How to Talk about Child and Family Wellbeing: A Toolkit

About The Workshop

The Workshop is a charitable trust for public good. We undertake research to find ways of communicating that will build support for the solutions that work to solve complex social and environmental problems. Our research, training and consulting work provides a foundation for other people and organisations to do more effective research, communication, community engagement and advocacy.

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Introduction

For those working on achieving meaningful policy change for family well-being, effective communications can create hope, improve people's understanding of the causes of poverty and inequality and the solutions that will work to improve family well-being, and motivate people to act in meaningful ways, to be agents of change.

But we are not projecting our messages onto a blank screen. There are harmful and corrosive narratives in the public and media that influence how people think about the causes and solutions to poverty. Our audience draws on these narratives, about causes and solutions, often without even being consciously aware of them, and it encourages shallow ways of thinking about the issue.

Messages that focus on the harmful outcomes of family poverty, or do not focus on changing how (not just what) people think about its causes and solutions, can therefore have the effect of reinforcing pre-existing myths and misunderstandings even as they increase levels of public awareness and concern about the problem.

The good news is that new research, and a growing body of evidence emerging from that research, offers us solutions to this challenge. Drawing on this research, we can redesign our communications so that they will be effective, ethical and have an impact in helpful ways.

Mainstream communication about family poverty and well-being has to date focused heavily on describing the problem and the economic impacts of poverty, and has led with facts. While poverty has significant economic repercussions inspiring action at the right level requires more than communicating the facts and the costs.

We need communication strategies grounded in the evidence of persuasive communication: the science of story.

This toolkit is designed to help us use strategies that inspire hope, open doors to people developing more productive understandings of the causes of family poverty, and encourage collective action on the evidence-informed solutions.

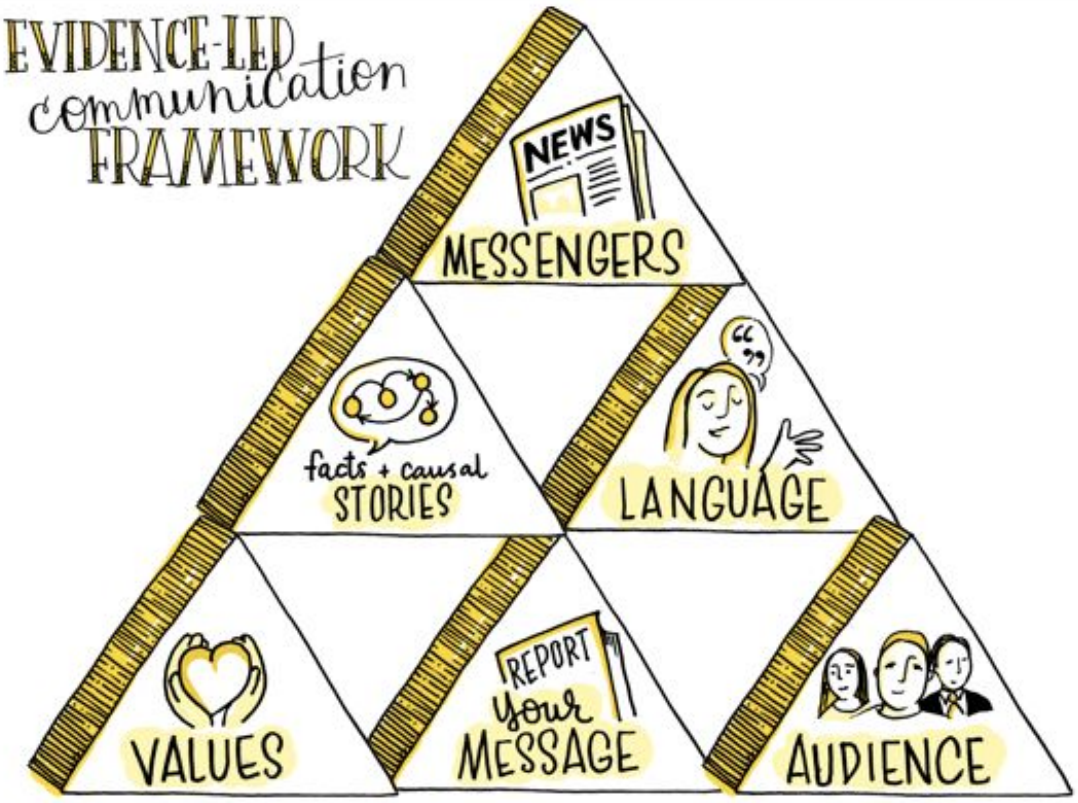
Drawing on many disciplines from cognitive psychology, implementation science through to cognitive linguistics, the science of story takes us beyond repetition of the facts and framing of costs and into the realms of story-telling with science.

How we created this report

To create this report we carried out extensive literature searches for poverty and welfare research as it relates to a) understanding current public explanations and understandings of

poverty and the solutions, and b) messaging to move people to more productive ways of thinking. We also carried out our own primary research, developing and testing messages for a New Zealand audience, and draw on the results of this research throughout the report. The methods used for that primary research included focus groups in Auckland and Nelson to explore existing cultural narratives and understandings around causes of and solutions to poverty and inequality, and quantitative dial-testing of a range of messages to see how they were received by a New Zealand audience. This research was carried out in 2016 and 2017, with funding from the Morgan Foundation, the JR McKenzie Trust, ActionStation, UNICEF, the Equality Network and Child Poverty Action Project.

Components of evidence-led communication



At The Workshop, we have developed an evidence-led framework for communicating research and science, and inspiring action in relation to the big issues of the world. These are the issues that require our collective action, often at a systems or structural level (as opposed to individual behaviour change). For example, reprogramming our economy so that every family has the resources they need to thrive.

Why is this hard?

Many people have spent a lot of time and energy trying to motivate the public to support effective, collective action to reduce poverty. It has proven to be challenging. Even where we've seen levels of public awareness of and concern about poverty go up, we haven't necessarily seen a matching increase in support for the effective policy solutions, or in collective action calling for those solutions.

Why is it so hard?

Both our in-built cognitive processes and our information environment can conspire to narrow our thinking about complex issues such as poverty. As experts who communicate on poverty, we also play our part.

Our fast-thinking brains use many shortcuts to cope with the vast amount of information in the world and protect our existing beliefs. These shortcuts mean we grasp the concrete and shy away from the abstract. This makes it hard to have a productive public conversation about complex issues, like climate change.

At the same time, we are overloaded by information, including a lot that is poor quality. The digital age has brought new, faster and more targeted ways for us to be exposed to unproductive explanations about complex systems issues.

As experts we often assume that if we fill people up with good information, they will understand and act accordingly. This is known as the 'information deficit' model and the evidence is clear that it is ineffective in deepening how people think. Another common strategy is to tell compelling personal stories. If our stories don't engage people in more productive understandings, we will fail to achieve the systems and structural shifts we need.

The combination of cognitive shortcuts, an overloaded, often misleading information environment and experts focused on filling people up with information can reinforce dominant cultural narratives that are overly simple or simply wrong.

What does this mean for building public support for effective action to poverty?

On many complex issues, including poverty, public understanding of the causes of the problem are shallow. This makes it hard to build support for effective, but complex, solutions. However, cultural narratives are not monolithic. Alongside dominant shallow understandings of complex issues like poverty, other more nuanced but recessive understandings also exist.

Dominant narratives are ones that:

- show up most often in the public discourse

- are readily available to people, i.e. they are often the first thoughts that someone will have when asked their opinion on an issue
- are simple and easily accessible by our fast-thinking brain.

Recessive narratives are ones that:

- show up less often in the public discourse
- are harder for people to access, i.e. they are not necessarily the first thought someone might have on the issue
- often require slower thinking, i.e. more time to reflect on the issue.

It is possible to change the dominant narrative. Over time, through consistent careful communication across a field of practice, recessive narratives that support more helpful evidence-based understandings can become more dominant in the public narrative. If dominant narratives change in this way over time the public appetite for new solutions can also change.

Moving from individual to collective action

To get the kind of widespread policy changes we need to ensure wellbeing for every family, we need people to support actions that change systems and structures.

When we talk to the public about poverty, we need to help them see they can act collectively to demand that national and local governments choose policies, systems and structures that reduce poverty. We want to help people look upstream to focus on structural factors like tax and welfare policies, rather than focusing on the downstream impacts of those policies on, for example, personal actions.

To be motivated to take collective action in support of policy and system change, people need to understand three things:

- that change is possible;
- that the most effective action will happen at a system and structure level; and
- that by acting together with others, they can motivate systems level action.

Our communications framework draws on research from multiple disciplines from social and behavioural psychology, communication science through to cognitive linguistics to help communicators work in concert with people's thought processes and motivations.

Audience

Generally speaking, there are three main groups of people to consider when communicating issues and considering who you want to persuade.

Supporters or base

These are people who already agree with you, on both the problem and best solutions. Your base is your most important communication channel, so it is critical that your messages appeal to them, however you should never test a message only on the base to assess whether it is effective. Your base is already persuaded and will usually agree with and share any message (even ones that are problematic).

Your base needs access to effective messages to share with their persuadable friends and colleagues.

Firmly opposed

People who are opposed to your policies and practices. It is very resource intensive work to open a door to the evidence for this group with a new and more compelling narrative. Because they often also oppose your goals, they may respond negatively - and loudly - to a message that makes your case well. If you are time and resource limited (which we all are, all the time) focus your messaging on the persuadables.

Persuadables

This is usually, but not always, most people in the population. They either don't think much about an issue, or don't have a fixed view on how to achieve a better outcome. Importantly, these people can be persuaded or dissuaded of the benefits of your action depending on how we talk about or frame the issue.

On the other hand, this audience can also be persuaded by an opposing take on both the problem and the solution. So it's important that we don't inadvertently create opportunities for that opposing view to be presented to them in the guise of presenting our evidence-based message. More on this below.

How to choose a message based on your audience

You want to find messages that activate your base and convince those who are open to persuasion. So we recommend testing messages on both your base and persuadable audiences, and advise against testing on your base alone.

A good, clear message that articulates your definition of the problem and solutions will likely also alienate the firmly opposed, so don't be afraid of messages that are unpopular with people who are fixed in their opposing views. Focus on the larger group of people who are persuasive, and on engaging your base to spread your well-crafted and tested messages to their persuadable friends and family.

What about other ways of segmenting your audience?

While audiences can be segmented in many different ways, this approach is core to our evidence-based communications framework because it presents the most pragmatic and strategic audience analysis for organisations wanting to have the greatest impact with limited time and resources.

It also helps avoid some common messaging pitfalls including:

- Developing and testing messages for our base: because they are already convinced of our message our base are good at interpreting ambiguous messages in the way we intended them to be read, however when those ambiguous messages are shared with persuadable audiences they are just as likely to interpret them in ways that are contrary and harmful to our intended message.
- Wasting our time trying to persuade the firmly opposed: not only is this a non-productive use of our limited time and resources, but it can result in us publicly engaging in the harmful work of trying to debunk myths (more on this below) or inadvertently reinforcing frames that are fundamentally unhelpful to our message.

However, alongside this foundational audience analysis there will often be good reasons to segment your audience further, and this can be especially useful when thinking about which helpful values to engage in your messages. More on this below.

Constructing a good message: the principles

Give people a positive vision of the more hopeful future

People respond to hope and a vision, and because our brains have a negativity bias, we need the visions repeated frequently for it to stick. Spend time developing the picture of the better world you want people to help you build.

In order to inspire and motivate people, we need to give them something to work towards. There is a reason Martin Luther King had a dream and not just a list of problems. And it wasn't for lack of problems. Helping people to imagine a better future helps us get on the front foot rather than simply defining ourselves by what we are against.

In poverty research members of the public have been found to think about poverty and inequality as inevitable or natural result of economic systems. This, researchers find makes it hard for people to think of alternatives and solutions.[1] Providing a concrete vision is an important positive counterpoint to the constant reminders we have about the problems we face and the sense they are inevitable. People need reminding and reassuring that a better future is possible.

[1] http://frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/JRF_UK_Poverty_MTG_2016.pdf

This 'We Dream' video from Whanau Ora articulates a clear vision for a better future:

> *"We dream of a day in the future where all NZers can stand on their own. We dream of a day where there is enough for everyone. Pathways are created for whanau to dream, to strive, to flourish. Doors are open, futures bright. Whanau are the architects of their own destinies. We dream big. We dream of a day when our support is no longer needed. We believe in family."*

A vision does not have to be exhaustive in detail, but the more of a picture we can paint, the more evocative and emotive it will be.

Based on the research we recommend the following:

- Develop and lead with a clear, concrete vision for the change you want in the world, you may have a single large vision and many smaller visions for the many areas of family well-being,
- Emphasise the potential for humans to solve this problem, frame these solutions using positive wording choices, and show how people can become involved and take action.

It is your job to show people the brighter, more hopeful future that is possible. We'll discuss where information about the barriers, serious risks and impacts fits in to your message below.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Leading with facts and problems	*Lead with a positive concrete vision*

Sell the cake not ingredients

Lead your messages with the information most likely to motivate people to act. People are motivated by the things they care about most, and by their hope for and belief in a better future, not by a policy or technical solution.

Instead of trying to educate people about the process to get something, show them what they get. Tell people how the change will enhance our lives.

Avoid trying to get people to see why they should act by leading with facts, telling them all the problems we are facing, or the technical changes that need to be made to current policies and practices.

For example, the policy ingredient might be a benefit levels indexed to wages, but the cake is: "families have the support they need to give their children a good start in life".

This Child Poverty Action Group campaign is an example of leading with the 'ingredient' or policy solution (in this case fixing the policy settings of Working for Families), although the image gives a hint as to what the outcome of a better policy would be.

This Child Poverty Action Group campaign is an example of leading with the 'cake' or better outcome, in this case 'a New Zealand where children can flourish'.

This UNICEF video featuring David Beckham is about calling on governments and businesses to put in place more family-friendly policies (the ingredients), but it focuses on the better outcome (the cake) that those policies will create: more time for babies, and parents having the support they need to 'raise happy, healthy children'.

The details are still important, but you can fill in the details of the ingredients once you've got people engaged. Ingredients don't motivate people to act as much as better outcomes do.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Leading with the policy ask	*The better life*

Avoid negating and myth busting

Repetition of a message, even to negate it helps spread that information to new persuadable audiences.

Our brains respond to and remember information better upon repetition. We are also notoriously bad at remembering the source of information. So we can attribute negated (and incorrect) information to a trusted source. If you negate bad information (i.e. spend time explaining why an idea is wrong), you risk spreading it further.

One of the short-cuts of our "fast-thinking" brain systems is to protect what we already believe. So negating bad information may inadvertently help people develop a stronger adherence to unproductive beliefs.

The evidence is clear: myth-busting is an unhelpful communication strategy. But it can be very hard to resist, for the simple reason that we feel compelled to correct untruthful, harmful and misleading messages. It feels wrong to leave them unchallenged. And so, even once we know that myth-busting is likely to backfire as a strategy, we all find ourselves getting sucked into it from time to time.

Avoiding unproductive communications strategies is an ongoing practice, and identifying clearly where we are employing them is one of the steps in that practice. So here are some examples - including some we ourselves have been responsible for - of myth-busting on family poverty and well-being.

The key message of this article is that all parents do their best to prioritise their children's needs and when low-income families are given more money they spend that money on their children. But it leads by negating a myth, which may have the unintended effect of reinforcing that myth with a persuadable audience. A more effective approach would be to lead with the truth, the key message.

Mythbusting in particular, where we set up a myth vs fact format may give persuadable people (who may have little knowledge about the

causes of family poverty) the idea that the evidence on what causes poverty is more controversial than it really is. Researchers suggest as a result they will want to avoid "picking a side", which is not your goal.

NEW ZEALAND

Jonathan Boston: Three myths about child poverty

8 Oct, 2012 5:30am

6 minutes to read

There are well-established, internationally recognised methods for measuring poverty. Photo / Getty Images

NZ Herald

This article is an example of the myth vs fact format, in which the myth is set out first, and then the author debunks it.

Myth 2, for example, is that "Children are poor and deprived mainly because their parents are bad, mad, foolish or indifferent. Children are going to school hungry, have worn-out cloths and shoes, and live in cold houses because of poor, incompetent parenting."

By setting out the myth in detail, the article may inadvertently give persuadable readers (who have probably been exposed to this myth many times) the impression that this matter is contested, and that the expert response or 'debunk' is one of two possible, equally legitimate ways of understanding the problem.

Instead reframe the debate entirely. Another way to think about is to focus on telling your positive story for action, not repeating theirs for them, even to try to debunk it!

Avoid	*Replace with*
Negating someone else's untrue story	*Your story and actions*

Name agents

Always name agents. It is critical that people can see and understand that people are responsible for what happens in our world, both in creating the conditions in which too many families face hardship and choosing to do something about it.

Without a clear understanding of the ways that people have made choices that created the problems we face, it's hard for people to understand or imagine that those same problems could also be solved by people making different choices. This is especially critical when we are communicating about big, complex problems where the causes are not immediately clear to many people.

Avoid passive or in-agentive sentences and be as clear as possible about the human agents who are creating the problem, and who can solve it.

Jobs to be created and jobs to be lost at TSB

Stephanie Mitchell • 16:09, Feb 26 2019

BRADEN FASTIER/STUFF

It is not yet known how many people the disestablishment of jobs will impact.

This headline is an example of a passive, in-agentive sentence in which the agents are not named, but are implied. The agent 'creating jobs' is the employer, whereas the agent 'losing jobs' is the employee. Agency is attributed to TSB where jobs are being created, but not where they are being cut.
When we name the human agents responsible for the problem and what they need to do differently, people can see what the solution is and belief that change is possible. It acts to counter the naturalism" beleif that people hold about poverty.

> But right now, due to the way in which successive governments have run down the welfare system, and taken a hands-off approach to the housing market, New Zealand's homes are some of the least affordable in the industrial world.[1] Families are having to choose between rent and food.

This campaign from ActionStation and Child Poverty Action Group (Welfare for Wellbeing) makes it clear that the bad choices made by successive governments (e.g. running down the welfare system and taking a hands-off approach to the housing market) have caused the current problem of family poverty.

This UNICEF video featuring David Beckham is clear on who has the power to make it easier for parents to raise happy, healthy children.

While making parents the empathetic centre of the message (he identifies with all parents, and their struggle to balance work and caring for their children) the responsible agents are clear: governments and businesses who can choose to set policies that will make it easier for parents.

The manner in which you name agents will depend on your organisation's appetite for risk, and the outcome you are working towards. But without a clear human agent, your message risks reinforcing a sense of helplessness.

Avoid	*Replace with*

Passive sentences with no agent	*Clear human agents whose choices contributed to or caused the problem and who could solve the problem by making different choices*

Help people see they are not alone in wanting a better world for all

Although research shows that most people in New Zealand prioritise values like compassion and care for others, we are all constantly exposed to media and advertising messages that tell us most people are selfish and care more about themselves than others. So it's easy for people to conclude that they are in the minority in their desire to see more support for families doing it tough in Aotearoa.

Research in other countries shows that people tend to underestimate how many others share their positive social values like compassion for others.

Dominant frames and messages do not necessarily reflect the true values and priorities of most New Zealanders, so it is important that our messages let people know that they are not alone in their desire for a better, fairer future for everyone in our country.

People are also afraid of disagreeing with others - there is a social risk in standing out. So communicating that people are not alone in their desire for action on family poverty is also helpful in establishing 'social proof' or evidence that we won't be standing out or alone if we take action in supporting better policies and outcomes for all New Zealand families.

One of the useful features of mass mobilisation tactics like petitions is that they can show people that thousands of other people share their concern and are ready to act collectively with them.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Focusing on lack of action or reinforcing the perception that other people don't care	*Show people that they are in good company, many other New Zealanders also care about family well-being, and together we can lead change.*

Bad behaviours not bad people

While naming agents is critical for people to feel that this is a solvable problem, it is important to not write off those whose support is needed to enact important changes. Research from the UK and in NZ has, found people tend to think about issues like poverty or inequality as resulting from the economic rules being controlled by nefarious actors, politicians, elites. This is called the "game is rigged" way of thinking. Labelling the government as corrupt or bankers as greedy, pulls to the foreground this model of thinking for people, and institutions as too broken to fix. Instead focus on people's behaviour: why it is a problem and how it can be changed to draw people to think differently about solutions to poverty.

> But right now, due to the way in which successive governments have run down the welfare system, and taken a hands-off approach to the housing market, New Zealand's homes are some of the least affordable in the industrial world.[1] Families are having to choose between rent and food.

This example from ActionStation and CPAG used above to illustrate being clear about the agent responsible (the government) shows how it is possible to do this without framing the government as inherently bad, useless or corrupt. There is clear agency here, and a clear description of the bad choices, but the government hasn't been written off as a possible agent for change, which is critical. This sets your message up to be able to point credibly to the same agent (i.e. the government) as being able to fix the problem, as in the following example.

> A hands-on government can fix our broken economic system. A hands-on government can change the rules to make our economy fair, kind and just. A competent and caring government can ensure that every child and whānau flourishes.

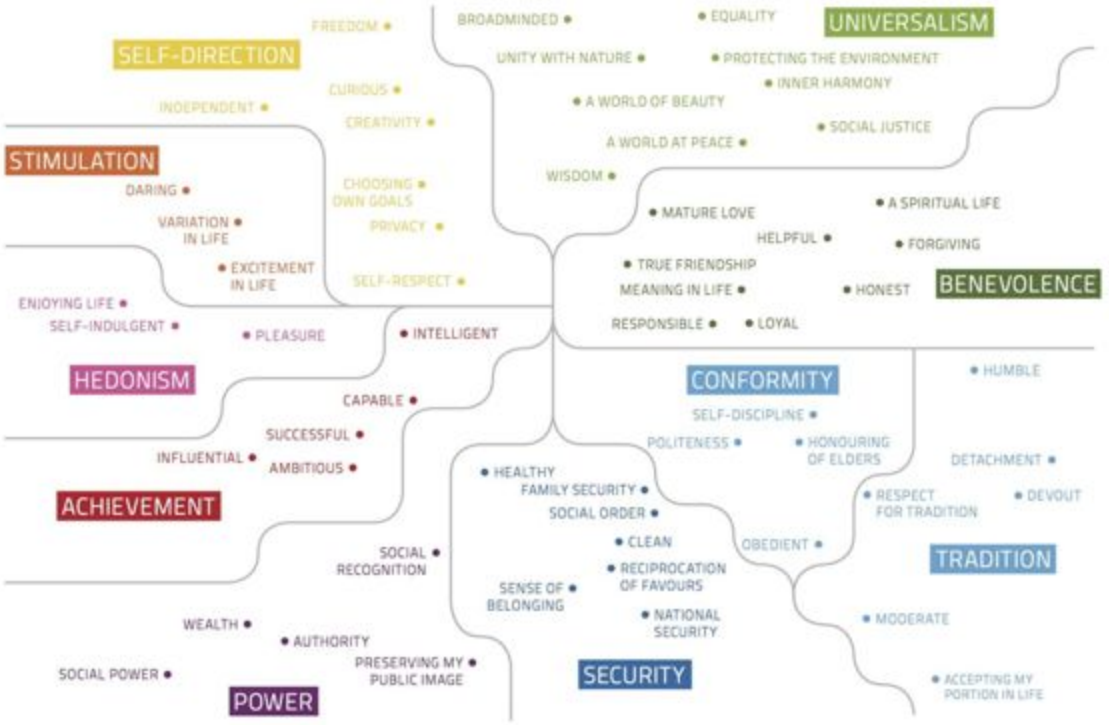
Here, later in the same campaign, the message is clear: the government could make different choices and by doing so, solve the problem.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Greedy bosses, uncaring or corrupt politicians	*Focus on the bad choices/behaviour and make it clear that the agent (e.g. government) could make different choices to solve the problem.*

Values

Values are a way to conceptualise what that matters most to us in life, they are at the heart of human motivations. Values are how we come to think certain ways about what causes poverty, what solutions will work, and act to support or otherwise specific actions. Beliefs flow from values.

Researchers have found a number of shared human values and grouped and mapped them (see the figure below). People tend to prioritize particular values and these influence how we think about issues. For example, if I highly value accepting my position in life or a strong social order, I am more likely to believe that some people have a character deficit (we call this the self-makingness narrative), or ways of living that means they will always be poor (we call this the culture or cycle of poverty narrative). Alternatively, if I highly value being able to choose my own goals I am more likely to believe there are structures & systems that prevent people in poverty from doing so. While we may tend to a disposition to prioritise certain values, we all hold a very wide range of values that appear across this map.



The Common Cause universal values map is based on research by Shalom Schwatz and Tim Kassner (Creative Commons)

A growing body of research shows that in order to improve the likelihood that people will act on big collective issues, like poverty, we need to engage all people with our shared helpful values, also known as intrinsic values. Specifically, intrinsic or helpful values are those that appear in the self-direction, universalism and benevolence groups on the map. Helpfully most people across the world say these are the things that matter to them (though conversely find it hard to believe that most others do!- this is called a perception gap).

By engaging people with values that relate to people and planet (helpful and intrinsic values) and avoiding engaging with people around dollars, cents, power, or fear, or tradition we can open a side door for people to consider the evidence on child and family poverty and the actions that we should take. Instead of trying to force people through a door they won't go through with facts that challenge their existing beliefs, we open a side-door for them to consider new information in the context of their deeply held values.

The research on poverty can guide us even more specifically when using values to communicate. Researchers suggest we:

- Use the values of compassion and justice - these two values tested well in the UK to move a broad audience of people to seeing poverty as real, and more likely to take political action.
- Use values of responsibility in talking about child poverty- in NZ talking about the hard work and shared desire to do well in parenting, evokes shared values of responsibility to children (e.g "Being a parent can be rewarding, but it's also hard work. Being a good parent is about more than providing for your family financially,")

Specially, on exploring different helpful or intrinsic values for different audiences, we suggest there are different options, depending on time and resources available. These are:

1) Focus solely on identifying intrinsic values to engage with a persuadable audience,

2) Segment audiences and find specific intrinsic values that appeal to each, or

3) Combine different types of helpful values- as some researchers suggest - for example combine freedom with self-transcending values like concern for the welfare of others.

Frameworks Institute in the US found the following values moved people in the UK to think more productively about poverty and the role of supportive welfare policies and benefits

Avoid	*Replace with*
'We may think of poverty as something from the industrial past, or a problem that exists in the developing world, but it's happening right here and right now in New Zealand.'	*'As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, thousands of people in our country are living in poverty. We share a moral responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and the same chances in life, no matter who they are or where they come from.'*

Frames and language

Frames are part of our "fast-thinking" brain system: mental short-cuts we take to make sense of information quickly. With certain words or images come pre-existing packages of meaning (frames), determined by our common knowledge, assumptions and beliefs. Using even a single word or image evokes associated meanings, whether or not the speaker intends to do so.

Words and the meaning of them are neurologically hard wired together. For example say 'red-tape' and it evokes a very particular set of understandings about bureaucracy and whether it works. Likewise the words 'consumer' and 'citizen' carry with them very different sets of understandings about who we are, and what kinds of solutions we can pursue for big problems.

The words, images, and the language we use to frame family poverty and family well-being evoke a shared story or narrative about causes and solutions. Those frames will either open or close doors to people being able to see and respond to particular actions. We need to use frames that engage people in support for evidence-based action, and avoid those that don't.

Research on family poverty and well-being gives some guidance on the types of frames to use and to avoid.

Frames used to understand poverty & inequality in NZ

Attitudes to inequality, poverty and wealth

Research on public attitudes to poverty and inequality in New Zealand, shows that the dominant frame in the public domain is one that draws heavily upon ideas of personal failing and weakness, even laziness, to explain how poverty happens. However, there are other more recessive frames, including some that identify systemic issues at the heart of poverty. The important point for the purpose of this guide is that people can believe more than one story and hence hold conflicting beliefs; this means people can "toggle" between individual and systemic narratives when primed. This means our messages should consistently use helpful and productive frames, and avoid unhelpful ones.

Unhelpful frames to avoid

The 'personal responsibility' frame

In 2014 the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) commissioned a representative survey of public attitudes to child poverty. Forty percent of those asked thought it was caused by poor parenting: neglect, lack of budgeting, and not prioritising children ahead of spending on alcohol, smokes, drugs.[2]

The World Values Survey, which New Zealand participated in until recently, shows a strong cultural narrative in New Zealand about poverty. They found that the main cultural models involved personal blame of those in poverty for their circumstances. In 2011, 50% of people surveyed thought poverty was due to laziness or lack of willpower.[3]

[2] MM Research (2014).
[3] World Values Survey. (2011). Findings and Insights. Accessed April 2018 http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp

In 2016 academic Peter Skilling's convened focus groups to explore public attitudes to inequality in New Zealand. He was interested in the divergence between opinion polls and surveys which consistently showed significant public concern about inequality, and lower support "for parties and policies that promise to address inequality".

Skilling notes that while parties across the political spectrum all claimed to have a solution to the problem of poverty and inequality, their solutions were founded on very different frames. Whereas parties on the left campaigned on redistributive mechanisms like taxation, welfare transfers and increased wages for low paid workers, parties of the right framed the issue in individual terms. The National party, for example, framed inequality as a problem of "individuals under-performing in terms of skills, training and employability."[4]

Because individual responsibility frames are simple, they are easy for people to grasp. So we need to replace them with clear, simple and concrete explanations about the impact of external factors.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Over-emphasis on individuals. *Talking about 'choices' without framing the constraints that social conditions place on people's choices.*	*Focus on external factors and stressors that constrain people's choices - be as concrete as possible e.g. talk about high rents not 'cost of living'*

The 'market realities/ market forces' frame

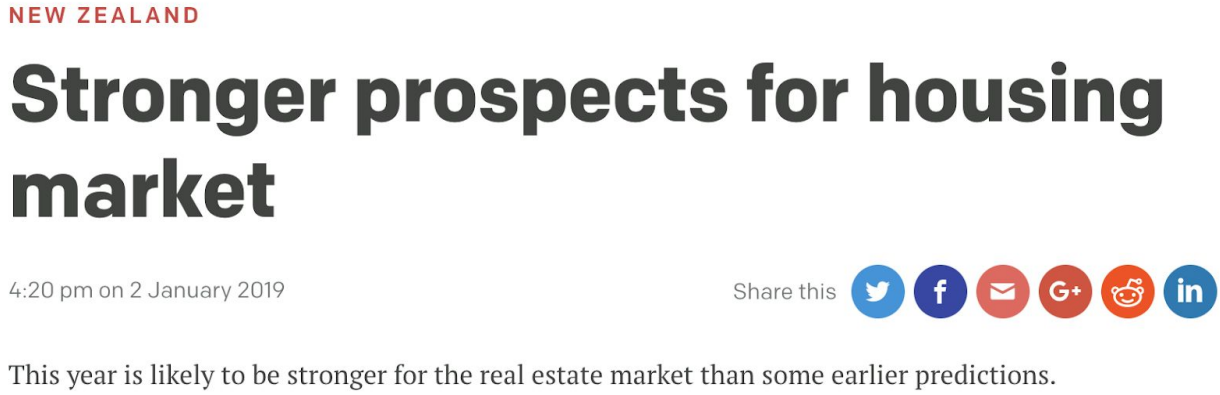
In his focus group research, Skilling found that when asked individually, most participants preferred a more equal distribution of incomes (e.g. better wages for the low-paid). But these preferences could be overpowered in the group discussion by someone expressing the view that, "while a more equal distribution might sound nice, it was likely not feasible given the 'realities of the market'."

What Skilling found particularly interesting about the power of this 'market forces' frame, which asserts that market forces are inevitable and out of human control, was that it was often advanced by only one person in the group, but seemed to be able to override a majority preference for greater equality. As Skilling observed:

[4] Skilling, P. (2015) Retreived from https://www.interest.co.nz/opinion/78283/peter-skilling-examines-why-concern-over-inequality-doesnt-translate-support-political

> "Even those participants with very strongly-held egalitarian commitments found it difficult to argue against this appeal to the constraining power of market forces."

The dominance of the 'market forces' frame is unsurprising given how frequently it is invoked. People's access to safe, secure work is commonly explained in terms of 'the job market' (what employers can afford) and people's access to a safe, suitable home is consistently explained in terms of 'the housing market'. As the example below illustrates, the housing market is often framed as a character, in this case a character with 'strong prospects', which reinforces the idea of the market as an entity and that it is our job to ensure that it is doing well.



NEW ZEALAND

Stronger prospects for housing market

4:20 pm on 2 January 2019

Share this

This year is likely to be stronger for the real estate market than some earlier predictions.

The helplessness which this frame produces in people who have a personal preference for reducing inequality is illustrated in these quotes from focus group participants:

> "That is done by the market and you can't change that."

> "It's market driven, so we've got no control over that."

This illustrates why 'market forces' are such an unhelpful frame when it comes to helping people understand that human choice lies at the heart of our economic rules, and that humans could choose to change the settings of the market.

It's worth noting that in his commentary on this research, Skilling observed:

> "It may be that many people were so easily persuaded by the market realist position because they simply didn't have a language with which to express their desire for their preferred alternative."[5]

Avoid	*Replace with*

[5] Skilling, P. (2017) Retreived from https://impolitikal.com/2017/11/08/peter-skilling-on-inequality-market-realism-why-do-we-want-what-weve-got/

Talking about social conditions in terms of market forces. *Any reference to the 'market' without being clear that humans can and do control the settings of the market.*	*Being clear about the human agents who make decisions about the rules and settings that determine how our economy works, including in relation to social conditions like employment and housing.*

The 'deserving rich' frame

In other research published in 2015, Skilling and Jessica McLay found that the New Zealand public view the rich as more individually deserving of their outcomes than the poor are deserving of social assistance, and that attitudes towards the rich are related to redistributive sentiments at least as strongly as attitudes towards the poor.[6]

Most people attributed wealth to individual talent of people (71.6%) and attributed poverty to a lack of effort (64.2%). About half of people thought of beneficiaries as being responsible for their own situation (48.7%).

This is a version of the 'personal responsibility' frame which builds on the idea that people's individual choices and behaviour leads to them being either wealthy or poor. It is also expressed as the 'deserving' or 'undeserving poor' frame, both of which are equally unhelpful.

Toby Morris' famous 'On a Plate' comic is a good example of using useful frames (including 'external factors' and 'spectrum of self-determination - both discussed below) to challenge the 'deserving rich' frame.

[6] Skilling, Peter & Mclay, Jessica. (2014). Getting Ahead through Our Own Efforts: Public Attitudes towards the Deservingness of the Rich in New Zealand. Journal of Social Policy. 44. 147-169. 10.1017/S0047279414000610.


THE PENCILSWORD
#TEN
BY TOBY MORRIS
ON A PLATE
A SHORT STORY ABOUT PRIVILEGE
THIS IS RICHARD. HIS PARENTS ARE DOING OK.
AND THIS IS PAULA. HER PARENTS? NOT SO MUCH.
RICHARD'S HOUSE IS WARM AND DRY. HIS SHELVES ARE FULL OF BOOKS AND HIS FRIDGE IS FULL OF FOOD.
PAULA'S HOUSE IS FULL OF PEOPLE AND NOT MUCH ELSE. IT'S DAMP AND NOISY AND SHE KEEPS GETTING SICK.

Helpful frames - use these

The 'external factors' frame

While personal choice and market forces are dominant frames in the public understanding of poverty and inequality in New Zealand, there are other more helpful frames at play, including a frame that emphasises the impact of external conditions like low wages and housing costs.

In the 2014 CPAG survey on public attitudes to child poverty, while forty percent of people identified personal choice and responsibility as the drivers of poverty, another forty percent identified wider conditions, including unemployment, low wages and rising living costs, as the cause.

This U.S. cartoon evokes the external factors frame to show the external constraints on a single parent, while countering the 'personal choices' frame represented by a man telling the woman she should be married.

The external factors frame in practice

In 2017 we tested a short message using an external factors frame which was then tested with a representative sample of New Zealanders. The method used was 'dial testing' in which participants listened to a recording of the message and 'dialed' up or down to show whether they agreed with the message or not.[7]

The message read to participants was:

> "Being a parent can be rewarding, but it's also hard work. And while being a good parent is about more than providing for your family financially, not being able to afford the basics makes everything harder. With rising rents, less secure jobs and mounting costs of living, many families are pushed to breaking point. It's not parents who control the property market or the price of petrol, but things like those do affect whether their kids get a decent start in life. To decrease the pressure and give kids a fair start, the government should introduce a universal payment for all families with kids, with extra support for those doing it the most tough."

This message focuses on showing that the problems facing low income families are driven by factors outside their control. This presents an alternative to the 'personal responsibility' frame. This message also offers an alternative to the 'market realities' frame, by pointing that the government could - to a degree - control those factors, if it chose to.

While this message is not perfect, it did test well with both the base and persuadable audiences, and offers one approach to countering some of the most unhelpful dominant frames in the public discourse in NZ.

In the messages below, the Children's Commissioner evokes the external factors frame to help people see the role that colonisation and systemic racism have played and continue to play in preventing Māori mothers and whānau from bonding with their babies and raising their children.

[7] Elliott, M. (2017). Words Means Things. Presentation for the Equality Network drawing on research conducted by UMR, funded by the Morgan Foundation, AUT, Equality Network, UNICEF, JRMT and ActionStation, with advice from Common Cause.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Talking about market factors *Focus on individual choices*	*Focus on external factors and stressors that constrain people's choices.* *Be clear about the humans who can choose to change the settings of our economy.*

How frames impact public support for evidence-based policies and solutions

Research on values-based messaging and framing suggests that these different frames could go a long way to explaining why many New Zealanders who are concerned about inequality and poverty do not support redistributive approaches to reducing inequality. The 'individual responsibility' frame, for example, builds support for solutions in which individuals take more responsibility for their own educational and employment outcomes, and for policies that focus on individual responsibility.

Awareness of and concern about a social problem like inequality isn't enough to build support for evidence-based and systemic solutions. Many people either don't have a strong belief about the problem was caused or have a mixture of complex and competing beliefs. In the 2014 CPAG survey, ten percent or those surveyed identified a combination of systemic issues

and personal choices as the cause of poverty. In the 2011 World Values Survey in New Zealand nearly a third of people (27%) did not have any understanding of why people are poor. These people would all fall into the persuadable segment of an audience on this topic.

In focus groups in 2016 we found a strong narrative of individual causes for poverty, but some of participants held contradictory ideas and beliefs. Notably, some people shifted between beliefs that, on the one hand, there were wider systemic issues at play and, on the other hand, that poor parenting was the cause of poverty.[8]

Effective framing can toggle persuadable people into their most productive beliefs about the causes and solutions to poverty. Our job is to offer clear and compelling frames to explain the wider conditions that create and sustain poverty.

Common frames used in the UK to explain what poverty is.

Although the research outlined above gives us some good ideas about the frames that dominate public understandings of poverty in New Zealand, we don't have much research here that tests more helpful frames to see how they shift public understanding of the causes and solutions for family poverty. For that we have to look to research in similar countries.

Research from Frameworks in the UK found some common ways that people frame "what poverty is". One is more helpful (use this) and the other is unhelpful (avoid this)

Helpful frame: Spectrum of Self-Determination

According to this model, material resources are important not because they satisfy wants or needs but because they enable people to freely choose or determine their own path; they allow for autonomy or self-determination.

The *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model expands thinking about the support people need to do well and determine their own path in life.

> I am not suggesting women should be excused from working and/or be allowed to languish on the benefit. If I believed the government policies were based on a true desire to assist women to empower themselves and live lives that are an example to their children, I would feel a lot more comfortable with those policies.
>
> Sadly it isn't about empowering women; - it's about political gain; it's about appealing to those who want simple solutions to what is an extremely complicated situation.

Here New Zealand a key proponent of framing self-determination was Celia Lashley. In this quote she talks about the importance of governments making policies that 'assist women to

[8] Elliott, M. (2017). Words Means Things. Presentation for the Equality Network

empower themselves and live lives that are an example to their children'.

Unhelpful frame: Needs vs Wants

The UK public's dominant model of poverty centres on the idea of basic needs. Within this model, needs are understood in terms of subsistence: food, shelter, clothing, heat and sanitation.

> This report is about what is often called 'poverty' in New Zealand. While there is no poverty in New Zealand by Third World standards, there are real concerns about inadequate living conditions, particularly for a significant proportion of children.

This quote from the NZ Institute report 'Poorly Understood' uses the needs vs wants frame to contrast poverty in New Zealand with poverty in the 'Third World'.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Focusing on needs vs wants, e.g. messages about 'the basics' every child needs	*Focusing on the support people need to do well and choose their own path in life.*

Frames on the causes of poverty

In the same research on poverty Frameworks looked at how people explain how poverty happens. They call these frames cultural models because frames are very culturally dependent.

Helpful frame (use this):

1. Opportunity structures: one helpful frame is the opportunity structures frame: In this people understands poverty as a function of opportunity or lack of it, for example good education or strong social networks. The researchers did find that people tend not to look at the system easily in terms of this lack of opportunities.

Unhelpful frames (avoid these):

1. Self-makingness - in this frame the outcomes people experience are a function and result of their personal choices and levels of motivation. With enough drive and hard

work, anyone can, it is assumed, make themselves into a successful person.

2. Culture of poverty - this frame is based on the idea that in certain communities there is a culture – a set of shared norms and values – that perpetuates poverty. We hear that when people talk about benefit families for example. It is a shared understanding in which people experiencing hardship are different from those who do not.
3. Economic Naturalism - people view the economy as shaped by mysterious forces beyond individual or natural control. This is also reflected in the 'market forces' frame outlined above, which is common in public discourse in New Zealand.
4. Benefits as the problem - in this frame benefits and welfare are seen as part of the problem, e.g. a cause of 'dependency' or a way to get people stuck in a 'cycle'. When we lead our messages with welfare or benefits, we may inadvertently foreground these unhelpful frames. A better approach is to clearly present the problem of poverty (using e.g. the helpful 'restricts and restraints' frames and metaphors outlined below) and then introduce benefits as a way to help people free themselves from those restraints.

NEW ZEALAND

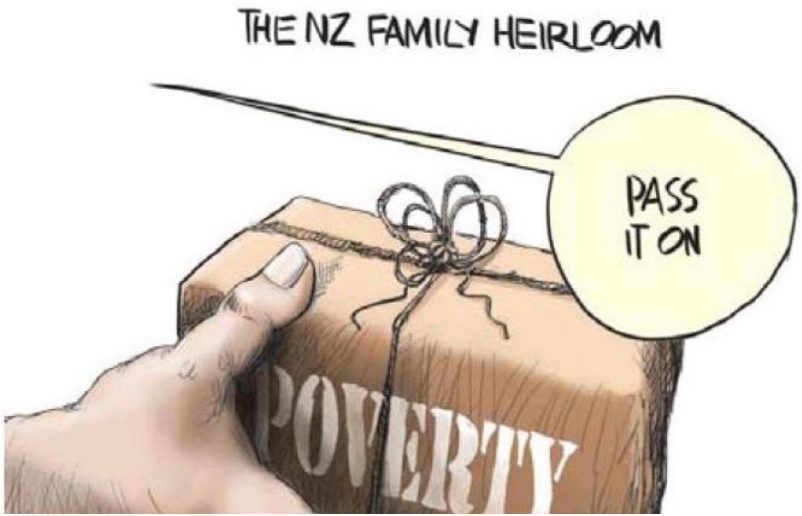
PREMIUM

New chief justice Helen Winkelmann and her rise from poverty to head of the Supreme Court

16 Mar, 2019 6:00am

14 minutes to read

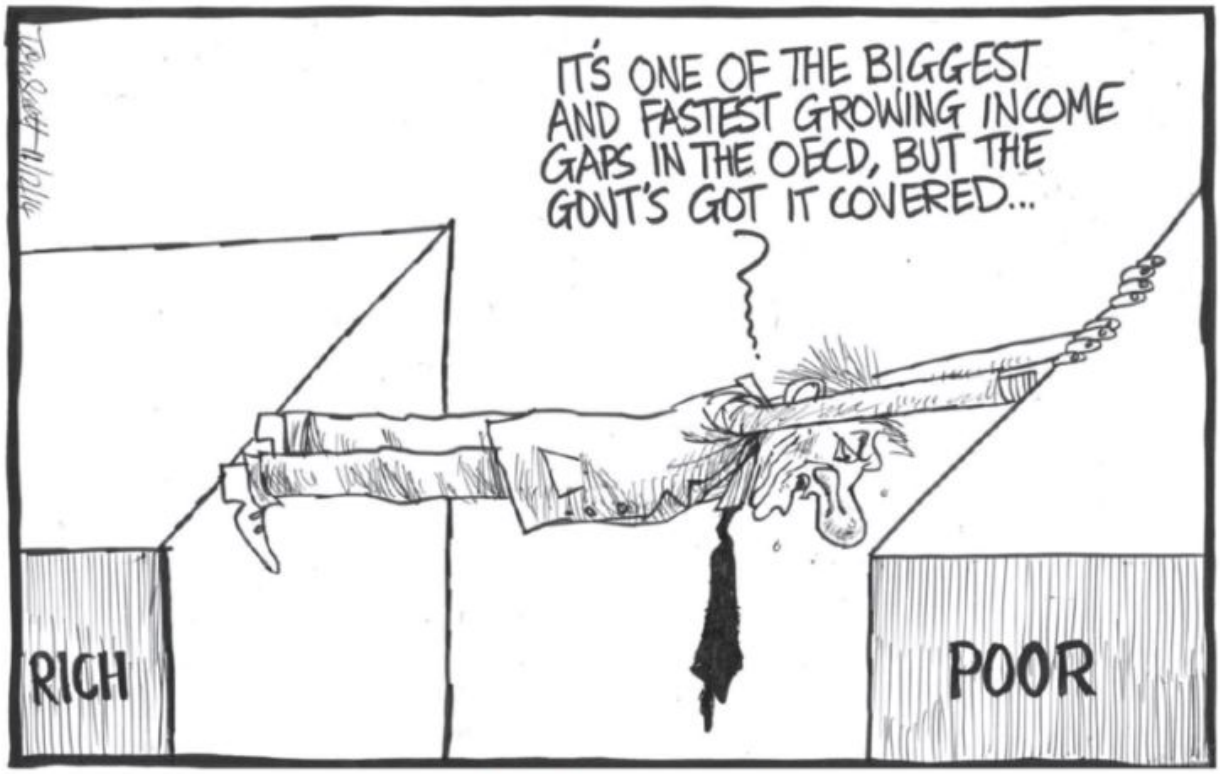
This headline is an example of the 'self-makingness frame' which reinforces the belief that with enough drive and hard work anyone can make a success of their life, despite difficult beginnings. This frame should be avoided.



This cartoon is an example of a common expression of the culture of poverty frame - in this version of the frame poverty is an heirloom passed

down from one generation to another. This frame reinforces the idea that poverty is sustained by a 'culture' of poverty as opposed to being sustained through external factors like wages, benefit levels and living costs.

This headline is an example of another common expression of the culture of poverty frame - in the form of a 'cycle' metaphor (more on metaphors below). This frame reinforces the idea that poverty is sustained by a 'culture' of poverty, which can be overcome through education.



Scott - Dominion Post 11 December 2014

Image credit: Dominion post (Newspaper). Scott, Thomas, 1947- :It's one of the biggest and fastest growing income gaps in the OECD, but the govt's got it covered... 11 December 2014.
Ref: DCDL-0030434. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/35331497

Research by Anat Shenker-Osorio has shown that common natural metaphors like 'the poverty gap' reinforce the frame that poverty is an inevitable phenomenon, driven by the natural forces of the economy and beyond human control. These frames should be avoided by poverty reduction advocates.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Talking about individual choice, focusing on the stories of individual motivation or drive. Cycles of poverty, culture of poverty, benefit dependency. *Talking about the economy in ways that make it seem like a natural force and fail to make it clear that humans can and do control our economy.*	*Talking about poverty as a function of structures & systems that have been designed and provide or remove opportunities e.g. tax policies to benefit some, educational policies and social networks.*

Frames on child well-being

Also important is how people think about child well-being. Research from the Frameworks in US and Australia[9] has found both helpful and unhelpful frames that people use to describe child wellbeing

Helpful frame (use this):

1. The Context of Stress: A more helpful, but recessive frame in which people understand that external stress affects parenting. This is helpful because it points to the role of environments and external factors, however often people see this mainly through money. It may not frame a more whole of child solution- in which people understand the influence of a child's physical environment, network of community relationships, social and emotional growth are critical to their wellbeing- a focus on their heart, soul and mind.

Unhelpful frames (avoid these):

1. The Family Bubble is a model in which child rearing takes place in the family, making those things that occur outside the family largely irrelevant to the discussion.
2. The Self-Made Child: The goal of this family-centred child rearing is to raise a successful and self-reliant child, who can "stand on his own two feet in the world," placing the emphasis on autonomy over interdependence. The myth of autonomy is similar to this, but refers to adults as well.

This is an example of the 'family bubble' frame: good parenting is enough to create the conditions for children to thrive, no matter what the external factors or stresses.

Because this is set up as a 'debate' it gives the impression that both positions (i.e. that poverty is the

cksonville (2019), Perceptions of Parenting (2016)
05)

problem & that parenting is the problem) are credible.

Avoid	*Replace with*
Over-emphasis on the role families can play in creating conditions for children to thrive.	*Focus on external factors and stressors that affect parenting.*

Metaphors

Metaphors, like frames, are another way our brain takes short-cuts to grasp complex and abstract ideas quickly. A metaphor connects something we understand on a practical everyday level and connects it to the abstract or complex to make sense. "Economic weather report" situate the economy as a natural force, "driving the economy" situates the economy as something people control.

We use metaphors frequently, and sometimes we can inadvertently undermine the understandings we want people to focus on and the action we want them to take by using particular metaphors.

The choice of metaphor can provide an indication of how governments and researchers are framing particular solutions to child and family wellbeing, and how acceptable they expect the solutions to be.

Helpful metaphors - use these

Frameworks Institute tested metaphors[10] that would help people think more productively about the role of benefits to overcome poverty. Metaphors that have been tested that help people both understand cause of family poverty and motivate them to support policies that promote family well-being include the following.

Restricts and restraints

Using a randomised control method with 12,000 people in the UK, they found that talking about lifting the "restricts and restraints that poverty created" improved people's knowledge, attitudes, and support for structural solutions to poverty, far more than leading with benefits as the problem.

When communicators make benefits the story's conclusion and explain how *Benefits Loosen Economic Constraints*, they can avoid the unproductive – and even toxic – effects of benefits being the issue or problem in the story.

Toxic Stress

[10] Frameworks Institute, *How to Talk About Poverty in the United Kingdom* (2018)

Toxic stress is a metaphor developed through research by Frameworks Institute to explain how adverse experiences can influence biology and development. The story this metaphor helps us tell is that chronic, severe stressors can cause a response that is toxic to the developing brain and has long-term effects on health and wellness.

This metaphor is a tested, effective way to redirect thinking away from unhelpful frames patterns like the 'Family Bubble', personal responsibility (e.g. good health comes from good choices) and myths about resilience (e.g. 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger').

Concepts and ideas included in this metaphor:

- In the absence of supportive environments, some kinds of stress are toxic to the developing brain and have long-term effects on health and wellness.
- Toxic stress can affect behavior, through biology, changing the body's natural alarm system so that it responds to events that might not be stressful to others:
- Toxic stress is one explanation for how adversity and inequity gets "under the skin" and built into the body. When children grow up in chronically stressful conditions their risk of toxic stress increases.
- Tackling toxic stress involves developing supportive community environments, to both reduce exposure to toxic stress and to make stressful life events more tolerable.

We can use the toxic stress metaphor to connect to issues of disparities across geographical or social dimensions, and channel attention away from default thinking that disparities exist because of poor choices. This metaphor, used carefully, also focuses attention on policy-level interventions and reinforces the role of environmental influences on outcomes.

Overloaded

This metaphor helps people understand the impact of parents carrying too much weight, or too many burdens, on their ability to care for their children. It's a version of the external factors frame - using the metaphor of 'load' or burden.

Frameworks found[11] that this metaphor was effective in increasing people's knowledge about the causes and solutions for child neglect. The largest gains were observed in people's knowledge about the causes of neglect. This is a critical finding because helping people understand the key role that social factors play in causing neglect is essential to building support for solutions focus on addressing those social factors. The 'overloaded' metaphor was also found to be effective in shifting attitudes and increasing policy support.

Finally, overloaded is a 'sticky' metaphor, which means that the language of this metaphor was often taken up by respondents' in the research and used by them to explain neglect.

Example of the overloaded metaphor in practice:

> The weight of things like poverty and violence can overload a person's mental and emotional capacity to manage stress and give care and attention to his or her children. Over time, this heavy load puts a strain on people, and can lead to things like mental

[11] Frameworks Institute, *Attending to Neglect* (2015)

> health issues and substance abuse problems that weaken people's ability to care for children. Just as a lorry can bear only so much weight before it stops moving forward, when an especially large burden — such as the loss of a job — is loaded on a person who is already overloaded, it can cause a breakdown in care. This doesn't mean that bad social conditions always lead to neglect, but that these kinds of conditions make it more likely that care will break down. However, just as we can unload an overloaded lorry by bringing in other lorries or moving cargo in other ways, we can provide social supports that offload sources of stress from overloaded parents and improve their capacity to care for their children. Social supports can help keep families moving forward in bad conditions.

Serve and return

The metaphor of Serve and Return can help people understand that relationships with supportive caregivers are a critical part of the brain-building process. It needs to be used with care, because it can feed into pre-existing shallow beliefs about parental responsibility and failure. However, if it is carefully presented within an explicit and clear frame that focuses on the policy and social factors needed to support parents and caregivers to provide these serve and return exchanges, it may help advance productive thinking about child development.

Here's an example of this metaphor in practice:

> Scientists now know that the interactive influences of genes and experience shape the developing brain. The active ingredient is the "serve and return" relationships that babies and young children have with their parents and other caregivers in their families or communities. With time, space, and resources parents and caregivers can connect with children, 'serve' them meaningful and thoughtful engagement, and 'return' children's attempts to engage and learn. That is why it's so important that we have policies that provide parents and caregivers and children with opportunities for lots these serve and return exchanges, including parental leave policies.

Recommendations:

- Use the term "caregiver" rather than parent. Doing so expands the conversation beyond parents and avoids activating the Family Bubble model.
- Point to policy-level conditions that help or hinder the serve-and-return process. These include issues such as child-caregiver ratios, age-appropriate curriculum, parental leave policies, and access to appropriate mental health supports.

Economy as a computer system

Frameworks also tested the economy as a computer system and it worked very well to counter economic naturalism "system is rigged" frame. The following is an example of how to do this:

> *'Our economy is like a computer program that's been designed. The impact it has on our lives is a result of the choices that are made in the design process. We need to redesign the system so the economy works for everyone.'*

The following campaign message from ActionStation uses both the computer program metaphor and the 'restricts and restraints' metaphor to emphasise that the economy can be (and is) controlled by politicians, and to show how benefits are a way to loosen the constraints placed on people by our current economic policies.

> Our economy is like a computer program designed by the decisions politicians make. Today the Wellbeing Budget started to rewrite that program, but even with these changes too many New Zealanders will remain trapped in poverty.
>
> Low-incomes combined with outrageous housing and food costs, keep individuals and families in a daily struggle to make ends meet, unable to think about a different future and forced to make impossible decisions.
>
> Significantly raising benefits would immediately improve the lives of the 250,000 children living in poverty in New Zealand and allow their families to partake in their communities.
>
> It's hard for people to break free from the restrictions our economy places on us, but we know the government has the power and responsibility to loosen those constraints. And we know from our experience campaigning for a better mental health system that everyday people have the ability to enact that

Avoid	*Replace with*
Metaphors that reinforce ideas about the inevitability of poverty: 'poverty cycle' Untested metaphors and any metaphor if you are unclear of what it evokes.	*Productive tested metaphors e.g restricts and restraints, economy as a computer system*

Facts and causal stories

To create an environment to help people think more productively about how poverty happens and what can be done, we need to produce new "mental models" about the causes and

solutions. We can use facts to help tell these stories of causes and solutions. But facts themselves are not the story, they are a character in it.

Because people tend to think fast, struggle to grasp the abstract and complex, it is important to build simple but productive mental models to explain how poverty happens, the impacts and the solutions people need to take action on. They should leave no gaps in people's reasoning and lead people to take specific action. These are called explanatory chains

The features of a good explanatory chain:

- Foreground the issue
- Identify the cause of the problem upfront (e.g, low wages, high housing costs, economic rules that benefit some)
- Provide a general conceptual account of mechanisms and impacts (ie, people are locked out of opportunity, they cannot find good work that will cover costs, while also being a good parent)
- End with broad repercussions (too many stressed parents & children who do not thrive and cannot participate fully in education).
- Use agents when explaining the cause and effects (i.e people in government chose not to tax housing, and can choose to do so now)
- Use facts judiciously to advance the explanations provided (i.e. half of families in poverty have working parents)

Avoid	*Replace with*
Bombarding people with facts about the existence of poverty.	A chain with causes, impacts and solutions in which facts are used to highlight that story. As a society, we have a poverty problem, and we are not making progress in tackling it. Since the 1990's successive governments have eroded our strong welfare system, giving tax benefits to house investors, and enacted economic policies that mean wages have stagnated. In the last year alone there has been a x percent increase in the number of hardship grants New Zealanders need, showing the severity of the problem. Families with children are being locked into poverty for entire childhoods. To release the constraints on parents and children in poverty, people in government need to raise benefit levels, step in to fix housing, and make sure economic policies work to benefit all people. This way all parents can ensure their children thrive.

More on facts

The general framing strategy is to use data that helps people to understand people's lived experience of poverty. Research by Framework showed the most effective ways to use facts about poverty are:

- Avoid prevalence data where there is other data
- Use facts that describe the lived experiences of poverty - e.g use of food banks, housing unaffordability, stress
- Use trend data not static rates, e.g rising usage in food bank use, stagnant wages, rising housing costs
- Situate facts within the wider systems story, don't stand them alone
- Don't lead with the facts (research finds it doesn't change how people think about causes and solutions)
- Given meaning to data in terms of people's everyday lives (preferably data about people's experiences of poverty)

> **BEFORE**
> *'Poverty rates are rising for the first time in two decades. The sharp rise in the number of pensioners and children experiencing poverty is alarming.'*
>
> **AFTER**
> *'We believe in showing compassion in our country, and yet increasing numbers of people are locked in poverty and are forced to rely on food banks.'*

Avoid	*Replace with*
Leading with facts	*Values or metaphors*
Many facts	*Use one or two well*
Facts that are abstract	*Facts that have concrete meaning*
Facts on their own	*Facts that highlight a systems story*
Prevalence facts	*Lived experience facts, preferably trends*

Messengers

The messengers who convey the story of the causes and solutions to poverty also matter. Research on messengers and trust is complex. It is not as simple as sharing a person's group identity, or using institutions that *should be* trustworthy, trust is about perception. Research shows good messengers on poverty share the persuadable groups' values or are seen to be unexpected.

Borrows wants smart approach to crime

18 Apr, 2017 5:00am

3 minutes to read

Chester Borrows says what is right when it comes to dealing with crime is not always popular. Photo/ Stuart Munro

Wanganui Chronicle
By: Zaryd Wilson

Chester Borrows says New Zealand needs to shift its focus from simply locking up criminals to more meaningful sentencing.

The Whanganui MP told TVNZ last week that politicians were scare-mongering over crime. "I can't understand why so many intelligent politicians can't think smart on crime rather than tough on crime," he told One News

In this example, former National MP Chester Borrows is the messenger for a restorative and evidence-based approach to criminal justice.

He's a good messenger on this topic because he's unexpected (because he is associated with a political party who have argued for 'tough on crime' policies).

In communicating poverty and choosing messengers we should:

- Use a wide range of messengers so that each persuadable audience will recognise them as values aligned, and help depolarise the issue.
- Use people who are well qualified to comment on the context of the message. For example, religious leaders may be trusted to deliver messages about poverty as a about compassion and justice.
- Use unexpected messengers, (e.g former National MP Chester Burrows talking about a more compassionate criminal justice system is an unexpected messenger)

Pulling it all together - using the components to tell a story

Just like we need to mix together the right ingredients in the right order if we want the cake to taste good, so the components of evidence-led communication need to be brought together in a certain way.

Using the structure of a story is one way to bring these components together successfully. People are hardwired to respond to stories. We attend to and retain information better when it is within a story. Stories, to paraphrase Christina Baldwin, are the water we swim in. So, effective communications about family poverty and well-being also needs to have an overarching story.

To tell a story you need a plot - a sequence of events and the outcomes, cause and effect - and you need to link the values that matter and are helpful, with the actions that people take.

Key elements of your message

1. WHO - Decide the characters & agents: who are the characters in your story - these can be the reader or the writer but will more often be families, a politician or group of politicians, even a system (although if your character is a system, make sure you are clear on the human agents who have the power to change the system).
2. WHAT - Articulate a vision: the better future your character wants, be specific and concrete.
3. WHY - Identify helpful values: why they want this, what are the helpful values that matter? BARRIERS - Specify the problem/barriers to achieving the vision: attributing cause and effect based on evidence with agents of this cause and effect named). There may be multiple causes and barriers and effects, try to keep it simple.
    a. Cause of the initial problem
    b. Mediating factors
    c. Outcomes:
4. HOW - Solutions: Attributing better outcomes based on evidence of the cause
5. Action/ resolution - this must be in proportion to the size of the problem you have described and be specific. Should include an action for your audience.

Example:

A thriving, happy childhood is something we want all children in New Zealand to experience. But too often parents, despite their best efforts, can't make that happen.

We have had a long period of low wages and very high housing costs, while people in successive governments have underinvested in key services that help the lowest income families, such as public housing, and income support. Instead people in government have chosen tax credits and accommodation supplements that work best for better off families.

For too many families the costs they now face, on the income they have, have locked them out of being able to give their children real opportunities to thrive. Over half of children in poverty have a working parent and most have housing costs that take up over half of their income.

The choices people in government have made to limit support to some families, but not others, has led to under-resourced and over-stressed parents and children. And the increasing levels of poor health associated with family poverty mean we all experience the impacts.

People in government can release the pressures on families and children. They can provide good public services to all families with children, and unlock opportunity for those doing it hardest by increasing their income support.

Checklist and cheatsheet

Checklist for messages

- ☐ Overall structure is: vision, barrier, solution
- ☐ Has a positive vision of an alternative future
- ☐ Includes an intrinsic value near start (identify that value clearly for yourself)
- ☐ Avoids referencing extrinsic values.
- ☐ Identify helpful and unhelpful frames in public narrative and actively engage the helpful frame. (eg avoid a basic needs frame, instead focus on self-determination frame)
- ☐ Names specific systems causes, effects and specific solution (e.g erosion of benefits, rising prices >locks people into poverty >lifting benefits)
- ☐ Use tested metaphors and avoid untested and unhelpful metaphors where possible
- ☐ Any metaphor is used to explain complex systems causes or solutions (eg locks people into poverty, grip of poverty, unlocking)
- ☐ Facts progress your story (as opposed to being the story)
- ☐ Uses concrete language
- ☐ Names agents & behaviours to change
- ☐ No mythbusting
- ☐ Solution is proportionate to the problem you described (big problem needs transformative solution)

Cheatsheet of key principles

Avoid	*Replace with*
Talking about "Meeting people's needs, or basic needs"	*Unlocking opportunities*
Consumers	*Citizens or people*
Comparisons to poverty in other countries or time	*Descriptions of the experience of poverty in NZ*
Telling individual's stories without first setting up the systems story	*Make systems a character in the story.*
Discussing inequality without explaining causes	*explain the sources of economic inequality to inoculate against the public's default tendency to see disparities as the direct outgrowth of elite manipulation, the product of uncontrollable forces or the result of lack of personal willpower.*
Making people in government villains "hateful politicians, uncaring winz workers" - This reinforce the sense that reform through government is impossible.	*Behaviour and actions taken or not taken*
Using numbers as THE story	*Using facts & data to progress the story you want to tell.*
Leading with benefits or welfare	*Lead with poverty and position benefits as part of a solution, for example to the restraints and restrictions the economy is placing on people*
Presenting impacts and symptoms of poverty as stand alone issues	*Present impacts as part of the story of causes and solutions.*