same period that the HART Act 2004 and the Care of Children Act 2004 were passed. According to Heather and Cate, this made their application problematic. They explained it this way:

Heather: So it was really difficult. We went to see a couple of judges who said, 'We can't okay this' and I said, 'What do you mean you can't okay this? You've got two parents here, you've got my affidavit saying I want to be the guardian. And it's very clearly written in this I tell you. And why can't we do this?' And they said, 'Cause there's no precedent' and I said, 'Well make one'... So what they were going to do was to get the donor, they were going to contact the donor –

Cate: The anonymous donor.

Heather: – and haul him off to court to see if he would like guardianship.

Cate: They were going to subpoena him.

Heather: Yep. And that's I think one of those moments in life where you're sitting looking at a judge thinking, 'Keep your mouth shut Heather.' [laughs] I was scared to bits. I was enraged. I thought you're going to ask him before me? Incredible.

Cate: And the lawyer that was assigned to Penny, and our lawyer, both said, 'This is ridiculous, there's no point in subpoenaing an anonymous donor.' But they were going to go through with it. And they contacted the fertility centre and said, 'This is what's going to happen.' And we contacted them and said, 'Look out for this, it's going to happen,' and so the fertility centre informally contacted him to say, 'You may be subpoenaed.' And he was very good about it, apparently. We don't know him from a bar of soap. But apparently he said, 'Well, I don't want anything to do – I've made this anonymous contribution and I don't want to step in the way of that family and if you can leave me out of it that would be much better'... So, but um, in the end, what actually happened in the end Heather? We went to court three times. And on the third time –

Heather: In the end we did nothing. We just stepped back from it.

Cate: And on the third time they granted you additional guardianship, didn't they.

With their second child Sam, the new legislation had taken care of the formalising of relationships because it had become possible for parents of the same gender to be named as parents (mother / other parent) on children's birth certificates, and when this occurred, guardianship was assured.

While the peace of mind gained through being able to name parents on children's birth certificates was significant for parents who chose to do this (it contributed significantly to the formalising of family relationships that were to be maintained in the long term), the terminology used was neither necessarily responsive nor reflective of the actual roles and relationships that formed. This was another challenge to the maintenance of family long term that parents faced. The following interchange, between Annaleise and Ruth, highlights the problem:

Annaleise: Certainly I think that it's good that there's complete legal recognition for two-mother families. Ruth's named on her [Erin's] birth certificate and she wasn't happy about that.

Ruth: I'm not and I want it changed, cause I'm not the father.

Annaleise: Ruth's named as the father on the birth certificate.

Interviewer: Oh wow. And so what's your legal status in relation to Erin?

Annaleise: She's the father.

Interviewer: Do you have guardianship or?

Ruth: I'm legally...

Annaleise: She's as legal as I ... we're both legally...

Ruth: I have to actually, you can actually send the birth certificate back and tell them you want it changed and you can get mother put on it, other mother, and you can do that, so [inaudible] to get it done cause I don't want to be...

Annaleise: It's only a word but...

Ruth: It isn't only a word, I'm not the father. [To her daughter], "Erin, who am I? Am I Mum? Yes, I'm yours."

As well as finding the birth certificate terminology troubling, Anneke and Chloe expressed another concern about the possible future impact on their twin girls holding birth certificates where both parents named were clearly female. Anneke was aware she and Chloe's choice in this regard would effectively 'out' the girls at different times in their lives whether or not the girls wished for this to be so. As she said: "The girls won't be able to hide that they have lesbian mothers." Kirk, the girls' donor father, was also aware this could create problems: "...The kids at various stages in their lives are going to have to hand over a birth certificate, and then they're going to have to be in the situation to explain to a stranger why there's two women on their birth certificate, and hope that the person is going to be open-minded about it."

Beyond the formalisation of relationships, taking up rights in relation to these relationships could also prove challenging, especially in families where parents were no longer living together. Moana's experiences in this regard were illustrative of a particular legal loophole for lesbian-led families where children had come to parents through a whāngai relationship. Moana found that her attempts to assert rights with regard to receiving financial support from her former partner Sue, were thwarted. At the time of the interview, Moana had a claim for maintenance from Sue before the Family Court. The court needed to couple the Māori situation of whāngai with lesbian parents – who were no longer in a relationship together. Moana said:

So, it's interesting at the moment, the legal system's having difficulty knowing how to manage my claim for maintenance from Sue. She hasn't paid any for a year and a half, and I can't apply to Inland Revenue because Inland Revenue will only chase the birth mother or adopted mother, neither of which Sue is. The birth mother hasn't got a cent and I wouldn't want to go after her cause she's on a benefit anyway. So we've had to make application to Family Court, to have Family Court hear my request for some financial contribution. Sue's lawyer has said that it's not a Family Court issue it's an Inland Revenue Department issue. Inland Revenue have said it's not. The Registrar therefore, has asked us to make a case, myself and my lawyer, to make the case clear by stipulating under which section of the Parental Act are we applying for, blah, blah, blah – basically there is nothing.

Moana and her lawyer had in fact already made this case and were waiting on the outcome. She said if the outcome was not in her favour, her only remaining option would be "to go to High Court and make an application to create new law – new family law". Several weeks after the interview, Moana contacted the person who had interviewed her for this project to report that the Family Court had dismissed the case and that she now planned to head to the High Court to appeal for redress.

The significant challenges that impacted on these parents' abilities to maintain their family lives in the long term were multi-faceted and complex. Achieving co-operative parenting and forming blended family lives was not always easy to attain, and when coupled with discriminatory social attitudes and questioning by others of the legitimacy of the family forms that were being created, the challenge became even more difficult. Turning to the law hadn't, for the most part, helped formally constitute families. It was the parents' determination to persist in spite of the adversities that seemed to make the difference.

4.3 Successes in maintaining families

As our analysis progressed, several successes developed significance as parents spoke similarly about varied aspects of maintaining family life. These successes related to:

- > preserving donors' involvement in children's lives
- > actively portraying the family positively to minimise challenges to family validity
- > taking a united approach to family life.

4.3.1 Donors' involvement in children's lives

Parents in six families said the reason for using known donors to conceive children was a desire by the women for their children to know their father. Xanthie and Pia's comments were typical of the kinds of statements made about this:

Xanthie: ...What was important for us around that was that we wanted someone we knew, someone who was prepared to be in the child's life, and for the child to know who they are but not necessarily want the rights of having to make critical decisions because we were very clear we would be the parents.

Pia: I wanted Rhianna to know her papa and to have him involved in her life. He was keen on that. He said from the outset he was very busy ... he didn't want to be, [have] a, you know, weekly kind of involvement but that he did want to be around ... He comes to the big sort of things.

While there were differing arrangements made about the conditions attached to these donors' involvement as fathers, in our analysis, arrangements were successful when the parents expressed satisfaction about the kind of involvement that had eventuated and/or satisfaction about the relationships their children had formed with donors. Such satisfaction was evident for parents in five families. Louise said, "...And I think what we've continued to be very pleased about is that it's continued to work with Mike."

Xanthie's reflections about Emma's relationship with her father illustrated successful donor involvement too, "... So she's really identified with Simon as her Dad... So it's really important that he's in her life... He makes a big effort to see her... And he loves her to bits, and she loves him to bits."

Kirk's parenting of Tabitha and Cerise had also developed successfully in terms of his day-to-day involvement in the children's lives, and even though some dissatisfaction about Kirk's legal position still existed (see Section 4.2.1), the manner in which he, Anneke and Chloe were achieving multi-parenting seemed to be working. Of the relationship Anneke said, "...You know, they adore their father. We don't have any formal arrangement with him... He comes and he goes and we have day-to-day care and autonomy ... and he contributes and gets involved as much or as little as he wants to. Providing he's a father, and that was the criteria."

For others who had conceived children with known donors, contact between donors and children in the early stages of children's lives was not necessarily as important as securing an option on later contact should the children want that. This option appeared to have been successfully negotiated for April and Sandra's children as well as for Renee and Neve's. April explained their donor was happy to be involved "if that's what we want, if that's what our kids want, it's up to them really". Similarly, Renee said her and Neve's donor was "really happy to have the future contact" and that they'd discussed those kinds of issues – like when

that would be appropriate and how it should happen before proceeding with their plans. Queenie had already taken up the option of contact and was about to take her son Richard to visit his donor overseas. She said:

...We are about to go over and visit him ... and part of the reason why I felt okay about doing it with him is that he said that when my boy was old enough to be interested in him he was happy to be involved. I would not have done it with someone who had said 'No, never, don't want to know.' It will be interesting to see how it works out.

Not unlike the lesbians who used known donors and valued securing an option on later contact, three couples who used unknown donors also placed value on their children's right to trace their anonymous donors in the future, through the relevant fertility service's processes. Annaleise reflected on this:

I wonder about how Erin will feel about being a sperm donor baby, and you know, I hope that we'll be able to support her, if that is an issue for her. But then there's other people out there in society that ... will have that same issue, and you know because there is a lot more openness ... I think that's better for people because it's the lack of openness, I think, that creates problems for people, like people who have had an anonymous sperm donor and then they can never trace their donor.

Two of these three couples already supported their children in gaining access to information about their donors. Celia talked about this explaining that at the time she and Ginny chose a donor, donors didn't have to agree to be identified in the future, as is now the case:

...We were only prepared to have a donor who was prepared to be identified. So Erica's donor Samuel was prepared to be, so that was good, aye? That was significant in our position. And Erica decided when she was about seven or so that she wanted to know, she just wanted to know who he was. So we wrote to the clinic and asked ... and so Samuel wrote straight back... So he wrote back and gave heaps of information ... all about why he'd decided to become a donor, and what he, you know more about his life and stuff, how thrilled he was to hear

that a child had been born. And how that had ... made it all worthwhile for him... So it was really great, so Erica was very pleased to receive that letter from him, you know it was enough information to keep her quite satisfied.

For Laine and Carlotta's daughter Jaclyn, the possibility of contact had happened in a rather different set of circumstances. Theirs is an experience that illustrates difficulties that can arise in communities where limited numbers of donors willing to contribute sperm to lesbian couples exist. Realising when Jaclyn was still quite young that her anonymous donor was probably the same anonymous donor used by another lesbian couple with children living nearby, Laine said:

We had a bit of a bombshell last weekend or the weekend before, because we were at that family's house, she was staying the night there, and their two children have met the donor. And it was in the agreement that we wouldn't contact the donor until Jaclyn was either 16 or 18, and I felt ... it was the right thing to do to honour that, and had talked with Jaclyn about that etcetera, but they felt the right thing to do was to write to him.

Explaining that the family had subsequently met the donor who had likely also fathered Jaclyn, Laine continued:

And so that family have met and spent time with him, and Jaclyn and I now have to write, or now are going to write a letter, which we checked out is okay for him to get... I mean she wrote the letter about five days later, she wrote half of it, and she hasn't said anything more about it. She hasn't asked any more, she hasn't wanted to write any more so I'm not really, I mean I don't want him to feel like 'Oh my goodness they asked if they could give me a letter and now they haven't' but at the same time I don't really want to push Jaclyn.

Considering it important to preserve Jaclyn's rights to contact her donor, Laine had been somewhat forced by the circumstances into considering supporting her daughter to do this earlier than had been planned. Nevertheless, she and Jaclyn intended making contact. "So we'll meet him sometime in the next little while," Laine said.

Parents' abilities to preserve children's rights to trace their anonymous donors, and secure contact between

donors (known and unknown) and children, was a significant measure of success in how these families maintained themselves in the long term. Helping children build a sense of their origins was an important dimension of family lives, one in which the children themselves could take pride in. As Cate reported of Penny (her and Heather's oldest child), one account of her (anonymous donor) father, made to a "man at the library" was, "...Oh my dad's a very kind man. I don't even know him. My mum doesn't even know what he looks like. He gave us some sperm..."

4.3.2 Actively portraying family positively to minimise challenges to family validity

Parents in many families talked about coming out. The parents were outing themselves as same-gender attracted couples or single adults who were creating and maintaining family in non-traditional ways. For the parents of nine of these families, there frequently appeared to be a sense of purpose underlying their outing of themselves – a conscious acknowledgement that being out was both advantageous to family wellbeing and/or acted to minimise challenges to family validity. Sometimes, there was also acknowledgement that it was impossible to remain closeted with children regardless of parental wishes – that their children would out them either purposefully or unintentionally at some point.

Neve and Renee found they were regularly faced with decisions about whether or not to come out while in the public arena as a family – when shopping, on excursions to the park and so on. As Renee noted, their sons drew interest from unfamiliar people and questions were then asked that highlighted assumptions about their family make-up:

...'Cause I mean the boys attract a lot of attention, because they're twins ... and they're blond and curly and all that. And, we're out places and people will say things like 'Oh, which one's their Mum?' You know? Or make comments like that. You know, total strangers. Funny little comments they make. So it's like, just that very kind of public thing.

When initially faced with these sorts of questions, Neve and Renee made decisions about the best way to respond based on whether or not they would see the person involved again – perhaps, therefore, indicating awareness of the costs of openness in a society that is

arguably homophobic. As Neve explained, they tended to think: 'Oh well, we're never going to see them again ... so it doesn't matter.' However, this approach later changed as awareness of the potential negative effect of this on the boys grew. Neve said:

...But, then we realise, well okay, what impact is this having on the boys? Once they get to the point where they understand – so we're denying or hiding the relationship of their mothers and all that sort of thing and we don't want to do that. We don't want to put them in that position. We had to make a conscious choice. We said, 'Okay, well, we're going to have to do it.'

Like Neve and Renee, Heather and Cate were regularly put in the position of either concealing their family configuration or outing themselves. This occurred both in response to strangers' questions or because of comments made by their daughter Penny, who was almost four years old at the time of their interview. Heather sometimes experienced apprehension about being outed by Penny. As she explained:

I sometimes feel a bit of anxiety about being outed. Sometimes. And I guess it's just because in my life I pick and choose who I talk about my sexuality to, and there are occasions when Penny will say, 'Mum' – and then she'll ask me something and then she'll say 'Where's Mummy?' and it's obvious, you know? And sometimes I feel a little bit uncomfortable but I don't let that show.

In consciously ensuring this apprehension wasn't obvious to Penny, Heather appeared aware of the significance of reinforcing the children's sense of family unity. As she put it: "It's very important to me that they feel very much a part of us. And that our relationship together is valid in their eyes." Presumably, this also sends a powerful message to others.

Both Louise and Whitney, as well as Sacha and Kari, had experienced being outed by their children:

Louise: I'm just remembering Farrell when he was little ... and talking to a friend and saying, 'Oh you know I've got two Mums' and she was going 'How come?' He said, 'They're lesbians stupid.'

Whitney: Yeah he screamed it out on the footpath as we were walking past... He goes 'They're lesbians', at the top of his voice. [laughter]

Louise: That's the thing, it's like when you have kids you're completely out.

Sacha: There's a bit of prejudice here and there but not really... I'm out at school and that's not a problem and it's not an issue... I don't advertise the fact but I don't deny it either so...

Kari: That's an important point actually that you can't really stay in the closet when you have got children because children speak about everything and they speak about it at school.

Given that children do "speak about everything", presenting themselves as a positive and united family could be seen as a useful strategy for counteracting challenges to family validity. This was noted by the interviewer of Dawn and Pia who, not having met the couple or their children Rhianna and Lena before, was struck by their strong sense of family pride and togetherness. She made several remarks during the interview to this effect. Pia's responses highlighted her view that individual responsibility needed to be taken for how she and her family were perceived by others and that if they weren't well received this was not a reflection on them. At the same time she acknowledged the difficulties for some in putting themselves out there:

... 'Cause it's up to me, who I am as a person, how I get treated. It's not because, you know like, you know just because I'm a lesbian doesn't mean I should get treated differently if I'm an asshole. You know. If you're an asshole you're an asshole. It doesn't matter where you come from and what you do... But you know the thing is why we've fitted in, that's what you've said, we've put ourselves out there in a manner that if people have had a problem with that then that says more about them than us. And I think that that's how everybody in the world should work... I know there are a lot of people out there who find it very difficult to put themselves out there and that's really hard and probably quite sad but in the end it all comes down to how you decide to, it comes down to you in the end, you know, and you can ask for help from all over the show but it's not going to make any difference in the end because you still have to do it yourself.

In a similar vein, Anneke said: "We don't have a public person, and a private person, pretty much what you see

is what you get and if you don't like it get stuffed." As confident women, she believed she and Chloe did not attract negativity, describing it this way: "As confident women we are probably not even aware of what some of the issues, attitudes or opinions that may exist because we just don't buy into it, we're not stakeholders of that rubbish, and we don't attract it. I certainly don't."

Xanthie's pride in her family was clearly evident when she explained how she would respond to challenges to family validity. She said:

But what I'd like to say to those people is ... you come and look at this family and you tell us that it's not a functioning family unit that ... has all the warts of any other family, but that this child isn't loved and nurtured and doing really well in this environment, and feeling secure in her own identity. And she's ... I mean, this family, she's having a whole range of different models of being and relationships, that I think can only be an advantage for her, and she's extremely secure. She knows who she is, she knows who the people are in her life and what her family looks like.

Moana's view was that the existence of families like hers made an important contribution to both understandings of family validity and what counts as family success. In her words:

...I think it's really good in terms of extending the horizons of what Māori families can be like, in particular. You know, just a couple of years back, I don't know how long ago it was now, we had the civil union legislation that was coming in and some quite prominent Māori politicians in the community spoke out against that Bill becoming legislation. And I think it's really important for those people to see successful families that come from – and what counts as success. You can in the first wee while after separating and having I guess, a failed relationship if you like, think that it's been an unsuccessful family, but if you see a successful family being how that child is growing and developing and how, whoever all of the parents are of that child, how they are growing and developing, wherever they are, if you see that as successful, and that those developing individuals are all doing well, and that there can

be combinations of times and experiences and stuff that, that make it all work together, then that's success as well.

While coming out can clearly be problematic, it also provides opportunities for families to portray themselves positively at the same time as serving to reduce attacks on family legitimacy. In taking up such opportunities, whether intentionally or otherwise, it appears the parents and children of these families, as well as those they came in contact with, stood to gain more from the experience of putting themselves out there, rather than less. In our analysis, this is a measure of success.

4.3.3 Taking a united approach to family life

The final significant success noted in this study's data reflected the notion that many of the parents we interviewed appeared to have a united approach to family life. This was evident through discussions about taking joint responsibility for the parenting endeavour, the sharing of childcare to enhance household functioning and to enable employment, and choices of leisure time activities.

The notion of joint responsibility for the parenting endeavour was significant to the parents of 10 families. Xanthie's comment, "...we're equal parents...", and Nola's reflection, "...It's just so balanced really..." are indicative of this. In three interviews this notion of joint responsibility for parenting was likely supported by a clear sense of shared parenting styles and values between parents. Kirk and Nola each described this as being "on the same page":

Kirk: We're on the same page in terms of child raising... We're just all in there for the right reason, we all have the same goals, on the same page in the parenting skills, you know how we want them brought up.

Nola: And we're very similar obviously, in our parenting styles, because we have exactly the same beliefs and values and the children are the main priority and so everything's about them and because we're on that same page, um, it's quite seamless really isn't it –

Crystal: Mmm.

Nola: – between the two of us.

Celia's experiences of parenting Erica with Ginny were different from those she'd had when parenting Joanna with Joanna's father Bevan. She particularly valued her and Ginny's philosophical alignment, saying:

...we have really strong philosophies about how we would want to parent and stuff and they were the same. So that was really good. So there wasn't conflict aye, it was just like we really got into it. It was like Erica was our own little project and it was really lovely aye. We just had lovely early years with her. But quite a lot of sleep deprivation and things, and that. But you know, it was really lovely to parent with someone who was so equal, and so philosophically aligned, so that was great.

For these 10 families, joint responsibility also played out through sharing childcare to enhance household functioning and enable employment. How childcare was shared differed across the families. Some parents took turns as both the primary caregiver at home and being in paid employment. Whitney's comment highlighted this situation: "We like to share the childcare through part-time work. So not one person at home, and it would probably be easier to have one person at home cause they could do a lot of co-ordinating but it works reasonably well."

Others chose to have one person as primary caregiver and the other out in paid employment. Anneke talked about what a difference it had made to her and Chloe's lives, and the lives of their children, to have her at home full-time:

And since I've stopped working ... I'm at home full-time, [it] has made a huge difference... Dinner on the table you know, got a vege garden going and doing all the practical things, so when Chloe comes home, the kids come home ... all that sort of ... housewifey stuff is done, and that's the foundation that makes our world a nice place usually to be in.

In some cases both parents were in close to, or full-time employment. This was the case for Neve and Renee. Neve's discussion with the interviewer gave a clear account of how childcare was juggled between them:

Neve: 'Cause, in the mornings, like I say, I plop them in front of the television so I can get their breakfast or their lunch or whatever while Renee's

getting ready for work. So she goes and has her shower and that sort of thing. Because of my flexibility, and because Renee is the bus-driver, you know, she drops them off and picks them up, that's her sort of her role within there. So, I see my part as getting them all off to work and school. And then I get myself ready and head off.

Interviewer: So, you're kind of holding the fort and deal to your own needs after they're gone?

Neve: Yeah. More or less. And then I'd say it's the reverse when Renee comes home. She's straight away into it, full on, baby care and childcare while I'm at work. And then I come through the door and it's like all hands on deck again.

Regardless of which option was taken up, come the end of a working day it was as Neve said, "all hands on deck again". The following comments made by Nola and Sandra are illustrative of a number of others that highlighted mutual co-operation with the children at this point in the day:

Nola: They are the main priority when I walk in that door and everything else pales in comparison. It has to. Everything else has to take a back seat.

Sandra: As soon as April's home she's right in there you know and they're right in there with April, so it's great.

For the parents of two families, this kind of practical support was considered a specific advantage of parenting as lesbian couples over those parenting from within the context of an opposite-gender relationship. Sacha explained it this way:

Kari works part-time, she probably has a lot more support, I don't mean financial, but emotional support and practical support than a lot of heterosexual women 'cause I will come home and cook dinner or bath Reggie and put him to bed. I don't think a lot of men necessarily do that ... I think that practical support is something that lesbian couples enjoy much more than heterosexual couples.

Beyond the daily patterns of childcare and employment routines, unity around leisure time activity also featured as important. Leisure time choices reflected parents' sense of family and the importance of nourishing this

through spending time together with the children. Cate's comment, "I feel like we've got a family now ... that's very obvious but we do family things" is indicative of the kinds of comments made. Renee described examples of "family things" that were typical to a number of parents: "We do a lot of outings. We go to the park. We always go, in the weekend, like we go to [petting zoos], we go to the museum – places like that."

For these parents, time together with their children was precious. Crystal explained this meant she and Nola prioritised that time together, over time spent pursuing individual adult interests. As she says, "You know Nola loves golf and will often choose not to play golf on a

Saturday because she sees it as more important to take the kids swimming and those sort of things."

In a similar vein, Annaleise who worked outside of the home during the week said, "There's not many things that will tempt me to leave Erin at home in the weekends."

The united approach and joy evident in these families' time together were taken as significant successes in these families' lives. Parents who actively position themselves as positive, coupled with securing children's access to information about who was important in their parentage, provided several measures of success in the maintenance of family lives where lesbians and gay men were parenting.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section of the report we discuss several of the study's findings, outline emerging issues and suggest future research that may address these. Study limitations are identified and two conclusions pertaining to the identified issues are drawn.

On the face of it, it seemed a fairly straightforward enterprise to explore the means by which lesbians and gay men were creating families in New Zealand. The phrase 'creating family' made visible significant and long-term commitment by families to complex processes, processes that were not always predictable, controllable or ameliorable. The parents' commitment became even clearer as they and interviewers engaged in exchanges over creation and birth stories; as accounts of the navigation of assisted reproduction unfolded; and as partners and friends talked about how their planned parenting and family arrangements formed (or failed to form). We begin this discussion by recognising what a huge accomplishment it is for lesbians and gay men to actually achieve parenthood. What can be learnt from these parents' experiences? How can we build on their successes?

5.1 What 'creating family' actually represents

In their discussion paper regarding whether or not sexual orientation might form an official New Zealand statistic in the future, Statistics New Zealand (2008) suggests that "the GLB¹⁸ community may offer insights into healthy family models because of the need to construct families outside of traditional roles" (p. 8). The participants in this study provided many examples of 'healthy' family models (we have taken this to be synonymous with 'successful') by effectively establishing themselves through both traditional and non-traditional means. Achieving family through the take-up of sperm donation was an accomplishment reliant on parents' ability to overcome complex issues (accessing donors and sperm, negotiating donors' parenting roles where this had been planned for, the time it took to achieve pregnancy). It was also reliant on their ability to withstand heteronormative and sometimes homophobic responses from others. Their intense desire to parent seems to have carried these men and women through. For blended families

complex issues around negotiating parenting were to the fore. Pryor's (2006) comment that "family life in the twenty-first century is characterised by anxiety and uncertainty about what it means to 'be family'" (p. 4), does not seem to reflect these parents' experiences. The parents we spoke to were clear about what it might mean to form family, the varied means by which this could be achieved and what their family might look like in the longer term. Theirs was a purposeful, strategic and deliberate journey from which diverse models of family formed. In our view, it is important to recognise how much adults invest in the journey towards family formation when they desire to begin and raise families through non-traditional means.

5.2 Issues for donor fathers who intend actively parenting

Creating family did not come without trials, and those facing gay men who planned multi-parenting families with lesbians were particularly salient. We found examples of both successful and unsuccessful multi-parenting arrangements in this regard. In our analysis it became apparent that it was significantly more challenging for donor fathers (and if desired, their partners) to take up parenting rights and/or guardianship responsibilities in comparison with the lesbian couples with whom they parented. Currently, legal parenthood can only be obtained by a donor father if he makes successful application to adopt the child (which would then sever the legal relationship between the child and one of their lesbian parents). Donor fathers were not automatically recognised if the lesbian mothers were both named as parents in birth registration processes. The process of securing contact with a child (via provisions in the Care of Children Act 2004) was contingent on the court agreeing that such contact would be in the child's best interests.

Should the recommendations from the New Zealand Law Commission report *New Issues in Legal Parenthood* (2006) suggesting that legal parenthood be able to be attributed to a known donor, the issue of legal parenthood for men like those in this study would be ameliorated. The donor would become a second or third parent. To date this issue remains unresolved.

We learnt, through the experiences of the families in this study, about how arrangements for deliberate

¹⁸ The initials GLB are used by the department to refer to gay, lesbian and bi-sexual persons.

multi-parenting could both succeed and fail. In one family, intended parenting by the known gay donor and his partner was unable to be realised when the planned multi-parenting arrangements and friendship with a lesbian couple broke down. As the biological mother and her lesbian partner lived together and agreed to the procedure that resulted in the birth of their son, it was these women who were recognised as the boy's legal parents upon his birth. Then, having not been identified on the baby's birth certificate, the biological father and his partner had no claim to legal parenthood. This situation highlights the importance of lesbians and gay men understanding the full ramifications of the present legal framework with respect to securing parenting and guardianship rights and responsibilities in planned multi-parenting families.

These are emerging issues for families. Not only does the birth registration process make it impossible for donor fathers or their partners to have their status as a parent automatically recognised, when viewed from the perspective of children, they too can be seen as disadvantaged by these legal processes because they are denied access to parents who have wanted all along to be involved in their lives. Hare and Skinner (2008) describe constraints like this as resulting from "adult-centric perspective[s] that discount children's reality" (p. 365). The implications of the birth registration and additional guardianship processes seem very troubling in this light.

A second family, where a gay father was parenting with lesbians, appeared on the surface to have overcome these issues, yet it was only through the ongoing goodwill of all parents (he and the lesbian mothers who were the legal parents) that he had actually been able to take up active parenting. He, too, remained unnamed on his children's birth certificate (their lesbian parents were named therein), but was aware that he could apply for (and in his mind, would likely receive) legal recognition of his relationship to his children through securing additional guardianship. To have proceeded with the donor and multi-parenting plans in the absence of any automatic legal protections represented significant risk, at the time. The third family where a gay father was parenting with lesbians was described by the mothers as a successful multi-parenting arrangement. Their child's father's legal status was not explored.¹⁹ In our view, and the views

of others, further study is necessary on the effects of recognising some parents over others and decisions on donor fathers' ability to successfully take up parenting (Tasker & Patterson, 2007).

5.3 Securing men's involvement in children's lives

Goldberg & Allen's (2007) study of lesbian parents' perceptions of male involvement in their children's lives found that most lesbians wanted male involvement with children. In this study we found that there was a commitment by many lesbian parents to securing the involvement of men, particularly donors, in children's lives. The experiences of two of the three families, who had deliberately entered into multi-parenting arrangements with sperm donors, were particularly illustrative of this commitment that was also noted across other families in the study. Issues with multi-parenting arrangements have been previously discussed. It would be useful to study further the ways multi-parenting is being successfully achieved, particularly with a view to finding out about gay men's contributions as active parents to children also being raised by lesbian couples (Henrickson, 2005).

5.4 Facing up to homophobia and heteronormativity

This study shows that parents and children in families with same-gender parents continue to remain subject to homophobia and heteronormativity. One way this was evidenced was through challenges that parents received from others about the legitimacy of the families they had created. Heteronormativity also shaped the assumptions and norms about families that were commonly held: for example, an implied or explicit reliance on opposite-gender and biological connections between parents and children. Goldberg & Allen (2007) reports similar findings by explaining that the privileging of heteronormative understandings of what families look like and how they should be, leads to a lack of recognition and acceptance of same-gender parents and their families.

5.5 Research limitations

The research was exploratory in nature and as such met its objectives with the exception of addressing

¹⁹ This father was not interviewed.

the support needs of families. There are, however, limitations with an exploratory approach. We find five limitations of note in the research. These are related to:

- > accessing and recruiting participants
- > the participant pool
- > the clarity of the interview schedule
- > a disjuncture between the scope of the study and the data produced
- > the 25 percent rule adopted in the presentation of findings.

Access to and recruitment of participants was achieved using snowball sampling. A potential outcome of this method is that relatively successful families seem to have been referred and recruited to the study. With one exception, all the participants were creating and maintaining families in the ways they had intended. Therefore opportunities to explore other experiences were largely untapped.

We sought to recruit balanced numbers of lesbians and gay men to this study so that we could further understand gay men's experiences as parents. This was after reading about and recognising there was a lack of understanding about what contributions gay men are making to families where children are also parented by lesbians. The failure to achieve this balance limits the study's conclusions around gay men's experiences as parents. Few gay men are represented. Of the four who are, only two were actively parenting and of these only one was interviewed.²⁰ However, in the report, a focus on both lesbians and gay men is maintained because the three interviews that did provide data around gay men's parenting were detailed, rich and illuminated several significant issues pertinent to any gay man seeking to parent with lesbians, or lesbians seeking to parent with gay men in the current legal environment in New Zealand. Further study in this area is warranted.

The interview schedule enabled us to somewhat standardise the topics canvassed and data produced in the study. Our questions about what constituted success in the families could have been clearer. As previously noted, we interpreted success on the basis of parents' responses to questions about what they thought were benefits or advantages of their family

forms. It was not clarified whether or not this would constitute success in their eyes. Questions concerning what supported parenting and what parents considered was needed to support them came late in the interview schedule and produced variable data. Our questions around this topic needed to be further refined to assist in producing trustworthy data.

Eager to explore parents' experiences of family life more widely, we included an array of questions in the interview schedule that produced data additional to that which were necessary to respond to the study's primary questions. A disjuncture emerged between the scope of the study and the data produced, in the sense that we collected far more data than were eventually necessary for this report. This did not impact on interview length or our ability to probe during the interviews although, had we been attuned to this, it is likely that we would have limited extra questioning and focused more on the aspects of creating and maintaining family lives.

Finally, the 25 percent rule adopted in relation to the production of data (as described under Section 2.6), may have limited our reporting and consideration of experiences that were not commonly shared by participants.

5.6 Conclusion

We end this discussion by briefly revisiting key findings of this report and draw two conclusions formed from the study. We found that families formed in one of four ways and that parenting models were diverse, encompassing, in some cases, the involvement of more than two adults and/or more than one household. The significant challenges associated with creating families differed depending on how families formed. Donor families experienced challenges related to assisted reproduction, whereas managing parenting roles by non-biological parents featured strongly for blended families. Significant successes associated with creating families included a readiness and commitment to engage in planned parenthood and the valuing of social diversity. In addition, the broadening of the concept of family was significant.

Families' lives were organised in three ways, with their choices around how they were organised, enhancing family wellbeing. Challenges to family maintenance related to the taking up of parenting and the formalising

²⁰ In one of the 19 families a gay father's parenting was made visible through the voices of the lesbians he parents with.

of roles and relationships. Legal advice or attempts at legal remedy in these situations did not bring resolution. Families were also confronted by heteronormative and homophobic responses to the legitimacy of their family form. There were many successes relevant to family maintenance noted by these families. Three are addressed in the report: donor involvement or later contact; the positive portrayal of families; and the united approach to family life.

The first conclusion drawn from this study is highlighted through the ways in which some families' actively portray themselves in ways that positively publicise family diversity. There is much to be learnt from their recognition and valuing of non-traditional modes of family life. Not only may this help counteract the discriminatory effects of heteronormativity, it also broadens perceptions about who and how families can be in contemporary New Zealand society.

The second conclusion drawn from this study suggests it is prudent to revisit the legal structures that currently prevent the recognition of multiple parents in planned multi-parenting families, with respect to legal parenthood, birth registration and additional guardianship. In these families, not only does at least one parent have to miss out when the process only allows for recognition of two parents on the birth register and certificate, the children too may be denied access to all their parents. Further, these children are denied having their parentage recorded with accuracy and respect. Progressive and positive law change, with respect to parenting and relationships recognition, is a hallmark of New Zealand legal history in the early part of the 21st century. It will be a further step towards inclusive policy if provisions are extended to catch up with the realities of multi-parenting family models.

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APPENDIX 1:

Overview of the current relevant legal framework

Status of Children Act 1969

1. The Status of Children Act 1969 sets out rules for determining the legal status of New Zealand children in relation to their parents.²¹ The status of most children is determined under the general rules in the Act. The parental status of children conceived by specified assisted human reproduction (AHR) procedures involving donated gametes is determined under the Act's AHR rules.²²
2. Donor gamete conception is used by heterosexual couples when natural conception is not possible due to infertility or risk of passing on a genetic disorder. It is also used by single women, lesbian couples and gay couples (using surrogacy) who wish to have children.
3. The deeming rules under Part 2 of the Status of Children Act 1969 apply. The woman who has conceived with donor gametes and gives birth to the child, whether or not she is the genetic mother, and her partner if he or she agreed to the procedure, will be the child's legal parents. The donor has no parental status, rights or liabilities towards the child and vice versa (unless the mother was single at the time and later enters into a relationship with the donor). The child loses any legal rights that otherwise flow from his or her genetic parent, such as citizenship or inheritance.
4. Where the parents intend the donor to be one of the child's legal and social parents, a donor can only access some or all parental rights and responsibilities, by:
 - > Entering into an agreement with the parents/guardians under section 41 of the Care of Children Act 2004 about contact and guardianship matters. However, these agreements do not give full parental status.
 - > Becoming a court appointed guardian, obtaining legal authority to have a role in the day-to-day care of and decision-making for the child. However, this

does not give full parental status or endure past a child's 18th birthday.

- > Adopting the child, but this extinguishes the rights of the other parent(s). This is the only means by which legal parenthood can be transferred.
5. There are no specific parenthood laws dealing with surrogacy arrangements and the same deeming rules under the Status of Children Act 1969 apply. The surrogate mother and, if consent was provided, her partner, will be the child's legal parents. If the child has been conceived by IVF or self-insemination of the surrogate mother, the intending father (parents) is treated as (a) donor(s) and his (their) parental status is extinguished. Adoption is the only mechanism for transferring parental status to the intending parents,²³ although the donor could seek any of the other arrangements outlined above.

Care of Children Act 2004

1. The Care of Children Act came into force on 1 July 2005.
2. Section 41 of the Care of Children Act 2004 recognises formal agreements between known donors and parents about the donor's involvement in the child's life.
3. Such an agreement cannot be enforced, but the parties to the agreement can ask the court to formalise some or all aspects of the agreement in a court order. That order, insofar as it relates to contact with the child, can be enforced under the Act as if it were a parenting order relating to contact. If a dispute arises, the parties can apply to the court for direction and the court may make any order that it thinks 'proper', after taking into account the child's welfare and best interests.
4. Applications may be made under the Care of Children Act 2004 for parenting orders for day-to-day care (formerly custody) or contact (formerly access) by donors, although they must first obtain the court's leave.²⁴
5. An application may also be made by a donor for guardianship of the child.²⁵ Leave is not required.

²¹ Status of Children Act 1969, s 7, s 8 and s 10; Family Proceedings Act 1980, s 2 as amended by Schedule 3 of the Care of Children Act 2004.

²² Status of Children Act 1969, Part 2.

²³ See Law Commission Report, paras 7.1 to 7.56, for a discussion of issues relating to surrogacy arrangements.

²⁴ Care of Children Act 2004, s 48.

²⁵ Care of Children Act 2004, s 27.

6. Under the Care of Children Act 2004 a father is a guardian of his child if he was married to, or in a civil union with, the mother or was living with her as a de facto partner at any time between the conception and birth of the child or his name is registered on the child's birth certificate after 1 July 2005. Under previous legislation (Guardianship Act 1968) a father who was not married to the mother was only a guardian if he was living with the mother at the time of the child's birth.
7. Changes made in the Care of Children Act 2004 (which replaced the Guardianship Act 1968) now enable the Family Court to make an order granting contact between a sperm donor (and his partner) and the lesbian mother (and her partner) provided such an order is in the best interests of the child.
8. The Status of Children Act 1969 also provides that an ovum donor is not the biological mother of a child born as a result of an AHR procedure, so strictly speaking a gay man who donates sperm is in no different position from a lesbian woman who donates an ovum to enable conception of a child in vitro. It is true that male donors have lesser rights than gestational mothers but this is only where the donor is not a partner of the mother.

The Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995 and the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2004

1. The Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995 and associated regulations govern the recording and accessing of birth information. Guardians of a child are required to register a child's name along with details about the child's parents. The form used for notifying a birth is prescribed,²⁶ but there is no prescribed form for a birth certificate, which is only required to contain certain prescribed information.²⁷ Registered information includes the child's mother and father, and since July 2005 in cases involving a same-sex partner of a mother who has conceived using AHR, an 'other parent'.
2. Where a child is conceived using an AHR procedure using donated cells or an embryo facilitated by a fertility service provider ('providers'), the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2004 (HART Act) requires additional

information to be kept. From 22 August 2005, the HART Act requires providers to hold identifying and non-identifying information about donors, donor offspring (the children resulting from the procedure) and guardians (for the purpose of giving consent to access information where the offspring is under 18 years). Providers are required to pass on basic information to Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) when the child is born. The register kept by BDM is known as the HART register.

3. People who donated sperm, eggs or embryos prior to 22 August 2005, and people who were born as a result of those donations (and their guardians), can provide information for inclusion on the voluntary HART register. The Registrar-General will attempt to match information of donors and offspring using donor identifier numbers from provider records.
4. Information on the HART register does not appear on birth certificates. There are restrictions on who can access information on the HART register, including that donor offspring must be over 18 years of age to provide information or access their details or those of their donor (or 16 or 17 years with the approval of a Family Court).

Adoption Act 1955

1. As noted earlier, the Adoption Act 1955 is the only means to transfer legal parenthood and would mostly be used in surrogacy situations.
2. Adoption is the only option for intended parents by which there is a complete transfer of rights and obligations from the birth mother to the intended parents. Adoption severs the legal relationship between the child and the surrogate mother. The child is deemed to have been born to the intended parents. However, adoption is only an option for married couples or sole applicants. Only one partner of a de facto couple may adopt with the other partner obtaining guardianship under the Care of Children Act 2004.
3. Some couples object to having to adopt what they consider is their own child. It can also be an intrusive process, with a social worker's report required by the Family Court as to whether the intended parents are 'fit and proper persons' to adopt a child.

²⁶ Form 2, Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration (Prescribed Information and Forms) Regulations 1995.

²⁷ Reg 6, Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration (Prescribed Information and Forms) Regulations 1995.

APPENDIX 2:

Family matrix

KEY:	Children	Day-to-day parents	Parents-more-broadly	Living/household arrangements
Donor families	Richard (KnD)	<i>Queenie</i>		Single HH
	Fergus (KnD) & Farell (KnD)	<i>Louise & Whitney, with Mike (Fergus)</i>		Multi-parented, two households (Fergus)
	1 son (KnD)	The lesbian mothers	Caleb & Damien	Single HH with mothers
	Reggie (KnD)	<i>Kari & Sacha</i>	Donor	Single HH with mothers, donor visits
	Lachlan (KnD)	<i>April & Sandra</i>		Single HH
	Abe (KnD)			
	Rhianna & Lena (KnD)	<i>Dawn & Pia</i>	Donor	Single HH with mothers
	Emma (KnD)	<i>Xantie & Kristen</i>		50/50 share
	Penny & Sam (UnD)	<i>Cate & Heather</i>		Single HH
	Claudia & Andrea (UnD)	<i>Crystal & Nola</i>		Single HH
	Erin (UnD)	<i>Annaleise & Ruth</i>		Single HH
	Jaclyn (UnD)	<i>Laine & Carlotta</i>		Single HH
	Reggie (KnD)			
Adam & Jacob (KnD)	<i>Neve & Renee</i>		Single HH	
Blended and donor families	Erica (UnD) & Joanna (HR, Ind.)	<i>Celia & Ginny, with Bevan (previously with respect to J)</i>		E, Single HH; J - Previously shared care
	Tabitha & Cerise (KnD) John & Jarod (HR)	<i>Anneke & Chloe, with Alan (with respect to J & J); Anneke, Chloe & Kirk (with respect to T & C)</i>		Shared care with respect to J & J with Alan; Multi-parented two households with respect to T & C with Kirk

Blended families	Rupert & Bonny (HR)	<i>Nerinda & Belinda</i> with Donald		Shared care with Donald
	2 sons & 1 daughter (HR)	<i>Bette</i> (FS-GP)		Shared care previously with the children's father (now deceased)
	2 sons (1 Ind.) & 1 daughter (HR)	<i>Trudi</i> (FS-GP)	Daughter's father	Single HH each of 2 dependent children (1 with mother, 1 with father)
	Saffron (Ind.) & Gilbert (HR)	<i>Cindy & Candice</i>	Father	Shared care
Whāngai family	Tania (HR)	<i>Moana & Sue</i>	Birth parents	Shared care M & S

UnD – child conceived with unknown donor through fertility clinic

KnD – child conceived with known donor through fertility clinic or privately

HR – child conceived in context of previous heterosexual relationship

Ind. – living independently

FS-GP – former same-gender partner also or previously involved in the day-to-day care of one or more children

HH – household

Names in italics denote parents who were interviewed in the study.

APPENDIX 3:

Semi-structured interview schedule

In what ways are lesbians and gay men creating families?

- > Tell me about your family? (Who's in it, ages of children, who's significant)
- > How did your family come into being, ie, what were the circumstances that made you decide to have a family?
- > Tell me about how your children were conceived? (If not already covered)

Possible other prompts:

- > For situations with multiple parents – How did you come to be parenting together?
- > For single parents – How did you come to be parenting alone?

What does life within these families look like?

- > Can you tell me about a typical week in your family's life eg, arrangements for shared parenting, childcare/schooling, activities etc.
- > Has this changed over time? If so, how?
- > How would you describe your role/s in the family and your relationship/s with the children?
- > How is parenting distributed in your family?
- > Tell me about the contribution of other significant adults involved in your family? For example, grandparents, ex-partners, neighbour/s.

What successes, challenges and issues do these families experience?

- > How have education agencies responded to your family?
- > How have health services agencies responded to your family?
- > How have employers responded to your family?
- > How have social services responded to your family?
- > How has the legal system responded to your family?
- > How is your family received by other agencies/ others, eg, church, community etc?
- > Can you think of an example that highlights what is great about the family you have created?
- > What do you see as the advantages of the type of family you have created? (Visibility, inclusion)
- > Can you remember a time when your family, or members of it, have experienced discrimination and/or exclusion? Can you describe this?
- > What is the biggest challenge facing your family?

What supports parenting in these families?

- > What are the key things that support your parenting? (Recognition of diversity, institutions/ systems that are responsive to diversity, legislation reform, community)

What is needed to support parenting in these families?

- > Can you think of specific things that would further support your parenting and your family's wellbeing?

Blue Skies Research

- 1/06 *Les Familles et Whānau sans Frontières: New Zealand and transnational family obligation*, Lunt with McPherson & Browning, March 2006.
- 2/06 *Two Parents, Two Households: New Zealand data collections, language and complex parenting*, Calister & Birks, March 2006.
- 3/06 *Grandfathers – Their Changing Family Roles and Contributions*, Wilton & Davey, March 2006.
- 4/06 *Neighbourhood Environments that Support Families*, Witten, Penney, Faalau, & Jensen, May 2006.
- 5/06 *New Communication Technologies and Family Life*, Weatherall & Ramsay, May 2006.
- 6/06 *Families and Heavy Drinking: Impacts on children’s wellbeing*, Systematic Review, Girling, Huakau, Casswell, & Conway, June 2005.
- 7/06 *Beyond Demography: History, ritual and families in the twenty-first century*, Pryor, June 2005.
- 8/06 *Whānau is Whānau*, Walker, Ngāti Porou, July 2006.
- 9/06 *Supervised Contact: The views of parents and staff at three Barnardos Contact Centres in the southern region of New Zealand*, Gibbs & McKenzie, August 2006.
- 10/06 *New Zealanders’ Satisfaction with Family Relationships and Parenting*, Robertson, August 2006.
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