

## **Letter to the Editor**

**18 July 2006**

It is disappointing that the tragic death of the Kahui twins has been used as an opportunity to point the finger at selected parts of our New Zealand society.

There has been significant focus in recent days on the challenges facing children and young people in Maori families, but we know that child abuse and neglect is a major issue occurring within all ethnic groups.

The data from the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services illustrates this. Maori involvement may be high, but CYFS statistics reported today show that some 60% of abuse notifications involve non-Maori families. Why then are we being encouraged to largely ignore this?

There are no percentages of abuse that are more, or less, shocking or tragic than any other percentage. The real tragedy is that according to notifications made to CYFS; nearly 64,000 children in New Zealand are likely to have been abused or neglected, across all our communities last year.

It's time we had some informed debate in the media, examining the real issues behind child abuse. What are the common factors? What are the real risk factors? What can we as a society do to turn this around?

The answers to some of these questions will point us to education, economic issues, parenting skills and other societal shortcomings.

We owe it to all abused and neglected children to not stop at crude conclusions based on casual analysis of limited data. Let us look critically at our own actions and within our own communities.

Murray Edridge  
Chief Executive Barnardos New Zealand  
P O Box 6434  
Wellington  
Tel: (04) 385 7560