

# **Australians Working Together**

## **EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF ACTIVITY REQUIREMENTS FOR PARENTING PAYMENT CUSTOMERS ON THEIR CHILDREN AGED 13-15 YEARS**

**The final report to the Department of Employment and  
Workplace Relations, June 2005**

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# Foreword

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With the significant increases in female participation in the labour market over the past few decades, coupled with increasing levels of expenditure by government on income support payments, Australia has started to see a significant shift in the role of welfare within our society. The previous system of 'passive welfare' is gradually being replaced by a more participatory set of arrangements in which individuals are encouraged to be more pro-active in developing their labour market skills and ultimately being less reliant on income support. Changes under the Australians Working Together (AWT) measure relating to Parenting Payment recipients that came into effect in September 2003, the evaluation of which forms the basis of this report, are another important step along this path.

Although the new participatory requirements for Parenting Payment recipients are incremental in nature, it is important that the impacts of these requirements on parents and their children be evaluated in order to better understand any positive or negative consequences that have arisen. To this end, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is to be commended for commissioning research into such an important area of Government policy. Using primarily qualitative research techniques, this report provides a voice for the parents and children who have been affected by the AWT changes, and describes in detail the impacts that these changes have brought to their lives and to their aspirations for the future.

The Institute's research team was led by Michael Alexander, and included Jennifer Baxter, Jody Hughes and Jennifer Renda. They are to be congratulated for producing such a detailed, timely report.

I am delighted that the Australian Institute of Family Studies was selected to produce this report and I am confident that it will make a valuable contribution to the development of Government policy and its implementation.

**Professor Alan Hayes**

Director

Australian Institute of Family Studies

# Acknowledgements

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While many contributed to this work, it is the authors who are responsible for any errors or omissions.

Finally, we are grateful to the 120 parents and children for their generous contribution of time and their willingness to share the experiences from their Participation Agreements.

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# Executive summary

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In September 2003, new requirements of Parenting Payment recipients – as part of changes under the Australians Working Together (AWT) initiative– came into effect; specifically, that Parenting Payment recipients whose youngest child is 13 to 15 years old undertake one or more activities (such as job search, education, training or community work) to develop and enhance their work skills and prepare them for a return to work. These activities need to be undertaken for up to 150 hours in each six-month period (or approximately six hours on average per week).

To evaluate the impacts the AWT changes on the children of Parenting Payment recipients, the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) commissioned this report in March 2004. Since this time, responsibility for Government policy and evaluation pertaining to persons of working age was transferred to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, in November 2004.

## This study

To assess the impacts on children of requiring recipients of Parenting Payment to undertake agreed activities, a mix of qualitative and quantitative data was collected based on interviews with 60 Parenting Payment recipients and their youngest child (who was between 13 and 15 years of age). All responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed for use in the analysis. Respondents were interviewed at two different points in time. The first wave was in June/July 2004, approximately 3-4 months after the Parenting Payment recipient had signed a Participation Agreement with their Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Advisor through a Centrelink office. The second wave was in March/April 2005, eight months after the first interview and 12 months after the Participation Agreement was signed.

From both waves of the survey, detailed information was collected from both parents and children on the nature of the activities that were undertaken as part of the Participation Agreement. Respondents were also asked about how the agreed activities had impacted on themselves and their family, particularly with respect to income, confidence and self-esteem, stress, health, parental involvement in the child's schooling and social activities, supervision of the child, and the child's relationships with others.

To analyse how parental involvement in the agreed activities might affect the adolescent children, it was important to consider how such parental involvement might directly affect the parents. If parents were affected, it was expected this would have a flow-on effect to the children. Beyond this, there were expected to be more direct affects on the children. The report was structured around this approach – first analysing the affects on parents, and then analysing the affects on children. A further piece of analysis considered how the Participation Agreement had affected parents' attitudes about work, income support and the requirement to undertake the agreed activities. The main findings of these analyses are summarised below.

It is first worth pointing out that many of the respondents had Participation Agreements covering activities that they were already doing prior to signing the Participation Agreement. For these people in particular (but also for those with new activities), it was difficult to make the distinction between impacts of activities and impacts of the Participation Agreement requirements. Further, the majority of respondents undertook activities for considerably longer than required. For example, the average time spent in activities, by those with a Participation Agreement at Wave 2, was 21 hours per week. These are important points to note when considering the impact of activities on parents and their adolescent children.

## **Key Findings – Impacts on Parents**

The most prevalent impact on parents from undertaking agreed activities related to emotional wellbeing. These impacts were viewed as both positive and negative, although in most families the positive impacts were perceived as outweighing the negatives.

### ***Increased parental self-esteem, happiness and confidence***

Increases in parental self-esteem, happiness and confidence were expressed by many parents and children. Much of this change was attributed to ‘getting out of the house’, but also to trying something new, taking on new challenges, and to making new social contacts.

Many positive aspects of the Participation Agreements on parenting were related to parents being happier people, which in turn resulted in better relationships with the children.

### ***Financial improvements***

Financial impacts of undertaking activities were largely positive, and related to income gained through employment. Some children noted parental employment led to improvements in the ability to buy things, or more pocket money for themselves. Some parents thought they were better able to fulfil their role as parents with greater income.

Many raised this issue in relation to their expectations for the future – that there would be long-term financial gains from participating in their activities.

### ***Increased stress and time pressures***

Reported increases in parental stress were mainly associated with the need to manage the work and family balance, or if not work, then study or other activities. The reduction in available free time resulting from undertaking activities caused stress for many parents, and in particular, the issue of not being there for their child. Children were less likely to discuss parental stress, as such, but were likely to discuss the time aspect.

Whilst increased levels of stress could be linked to poorer parenting behaviour and worse adolescent outcomes, encouragingly, parental stress often dissipated over time, as parents found they were successfully able to manage the activity, and the balance with other responsibilities that was required.

There was no evidence of increased parent-child conflict, and indeed little deterioration in quality of the parent-child relationship, except in relation to the time parents and children spent together.

Those with long-term health problems were more likely to have reported negative stress associated with undertaking their activities. Also, those reporting negative stress were spending, on average, longer hours per week in their activities.

## **Key Findings – Impacts on Children**

All parents, and all but one of the children, felt the overall impact of parent’s activities on the child was either positive or had no impact. The split between positive and no impact was about half and half.

### ***Child’s schooling***

On the whole, the impacts of the parent undertaking the agreed activities on the child’s schooling were seen as negative, as the parent had less time to be involved with the school or school functions, and had less time to help with the child’s homework. However, there was only one case in which the child’s schoolwork was said to have deteriorated as a result.

There were some positive aspects for those families in which the parent had become more involved in the school as part of undertaking some of their activities and some reported being more able to help with homework because they had acquired new skills or a new understanding of their child's work.

### ***Parental involvement in children's lives***

Undertaking activities meant that parents were, on the whole, less involved in the child's school, homework, and sporting and social activities. This was primarily due to a clash of timetables or just having less time available overall. This lack of involvement was more acute when parents had other caring responsibilities or long-term health issues of their own.

Parents almost universally felt that less involvement was a negative thing, and on some issues so did children. However, in many cases, the lower level of parental involvement, although a negative issue when considered in isolation, had created significant positive opportunities where children were given greater responsibility and had embraced the opportunity positively. In many of these cases, it had led to greater mutual trust and respect between the parent and the child, particularly where parents had had some initial concerns about the effects of less supervision and the manner in which the children would react to the greater expected responsibilities. Often this compensated for concerns parents had about less involvement with the child's school or homework as some children had actually performed better under these increased levels of personal responsibility.

There were cases where the activities provided opportunities for parents to have greater involvement in their child's life, usually when the activity involved paid or volunteer work at the child's school or where the parent was a volunteer for social activities the child was also involved with.

These changes in parents' involvement in children's lives were echoed in what parents and children said about how parent's agreed activities had affected the child's relationships with other people, including the parent undertaking the activities. Where impacts were reported they were generally positive, usually based on an increase in mutual respect stemming from the child exercising greater responsibility and/or the parent's agreed activity giving the parent and child more to talk about or a common task (like studying).

### ***Parents as role models***

Often the commitment of the parent to the activity (working or studying) had provided a role model to the child who had responded positively to the parents new commitment and this had again increased the level of respect between parent and child.

### ***Changes in child behaviour***

This report also considered changes in the behaviour of children over the first year that the agreements were in operation. Unlike other analysis in this report, it could not draw upon direct connections made by the respondents between the behaviour and other events and issues. Whilst this means some care must be exercised in drawing too much from this analysis, there were some interesting relationships. Adverse changes in behaviour were certainly more concentrated amongst parents undertaking new activities since signing their Participation Agreement (as distinct from those who were able to include existing activities in their agreement), suggesting that children are more prone to antisocial behaviour during these transitional periods within families. Interestingly, activities done outside of school hours did not elicit higher levels of negative behaviours, mainly it would seem because most parents who did activities at this times ensured their child had adequate alternative supervision.

The main finding from this analysis was the relationship between the impact of activities on the parent and their resultant wellbeing and subsequent behavioural outcomes for the child. Negative impacts on parents in terms of stress and confidence, particularly if coupled with

negative impacts on their perceptions as parents, were more associated with negative behaviours in children. At the same time, where changes in parents' wellbeing were positive (even where they were stressed) – as manifested in improved self-confidence and positive perceptions of themselves as parents – the children in these families tended to show decreases in adverse behaviour and/or increases in positive behaviour.

## **Key findings – changes in parents' attitudes**

Many parents said they had become more positive towards work, and this reflected personal increases in self-confidence and motivation in the workforce, often as a result of overcoming initial concerns about abilities and a more general fear of the unknown.

Respondents' attitudes about undertaking agreed activities through the compulsion of having a Participation Agreement also appeared to shift in a generally positive fashion in a similar way to the attitudes about work. By Wave 2, a number of parents were much more accepting of having to undertake agreed activities and a few even considered them to be of significant benefit, mainly in terms of motivating them to change their circumstances or encouraging them to take on new challenges.

Almost all parents said their attitudes about receiving income support or staying home to look after children were unchanged 12 months after signing their Participation Agreement, suggesting that these attitudes are much more ingrained and unlikely to be shifted by being involved in the agreed activities. There were a few parents who had become more comfortable with leaving their child while they worked, based on their experiences with the agreed activities.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study did find significant issues for parents with respect to stress and time pressures resulting from undertaking the agreed activities. Parents and children were both concerned with the reduction in time that parents and children spent together and the consequences for the quality of the relationship between them that stemmed from parents undertaking the activities. However, many of the negative consequences of the activities were transitory in nature and tended to diminish over time, or were consistent with pressures that many families face in balancing work and family arrangements.

Overall, the impact of Parenting Payment recipients undertaking agreed activities, both on parents and children, was positive. In most cases, the stress and time pressures of undertaking activities were outweighed by the positive impacts on confidence and self-esteem that followed from the challenges that new activities created, the increased social connectedness they provided and the benefits of actual or anticipated financial benefits of participation. Many parents and children commented on the improved wellbeing of the parent and this report has identified how this has positively translated to parenting style and the concept of parents as role models to their adolescent children. These positive effects were further reinforced by how children responded to their parent's activities through increased levels of responsibility, maturity and respect for the parent.

# 1 Introduction

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This report aims to contribute to the evaluation of the impact on children of the introduction of activity requirements for Parenting Payment recipients with a youngest child aged 13 to 15 years. The report was commissioned on behalf of the Australian Government through the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) in March 2004. Since this time, responsibility for Government policy and evaluation pertaining to persons of working age was transferred to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).

## 1.1 Background

In the 2001/02 budget, the Australian Government announced changes to the social security system under the ‘Australians Working Together’ (AWT) packages of measures. One of the changes was the introduction of a requirement that Parenting Payment recipients whose youngest child is 13 to 15 years old undertake one or more activities (such as job search, education, training or community work) to develop and enhance their work skills and so prepare them for a return to work. These activities need to be undertaken for up to 150 hours in each six-month period.

Under the legislation passed by the Parliament (*Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Australians Working Together and Other 2001 Budget Measures) Act 2003 No. 35*, and assented to on 24 April 2003, the Minister is required to conduct an evaluation of the measures contained within Schedule 1 of the Act (that is, those pertaining to Parenting Payment Participation Agreements), which must include “an assessment of the impact of the measures in Schedule 1 on children of parenting payment recipients” (Section 4, sub-section (2) (g)). This report forms part of this evaluation requirement.

Since this evaluation commenced, the Government introduced a new ‘Welfare to Work’ policy, which is to increase the participation requirements of Parenting Payment customers with younger children. This evaluation does not consider this new policy, and especially how parental participation might affect outcomes of younger children.

## 1.2 AWT and the Participation Agreement

The participation requirement for parents in receipt of Parenting Payment to undertake approved activities first came into effect in September 2003. From that date, Parenting Payment customers whose youngest child was aged 13 to 15 years were required to attend an interview at a Centrelink office with a Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program advisor, or a Personal Advisor, to develop an agreed set of activities to assist them to prepare for a return to work. These agreed activities were tailored to individual needs and circumstances and formalised in a Participation Agreement. Customers were required to undertake during each 26-week period, approved activities up to 150 hours (or approximately six hours on average per week).

Due to the different backgrounds and experiences of customers receiving Parenting Payment, there is a wide range of activities that parents can undertake in order to fulfil the obligation of becoming more job-ready. For many parents, moving directly into paid employment would be straight-forward, and indeed some parents are already undertaking some type of paid employment or may be able to confidently undertake job search activities, thereby easily fulfilling their new obligations. Similarly, others are undertaking study or participating in voluntary work, which can be recognised as agreed activities. For others, the transition to becoming job-ready may require taking on new activities, and where moving straight into work or job search is not feasible, customers may undertake alternative activities such as voluntary work (as a way of getting work experience) or study (in order to increase their

skills), or other activities that are agreed to be appropriate to the parent's personal circumstances.

Certain customers, for example those caring for a disabled child or partner, are exempt from the requirement to have a Participation Agreement. Further, considerations such as the person's health, education, the state of the local labour market and travel time are taken into account when developing the agreement. Parents are not required to undertake activities outside school hours.

### **1.3 Literature review**

Policies and programmes to promote economic participation among income support recipients in Australia, while increasingly integrated into Australian welfare arrangements, are relatively new compared to the international experience. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that the potential impact of such programs on the attitudes and behaviour of Australian parents and their children is an under-researched area – a point noted by Kinnear, Grant and Oliver (2003).

The international literature on the likely effects of parental participation programs on adolescents is also somewhat limited. More extensive information is available on possible effects on younger children, but this research is not as relevant to the age group covered in this study. The published reports pertaining to adolescents are based on studies in the United States (US), and a review of this literature is given below, even though the participation requirements of US programs differ to those of AWT.

Of relevance, also, is the association between parental (especially maternal) employment and adolescent outcomes. More Australian literature exists on the topic of maternal employment and family outcomes, although studies do not necessarily focus on low-income employment, or on families with adolescent children. These studies, and other international literature are also discussed in the section on parental employment.

#### ***Methods used to analyse impacts***

The possible effects of work participation programs or of parental employment on adolescents are varied, and can be measured in different ways. For example, the effects may be apparent in the adolescents' own wellbeing (for example, Sallinen, Kinnunen and Rönkä 2004), their relationships with others (Montemayor 1984), their school involvement and outcomes (Paulson 1996) or other indicators of behaviour, such as the incidence of antisocial behaviour (Vassallo, Smart, Sanson, Dussuyer and McKendry 2002).

Attributing outcomes to the effect of specific variables, like parental participation in a work program, is extremely difficult. This is particularly the case when using cross-sectional data, when it is not possible to disentangle cause and effect. Even with longitudinal data, however, identifying the existence of a causal relationship can be problematic. Further, the outcomes of some programs may not become apparent except in the very long term (Gray and Stanton 2002). Attributing change in adolescent outcomes to a particular effect is also likely to be difficult because adolescence is, by definition, a time of significant change, when roles and behaviours are in transition between childhood and adulthood. This complexity is clear in the following statement by Gennetian *et al.* (2002, p.3-4):

Adolescence is a period of dramatic physical and emotional transition, marked by puberty and new expectations with regard to behavior, responsibility, self-awareness, and independence...The effects of welfare and work policies on adolescents are likely to hinge on the interaction between the changes in adolescents' lives caused by these policies and the developmental processes of adolescence.

In analyses of impacts of parental employment or employment participation programs on children there are at least two sets of 'voices' – those of the parents and those of their

children. While much research relies on the reports of parents, there is also a body of research in which their children's perspectives are presented. It is particularly important to gain insights from the children, or adolescents, and to compare their insights to those of their parents, to gain a comprehensive picture of what these impacts might be. For example, Paulson's (1996) findings with respect to parenting behaviour and adolescent achievement suggest that parent and child perspectives of parenting behaviour may not always agree, and it is the child's perspective that is more likely to be related to adolescent outcomes.

The following literature includes examples of different methodologies, using parent and child perspectives, using cross-sectional and longitudinal data, and using a range of outcome measures.

### **Overview – impacts of work participation programs**

Australian and overseas research (Evans, Eyre, Millar and Sarre 2003; and studies reviewed in Kalb 2003) supports the notion that policies aimed at increasing work participation help reduce poverty rates in low-income families. This is one of the key reasons for the introduction of such policies in Australia (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation 2005; Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000; Saunders, Eardley and Brown 2003). Improvements in financial resources to families could result in families being better able to afford more nutritious food, health care, access to outside-school activities or learning materials (Gennetian and Morris 2003).

The effect of increased parental work participation on families and children is likely to go beyond that of just an income effect. As stated by Duniform, Kalil and Danziger (2003, p.2) in the introduction to their study of US-style welfare-to-work programs and the outcomes for young, school-aged children:

Developmental theory suggests that increased employment for welfare mothers could improve their self-esteem, motivation, and sense of personal control. These improvements could lead to better parenting and concomitant improvements in children's behavior. Increased economic resources from earnings could also benefit maternal parenting practices and child development. On the other hand, if employment is unstable or erratic, material hardships could ensue, family routines could be disrupted, and children's development could be adversely affected. Additionally, the stress of balancing work and family life could lead to changes in parenting styles and potentially negative impacts on child wellbeing.

While the above study focused on younger children, the possible impacts described are also relevant to families with adolescents. Gennetian *et al.* (2002) note that improvements in adolescent outcomes might come about because the adolescents will have more positive role models if their parents are employed. However, these authors also note that negative effects might occur because of the reduced supervision and monitoring of adolescents when parental employment occurs outside school hours. Further, the changes in responsibility of adolescents that might be brought about by parental employment may not always result in positive outcomes. Other authors (Brooks, Hair and Zaslow 2001) have also suggested that parent-child relationships might deteriorate, with possible negative impacts on adolescent outcomes. These issues are explored further below.

### **Work participation programs and adolescent outcomes, evidence from the US**

Gennetian *et al.*'s (2002) report brings together the results of eight studies to analyse how US-style 'welfare-to-work' policies for parents affect adolescents. These results are not directly relevant to the Australian context, given that the requirements of US-style programs differ

considerably to those in Australia, in particular in relation to the age of the youngest child when such policies are enforced. However, as there is little international or Australian evidence on possible impacts on adolescents, this review is included to highlight some possible issues.

The 12 programs evaluated in the studies had a common goal of getting welfare recipients into work, but the means by which this was done differed in each program. The main elements of these programs were mandatory employment services<sup>1</sup> (eight programs), earnings supplements<sup>2</sup> (nine programs) and time limits<sup>3</sup> (three programs). Note that these programs did not necessarily require full-time work participation. A full description of each program can be found in the source documents referred to in Gennetian *et al.* (2002).

The studies were conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation and used random assignment designs, where a treatment group (families in which the parent was in a welfare-to-work program) could be compared with a control group (families similarly receiving welfare, but not in the welfare-to-work program). Random assignment to the control or treatment group enables attribution of differences between the groups to the program effect. Adolescent outcomes were reported by parents in all studies (plus one study included teacher reports). These outcomes were measured at a follow-up point some time after commencement of the program. This time varied from study to study, with a minimum time of 24 months and a maximum of 60 months (Gennetian *et al.* 2002, p.6-7).

Overall, Gennetian *et al.* (2002) reported only small differences between the treatment and the control groups for adolescent outcomes. It was consistently found, however, that adolescents with parents who were in the welfare-to-work program were more likely to show below average achievements in school (according to parent reports). Other effects related to school performance that were found for the program group included having a higher likelihood of repeating a grade or receiving special education services. In some programs, specific differences were observed: one found more school behaviour problems, and another found, in the program group, more minor delinquent activity and drinking at least once a week.

Detrimental program effects on adolescent outcomes could not be attributed to specific aspects of those programs.<sup>4</sup> Further testing of the results evaluated whether it was maternal employment that was driving the effects, since this was a common goal of these programs. The results, however, did not find that adolescent outcomes were related to maternal employment outcomes. The authors suggest the association between the program effects, maternal employment and adolescent outcomes may not be clearly explained because the characteristics of the parents' jobs were unknown (and there may be differences according to job schedules, for example). Also, there are likely to be both positive and negative effects on families (as discussed elsewhere in this review) that might offset each other and confound any attempts to measure impacts on adolescent outcomes. Other specific effects were tested in this study: income effects (either increases or decreases) did not explain differences in adolescent outcomes; there was also some indication that adolescents with no younger siblings had better outcomes (discussed later in more detail).

Another synthesis of three Canadian and US programs was published as a policy brief by Brooks *et al.* (2001). As with Gennetian *et al.*'s report, the studies were based on random

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<sup>1</sup> Parents were required to work or to participate in an activity designed to enhance their employability, such as job search or education or training (Gennetian *et al.* 2002, p.5).

<sup>2</sup> Programs with earnings supplements tried to 'make work pay' by providing extra income to parents who received welfare and who were or became voluntarily employed (Gennetian *et al.* 2002, p.5).

<sup>3</sup> These programs aimed to make welfare receipt temporary, initially by encouraging families to leave welfare and eventually by requiring them to do so (Gennetian *et al.* 2002, p.8).

<sup>4</sup> Differentiating programs with mandatory employment services alone, programs with earnings supplements and programs with time limits.

assignment designs. The authors found there was an increase in 'harsh parenting' of adolescents in one of the three reviewed programs (for the others, information on parenting was not available). Brooks *et al.* (2001) also examined whether parental involvement in a welfare program led to a shift in adolescents' roles within their families. They found some evidence that when parents were in one of the welfare programs, adolescents were doing household tasks more frequently, and were more likely to be working 20 or more hours a week.

Another study looked at a program for single parents receiving welfare that encouraged employment. This study found that adolescents whose parents participated in this program were more likely to engage in minor delinquency, and to use tobacco, alcohol or drugs, than those whose parents were not in the employment program (Morris and Michalopoulos 2000).

It has not been established whether negative effects on adolescent outcomes are transitory or lasting. Very little information exists on how outcomes at adolescence affect outcomes in young adulthood. The data that has been reviewed by Gennetian *et al.* (2002) shows little evidence that the effects are lasting.

More positive child and adolescent outcomes of parental welfare-to-work in the US were published by Chase-Lansdale, Moffitt, Loochmann, Cherlin, Coley, Pittman, Roff and Votruba-Drzal (2003). These authors used longitudinal data on 895 adolescents to observe the transitions their mothers made between welfare and employment over a 16 month period, and multivariate techniques to model the change in adolescent outcomes over this time. The outcomes they evaluated for adolescents were quantitative skills, reading skills, behavioural problems (further disaggregated as internalising or externalising behaviour problems), psychological distress (incorporating anxiety), and delinquent behaviours (including drug and alcohol use). They found few associations between maternal transitions and adolescent outcomes. However, improved adolescent mental health (on the psychological distress or the anxiety score) was associated with maternal transitions from welfare-to-work. This effect, while significant, was quite small. There was some evidence of other effects, but these were not robust across the models tested.

In summary, the evidence from the US is mixed, although studies are more likely to find negative effects than they are to find positive effects. Even the negative effects are, however, quite small in magnitude. Also, the extent to which these effects might be expected to be evident in the current study is unclear, especially considering that the US-style programs apply to parents of young children, and are generally for full-time work requirements, unlike the AWT requirements that apply to parents of 13 to 15 year olds only.

### ***Joblessness, participation programs and family stress***

Income support recipients often face considerable barriers to employment. In the case of parents who have not worked for a number of years while they cared for children (or for other family members), barriers are likely to include low levels of confidence in the ability to find work or outdated work-related skills – problems that the participation requirements attempt to address. Other barriers are also likely, including personal health problems or continuing responsibilities to care for family members (see, for example, King, Bradbury and McHugh 1995; King and McHugh 1995; Shaver, King, McHugh and Payne 1994). The existence of these barriers, and the degree to which they are dealt with in the work participation program, are likely to affect how a person responds to new participation requirements.

Research shows that joblessness is associated with poorer psychological health (for example, lower self-esteem and higher stress). These effects may extend beyond the jobless person to the rest of the family. Further, longitudinal analyses have shown that moving from unemployment to employment is associated with improved psychological wellbeing, while moving from employment to unemployment is associated with deteriorating psychological wellbeing. Even amongst mothers with dependant children, this has been found to be true – generally employed women have better measures of psychological health than do jobless

women. There is mixed evidence, however, on whether *any* job improves mental health. Some studies find this to be so, while others note the relationship between the characteristics of the job, the degree to which the job matches the preferences of the person, and mental health outcomes (see references in Ganley 2004).

There is some evidence that policies aimed at increasing participation can be stressful to parents and children. Mothers may be worried and depressed, and children may experience resulting emotional problems (Hofferth, Smith, McLoyd and Finkelstein 2000). This finding is consistent with British research on the impact of changes to housing entitlements and access to Working Family Tax Credit. Single parents expressed a fear that their decision to work could be deleterious to themselves and their children, and were concerned about their ability to return to welfare payments should the job not work out. Personal barriers, such as low self-esteem, depression and feelings of isolation were all seen to affect single parents' capacity to seek and sustain paid work (O'Connor and Boreham 2002).

To put this into an Australian context, Shaver et al (1994) found considerable anxiety existed amongst sole parents who were nearing the end of eligibility to the (then) Sole Parent Pension. Of those who were about to lose eligibility, 42 per cent of women were 'very concerned' about the coming termination of payments, and another 24 per cent were 'concerned' (Shaver *et al.* 1994, p.37). Whether or not a participation program is in place, this is likely to be a very stressful time.

These issues of psychological wellbeing have been raised here because of the link that has been drawn between parental wellbeing and parental behaviour. This link was identified, for example, in a UK study of adolescents' attitudes towards parenting, which examined their views of their parents' characteristics and approaches to parenting and how these affected them. Adolescents thought that parental self-esteem was very important in enabling their parents to raise happy children (Henricson 2000). Also, as is discussed later, parental moods or levels of stress are likely to be discerned by their children and may have an impact on their own wellbeing.

### **Parental employment and adolescent outcomes**

Given that the goal of participation programs is to increase employment, it is relevant to consider research that looks at adolescent outcomes and parental employment. However, the findings of studies focusing on all employed people will not always translate to those moving from income support into work. For example, a possible deficiency in considering this broader employment literature is that people moving from welfare into employment are more likely (than those who have not been on welfare) to be moving into the lower skilled, more precarious jobs, with less favourable employment conditions (Heymann and Earle 1998; Shaver *et al.* 1994). Further, given that the AWT changes being considered by this report only require part-time activities, the literature on part-time employment is most relevant. The distinction is not always made, however, between full-time and part-time work in the literature.

An Australian study by Amato (1987), using information obtained through interviews with a sample of parents and their children, analysed the impact of maternal employment status (not working versus part-time or full-time work) on various outcome measures, including parenting behaviour, household responsibility, child-parent relationships and competency measures (for example, reading, life skills, self-esteem). The study included a sample of 195 primary school children and their families and 207 secondary school students – adolescents – and their families. Amato (1987) reported that adolescents' overall level of autonomy and household responsibility (as reported by the adolescents) varied significantly with the mother's paid work hours. After controlling for the number of siblings in the household, family type, and mother's education, greater autonomy and household responsibility were observed in adolescents when their mothers worked full-time, rather than part-time or not at all. No significant differences were found in reading ability, social competence, self-control,

and independence based on their mother's employment status. The mothers' employment status made little difference to the self-esteem of sons, but the self-esteem of daughters was considerably higher when mothers worked full-time than when mothers worked part-time or not at all. Amato suggested that the mother acting as a role model to daughters when she is in a full-time (and therefore possibly higher status) occupation might be associated with higher self-esteem of daughters.

Montemayor's (1984) study of the link between maternal employment and adolescents' relationships with parents, siblings and peers suggested that sons with employed mothers had more arguments with mothers and siblings (but not their fathers) compared with sons whose mothers were not in paid work. The frequency of arguments between daughters and other family members did not appear to vary according to their mother's paid work status. However, the boys perceived more conflict with mothers than mothers perceived with them. According to this study, working mothers expect more help around the house than non-working mothers, which Montemayor considers to be a major cause of increased conflict.

More specific issues on the effect of parental employment are discussed in the following sections.

### **Parenting, children and the work-family 'spillover'**

The impact of changes in employment status of parents can include indirect affects on adolescents through changes in parents' parenting behaviour. There is much research on the relationships between parental employment, parenting styles, other environmental factors and family (including child/adolescent) outcomes. For example, Sallinen *et al.* (2004) reviews the literature on the relationship between parental employment and parenting style, and goes on to relate this to adolescent wellbeing. Sallinen *et al.*'s (2004)'s study found that negative parental work spillover, as reported by the adolescents, had an effect on adolescents' wellbeing (using measures of self-esteem, attitudes to school and depression). Perceptions of negative work spillover were related to lessened 'autonomy granting' and increased parent-adolescent conflict and higher levels of depression (especially for girls). "From the viewpoint of adolescents, parents do bring home their work stress by being less responsive and encouraging, and this is reflected in adolescent mood" (Sallinen *et al.* 2004, p.233). These authors also noted evidence for positive spillover, with an association between a mother having higher levels of job motivation and her child having more positive attitudes towards school.

A number of studies have examined children's perceptions of how their parents' work affects them and their family. These include a US study by Galinsky (2000) of 1000 children aged 8 to 18; an Australian study by Lewis, Hand and Tudball (2001) designed to replicate Galinsky's study through interviews with 71 children aged 8 to 21 (most aged 10 to 12 years) and their parents; and another similar Australian study of Year 6 and Year 11 children by Pocock and Clarke (2005).

Lewis, Hand and Tudball's (2001) research found that there was no simple relationship between the amount of time parents worked and the degree of children's satisfaction with those hours. Children held widely differing views on how happy they were with their parents' hours, whether those hours were full-time or part-time, and whether or not they lived in lone or couple families. However, there were links between parental satisfaction with work and child satisfaction with time spent together. Further, parental satisfaction appeared to be linked to the flexibility of work: a point that is pertinent to this research given that people moving from income support into work are likely to be in jobs offering less attractive conditions:

It seemed to be the case that some of the children expressing dissatisfaction with their time with parents were reflecting the parent's dissatisfaction. Whether the children are conscious of the parent's feelings from overt statements or subtle cues, the consequence may be poorer family functioning. This is important, as parents who feel they don't have enough

time with their children are often not in a position, either financially or socially, to change. Parents in this position often seemed to be working in the least flexible jobs. For these parents and children, strategies involving family friendly workplace initiatives would have particular importance (Lewis *et al.* 2001, p.2).

When there are higher degrees of ‘job overload’ – when parents are particularly stressed by their jobs, or work excessive hours – this is more likely to affect family life (as reviewed in Sallinen *et al.* 2004). This result is consistent with research of Galinsky (2000) and Pocock and Clarke (2005) who found that it was not being employed, as such, that had the largest impact on family life, but the ‘state’ parents come home in after work: “This ‘state’ reflects objective characteristics of jobs (like hours and intensity) as well as the extent to which parents’ preferences match their jobs” (Pocock and Clarke 2005, p.73).

Pocock and Clarke’s study found that children reported both positive and negative effects of employment on their parents, which would then flow on to the children.

Many can see positive outcomes for their parents from their paid jobs – outcomes that flow to children through material comfort and, beyond this, to a happier parent and household (Pocock and Clarke 2005, p.70).

Most obvious among the positive effects is income. Alongside this, many young people see benefits for them arising from their parents’ work-related skills... Young people also see that their parents have fun and gain a sense of worth and contribution through their jobs. Others feel that parents enjoy making friends, having laughs and social connection through their jobs (Pocock and Clarke 2005, p.71).

According to children in this study, the negative aspects of parental employment included causing (to the parent) “physical injury, emotional or mental injury, bad moods, stress, tiredness, sadness, uncertainty and fear” (p.71). This study replicates many of the findings of Galinsky (2000), and Jensen (2003) that suggested that children are ‘sophisticated observers’ of parental moods associated with work (Pocock and Clarke 2004, p.69). Related to this, Näsman (2003, p.52) reported on children’s experience of their parents moods before and after work. She found that, according to children “fatigue is the most frequent negative condition after work. Parents are tired but also fretful, irritated, angry, grumpy, surly, sad, dizzy, inattentive, occupied and in pain”. Further, this study found that some children perceive that their parents withdraw from them when they are in moods such as these, after work. Other children notice that their parents attempt to hide the stress or other negative emotions from them. These parenting behaviours are consistent with those found in other studies, as reported in Sallinen *et al.*(2004).

## **Role models and attitudes to work**

Another possible impact of parental employment is on children’s attitudes to work. A number of studies have found that children with working parents have more liberal attitudes towards women or mothers working (Gardner and LeBrecque 1986; Tomeh 1979; Wright and Young 1998). Some mothers in Lewis *et al.*’s (2001) study articulated the importance of being a role model to their daughters, and also in teaching their sons that women as well as men could have a career.

Paulson (1996) looked at how parenting behaviour mediated the relationship between maternal employment and adolescent behaviour. Paulson’s (1996) study of ninth-grade students in the US found that maternal employment did not affect adolescent school achievement (as measured by self-reported grades). Instead, she found that attitudes to maternal employment, and especially the adolescents’ perceptions of their mother’s attitudes towards maternal employment, were related to the outcomes of those adolescents. She says,

Changing attitudes about maternal employment and mothers' own satisfaction with their choices seem to be more important indicators of children's outcomes than whether mothers are actually employed outside of the home, but parenting style and parents' involvement in their children's achievement are important mediators of differences among families (Paulson 1996, p.207).

It is possible that the results of Chase-Lansdale *et al.* (2003) – that increased mental health of adolescents was observed when parents went from welfare to work – was a reaction to their parent becoming a more positive role model, as the parent's mental health also improved when they went to work. An alternate reason for this improvement may be that the adolescents discerned a reduction in anxiety within the family, if pressures of financial hardship eased when the parent commenced employment (Chase-Lansdale *et al.* 2003).

The degree to which parental employment is likely to affect children's attitudes to work, or to female employment, is important, as increased parental employment might influence children's employment aspirations or later, employment behaviour. The effect of having one or both parents take up employment is likely to be particularly important amongst children who have so far been raised in families where parental participation in employment has been low.

### **Supervision or self-care and adolescent responsibility**

In some families, parental activity may mean that there is a period of time in the day – usually after school – when adolescents might be without supervision. Younger children would be expected to be in some form of formal or informal care if neither parent was available, but this is not necessarily the case for adolescents. As children get older, after-school programs are less likely to appeal and parents may negotiate different arrangements with their children. For example, in Lewis *et al.*'s (2001)'s study, parents had made arrangements which included children going home and staying there until parents returned from work, and children keeping in touch through mobile phones. De Vaus and Millwood's (1998) analysis of self or sibling care in Australia showed that the likelihood of children being in such care increased significantly with age, such that 15 year olds were much more likely to be in self or sibling care than were younger children.

There is considerable evidence however, that a lower level of supervision of adolescents is associated with a higher level of problem behaviour (for example, Cookston 1999; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales and Hirage 1996), and in contrast, a higher level of parental monitoring has been linked to better school outcomes and social functioning (Baumrind 1989; Linver and Silverberg 1997). This is discussed in depth (with further references) in Smolensky and Gootman (2003).

Smolensky and Gootman (2003) make the distinction between 'in-home' self-care and 'out-of-home' self-care. While they draw the links between higher levels of in-home self-care and poorer outcomes (particularly for those adolescents who undertake sibling care) they make stronger links between out-of-home self-care and poor outcomes. They note that there is an association "between unsupervised and unstructured after-school endeavours and a range of problem behaviours (eg, antisocial behaviour, crime, substance use, early sexual activity)" (Smolensky and Gootman 2003, p.184-185). The outcomes are likely to be related to the degree of parental monitoring and the 'quality' of the peer group within which the activities are being undertaken.

Involvement in structured 'enrichment' activities outside school-hours, such as sports teams, lessons and clubs can be an important means of promoting competencies and preventing problem behaviours (as reviewed in Smolensky and Gootman 2003). In particular, the qualities of successful programs include:

... opportunities to form positive relationships with peers and competent adults, a safe environment that fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness to conventional values, and the development of valued skills through regular and structured engagement in challenging activities that are intrinsically interesting to the participants. (Smolensky and Gootman 2003, p.188).

US research has found lack of access to such activities, through cost and/or transportation difficulties, is a problem for some youths (as reviewed in Smolensky and Gootman 2003).

### **Increased responsibility**

Periods of no supervision may be problematic for some children, while for others may increase their sense of responsibility and independence. While adolescence is a time when people make the transition from childhood to adulthood, and therefore have to learn to take on more responsibility and adult roles, 'too much' responsibility or autonomy can be detrimental to certain outcomes, such as higher levels of delinquent behaviour, lower levels of academic achievement and increased stress and anxiety (refer to research cited by Brooks *et al.* 2001). For example, commitment to school may falter if there are too many domestic responsibilities, such as having to care for younger siblings<sup>5</sup> or to undertake other household tasks.

Gennetian *et al.*'s (2002) analysis of the effects of welfare programs suggested there were different outcomes for adolescents depending on whether they had younger siblings:

The fact that adolescents without younger siblings were necessarily the youngest child in the family or the only child in the household appears to have enabled them to participate in more structured, monitored activities after school, which might have helped mitigate negative effects of increased parental employment. They may have participated in these structured settings more because they were not needed at home or because their parents, with no younger children in the home, could invest more of their time and financial resources in their adolescent children's activities (Gennetian *et al.* 2002, p.38).

### **Antisocial behaviour**

As noted above, research points to an association between parental employment – through reduced levels of supervision – and antisocial behaviour amongst adolescents (refer to research cited by Smolensky and Gootman 2003).

A study of predictors of adolescent antisocial behaviour using the Australian Temperament Project (ATP) found that socio-demographic characteristics of the family (socio-economic status, parental education, occupation, ethnic background, number of children in the family) did not predict the degree of adolescent antisocial behaviour. Instead, it supported the hypothesis that socio-demographic differences indirectly affect such outcomes through the manner in which parents discipline and/or nurture their children. Differences in parenting style and parent-child relationships were evident across different degrees of antisocial behaviour. For example, those engaging in persistent serious antisocial behaviour had low attachment to parents, less parental supervision of their activities and less warmth in the parent-child relationship (Vassallo *et al.* 2002).

The ATP showed that some degree of antisocial behaviour is to be expected amongst adolescents, for example, skipping school, cigarette use and alcohol use are quite common.

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<sup>5</sup> The care of younger siblings is not an issue for the adolescents in this study, given they are the youngest children in the family.

More serious antisocial behaviour – violence, property damage or theft is less common. Also, while antisocial behaviour escalates through adolescence, for many, this is just a transitory or ‘experimental’ phase which does not have long-term repercussions (Vassallo *et al.* 2002).

### **Conclusion and implications for this evaluation**

The literature reviewed above shows that parental work participation programs may result in changes in family income (and therefore a change in the resources available to adolescents); time pressures; perhaps work-family spillover; as well as changes in parental self-esteem and motivation. These effects are all possible with the AWT requirements, although the intention for activities to be done for up to a maximum of 150 hours in a 26 week period, and to be done within school hours, should minimise these effects – especially those related to time pressures and work-family spillover.

The international literature shows that adolescents may be affected negatively because their parents have less time to supervise and monitor them, because they assume new responsibilities, and because their relationship with their working parent deteriorates. There is slight evidence that parental involvement in participation programs results in some small negative outcomes. Two factors that require close attention, as they have been linked to more negative outcomes for adolescents, are the changes in monitoring and supervision and changes in adolescent responsibilities. As noted above, where activities are done within school-hours, these effects should be minimal.

Adolescents may also be affected positively as their parents become better role models, have higher levels of self-esteem, develop better parenting skills and the family has greater financial resources. There is strong evidence that maternal employment is related to improved self-esteem and enhanced wellbeing; that in turn leads to better parenting skills, all of which are associated with better outcomes for adolescents. For AWT, these outcomes may be expected even for involvement in part-time activities.

## **1.4 Outline of the rest of the report**

Following this introductory chapter and literature review, Chapter 2 provides the background to the evaluation, including the objectives that the evaluation is seeking to address. It also details the methodology used to address these objectives and concludes with a brief overview of the sample and contents of the Participation Agreements. More detailed characteristics of the sample of parents and children and various aspects of the development of the agreements can be found in the Appendices at the end of the report.

The analysis of the impacts of the agreements on families commences in Chapter 3. As discussed in the literature review, outcomes for adolescents are to some extent a factor of the outcomes from the Participation Agreements for the parents. In Chapter 3, the impacts of undertaking the agreed activities on the parent are considered, including the impacts on stress, family income, health, parenting and self-confidence.

The fourth chapter of the report examines the direct and indirect impacts on families and children of parents undertaking agreed activities. It firstly considers the impacts of parents’ activity requirements on the child’s relationships, including the relationship with the parent undertaking the activities, the other resident or non-resident parent, the child’s siblings and their friends. This is followed by a discussion of how the agreed activities have affected parent’s perceptions about parenting, their ability to supervise their children in the presence of new activities and what this implies for children having to undertake greater levels of responsibility. A third section provides a discussion of how undertaking the agreed activities have affected parents as role models for their children. In the fourth section, the parent’s involvement in the child’s life is analysed, including the amount of time the parent and child spend together, the involvement of the parent in the child’s schooling, and the impact on sporting and social activities. Chapter 4 concludes with an analysis of the impact of the

agreed activities on the child by analysing the extent to which there has been any changes in positive or negative child behaviours and considers whether this can be related to the other changes in the parent's and child's lives.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the impacts of the Participation Agreements on parents' attitudes to work, income support and having to compulsorily undertake the activities.

Finally, Chapter 6 draws together the major themes that have emerged from the research conducted as part of this evaluation and provides some concluding comments.

The Wave 1 and Wave 2 fieldwork reports are found in a separate volume.

## 2 Background to the study

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The previous chapter identified the extent of knowledge on the effects of maternal employment generally, and of welfare activation policies specifically, on parents and their families. While a lot of this is very useful in informing policy development, there is still a great deal that is not known, particularly in the Australian context. Not only is the Australian welfare system quite different from those operating in Europe and the US (where most of the studies of impacts of activation policies have been conducted), the particular policy intervention being evaluated within this report is somewhat different to those that have been studied elsewhere. It is therefore important that the policy intervention be evaluated on its own merits, which is the purpose of this study, at least in terms of its impact on children.

### 2.1 Objectives of the study

The primary objective of the study is to identify the impacts on children of activity requirements for Parenting Payment recipients whose youngest child is aged 13 to 15 years.

A related objective of the study is to identify the perceptions of both Parenting Payment recipients and their children on the advantages and the disadvantages of undertaking these activities. In addition, the study is to consider whether these perceptions change; for example, are the views held in the initial period after signing the Participation Agreement the same as those held after the agreement has been in place for some time?

The study was also designed to collect demographic data that are not already available from administrative databases and to collect information on the experiences of people on Parenting Payments with respect to the development of the Participation Agreements and the interviews with their Personal Advisers (at Centrelink). Such data provide useful background information for this evaluation.

### 2.2 Methodology

In order to adequately address these objectives, it was considered important to collect information from both the parent undertaking the activities and the child. That is, the impacts of the agreed activities on both the parent and the child are considered from the perspectives of both parents and children. The methodology also considered how the perceived impacts of, and attitudes about, the agreed activities changed over the first 12 months of their operation.

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches were chosen to address the complex research questions being asked, as well as the need to capture the diversity of family circumstances. The collection of quantitative data is useful in establishing the characteristics of the respondents and the contents of the Participation Agreements. A qualitative methodology is more useful for gaining insights into the way respondents feel about their (or their parent's) activities and how they are impacting on their lives. For example, for some people the new obligations would involve a significant change in their own and their children's lives that entailed an initial period of uncertainty, followed by adjustment to the new arrangements. Information about such changes would be difficult to ascertain through structured questionnaires. Also, because it was considered important to get children's perspectives on these changes, the more conversational nature of qualitative research was better placed to allow the voice of each child to inform the evaluation.

Consequently, the analysis contained in this report uses information obtained from semi-structured telephone interviews with 60 parents in receipt of Parenting Payment income support and the youngest child in the family. Interviews were conducted both with parents and children, at two different points in time that were approximately eight months apart. The

initial interviews were conducted in June-July 2004, approximately three to four months after the parent had first signed a Participation Agreement. The second interviews were conducted in March-April 2005, approximately 12 months after the Participation Agreement was signed.

The initial interview was designed to assess the extent to which the introduction of a requirement for parents to undertake activities affected parents and children, while the follow-up was designed to assess the extent to which perceived impacts changed.

In both survey waves, respondents were given as much opportunity as they needed in order to explain how the agreed activities had affected themselves and their family. To capture all the information that respondents provided, the interview was taped (with the permission of the respondent) and then transcribed. The analysis of these transcribed interviews forms the bulk of the information provided in this report, although a great deal of the basic demographic and other factual information, along with answers to structured questions on the impacts of the agreed activities on parents and children, was also coded directly into a database as part of the interview process.

## 2.3 Fieldwork

The design of the questionnaires was undertaken by AIFS with significant input from the staff within FaCS.<sup>6</sup> A market research company – the Social Research Centre (SRC) – was engaged to conduct the fieldwork. SRC has had significant experience with recipients of Parenting Payments, having already conducted the fieldwork for a number of Parenting Payment surveys for FaCS.

A sample of 736 Parenting Payment recipients who had signed Participation Agreements in February or March 2004 was initially provided to SRC, after an opt-out process was conducted by FaCS. This initial list may not be representative of all Parenting Payment recipients with children in this age group. There may be a higher proportion of parents who were not already engaged in activities prior to their participation interview in this sample compared to the broader population. This is probably the result of the targeting of parents whose records indicated they were not already participating in employment or study for JET interviews in the period after AWT changes were introduced. These customers, with no obvious activity, were seen as a priority in requiring help to prepare for work.

The desired sample size for this study was 60 interviews of both a parent (the Parenting Payment recipient) and their youngest child (who was aged 13 to 15 years). In order to achieve this sample, SRC had to randomly access 306 of the 736 Centrelink records, of which 120 were found to be within scope and where contact was subsequently attempted. The final response rate was 50 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

The data were collected in two waves (June-July 2004 and March-April 2005). The first wave involved telephone interviews with 60 parents in receipt of Parenting Payment and with the youngest child of each of these parents (who was between 13 and 15 years old). The second wave involved re-interviews with 55 of the parents and children from the first wave. Of the five respondents lost to the second wave, four could not be contacted and one refused. These respondents were disproportionately single and from capital cities (refer to Appendix B of the supplementary volume).

## 2.4 Sample description

Table 2.1 shows a selection of the Wave 1 sample characteristics. Parents in receipt of Parenting Payment Single are somewhat under-represented in the final sample, and those in

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<sup>6</sup> Machinery of government changes resulted in this area of work being incorporated into DEWR.

<sup>7</sup> Defined as paired-interviews as a percentage of in scope contacts – see Wave 1 fieldwork report in Appendix A.

receipt of Parenting Payment Partnered are over-represented. Also, amongst the partnered recipients, this sample has a much higher representation of Disability Support recipients than is found in the Parenting Payment Partnered population. The difference is important, as this sample has a much higher proportion of Parenting Payment recipients whose labour market experiences might be affected by some ongoing caring responsibilities.

Because of the size of the sample, and the means by which the initial sampling frame was selected, no statistical inferences can be drawn between the results presented in this report and the general population of Parenting Payment recipients. Rather, the purpose is to better understand how a diverse set of families in receipt of Parenting Payment adjust to the activity requirements.

**Table 2.1 Characteristics of Wave 1 sample**

	<b>Final sample</b>	
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	54	90%
Male	6	10%
<b>Benefit type</b>		
PP Single	26	43%
PP Partnered	34	57%
<b>Location</b>		
Capital City	26	43%
Other	34	57%
<b>Marital status</b>		
De facto	6	10%
Divorced	1	2%
Married	28	47%
Separated	17	28%
Single	8	13%
Widowed	0	0%
<b>State</b>		
ACT	1	2%
NSW	18	30%
NT	1	2%
Qld	14	23%
SA	3	5%
Tas	7	12%
Vic	12	20%
WA	4	7%
<b>Date of birth</b>		
1960 or after	33	55%
1959 or earlier	27	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	

A comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of the sample is included in Appendix 1. In addition to those points made above, other main points are:

- Most of the parents were female;
- The majority of parents had either no post-school qualifications or basic vocational qualifications. Amongst partnered respondents, most had partners with no post-school qualifications;

- The median duration on income support was 6.4 years and on Parenting Payment 5.5 years at Wave 1;
- Around half of the parents reported having an ongoing medical problem or disability that limited the work they could do, the kind of study they could undertake or the hours they could work. Most of these reported having a physical problem;
- Almost half of all parents had responsibilities to care for others with health problems. Some were providing care to partners, others to children; and
- Of the child respondents almost all were aged 13 or 14 at Wave 1 and there were slightly more boys than girls.

## **2.5 Participation Agreements and activities of the parent**

In order to ascertain how various parental activities differed in their impact on adolescents, a great deal of background information was collected about the Participation Agreement in both waves of the study. This section briefly summarises the main points, but the detail is given in Appendix 2.

### ***Ongoing versus new activities***

In Wave 1, just over half the respondents had only ongoing activities in their Participation Agreement. These respondents did not take on new activities as a result of the JET interview. For these people, the activities in the Participation Agreement included paid and voluntary work predominantly, but also study.

Those with new activities in Wave 1 included people with work-focused activities or study-focused activities predominantly. Some also had volunteer work or other activities. Just over half of those with new activities were doing *only* new activities, while the remainder took on new activities in addition to ongoing activities. A number of those with ongoing and new activities had previously been doing paid or unpaid work, and undertook to study as well for their Participation Agreement. Those with new activities only were less likely to be taking on work-focused activities.

### ***What is in the agreement***

In Wave 1, 25 respondents had work-focused activities in their agreement, 23 had study-focused activities, 20 had volunteer work, two had health maintenance and 14 had other activities. A number of people had more than one activity in their agreement, which explains why the total of these numbers adds to more than the 60 respondents.

By Wave 2, there were fewer in each category because of the sample attrition and because some respondents no longer had (or thought they no longer had) a Participation Agreement. Paid and unpaid work and study remained the predominant activities at Wave 2. The Wave 2 survey was predominantly used to examine the details of these activities and these details can be found in Appendix 2.

### ***Time spent doing activities***

Even though participants are required to undertake their activities for only up to six hours a week (on average), the majority spend much longer than this in their activities. About one-third of those with an agreement at Wave 2 were spending 25 hours or more a week on activities. Of the 11 undertaking their activities for 25 hours or more, six were working (of which two were also studying), three were combining voluntary work and study, one was just studying and one was undertaking caring responsibilities. Only eight of the Wave 2 respondents who said they still had an agreement spent six hours or less a week on their activities, and of these, four reported doing no hours, so were perhaps 'between activities'.

When asked why they spent longer on their activities than required, respondents doing study or voluntary work typically indicated that they were doing longer hours because this was what was required of the activity to which they had committed. For paid workers, it was because this was what the job required, and because they needed the income associated with that work.

### ***When activities are done***

Despite policy guidelines that only require people to undertake their activities within school hours, half of the respondents in Wave 1 said they carried out their activities outside the child's school hours or on the weekend. However, it was not always the 'new' activities that were being done outside school hours. There was a range of activities that involved outside school hours time. These activities included paid work, study (sometimes evening courses, sometimes courses finishing just after school hours), volunteer work (some of which was done with the children), and some only occasionally having to do activities outside school hours, for example, having to attend meetings in the evening. Similar findings came from the Wave 2 survey.

Having to do activities outside school hours can mean adolescents are left unsupervised for this time. However this was rarely found to be the case. This happened in three families in Wave 1 and in five families in Wave 2. In other families, other supervision arrangements were made for this time, or the child was actually with the parent. Even amongst those adolescents left alone, in most cases this was either done only occasionally or for a short period of time. Only in one case was the child clearly left on their own in the evenings on a regular basis.

### ***Developing and changing the Participation Agreement***

Further, much information was collected about how the Participation Agreement was developed and, if applicable, how it changed between Wave 1 and Wave 2. This information is given in detail in Appendix 2

### ***Children's understanding of the Participation Agreement***

The children's views form a key aspect of this study, and it is interesting to note that while many children were unaware of the existence, or the detailed meaning, of the Participation Agreement, they were quite aware of their parent's activities. Appendix 2 also contains a more detailed analysis of this information.

### ***Supplementary information***

The fieldwork reports from the SRC are presented in a separate volume as Appendix A (Wave 1) and Appendix B (Wave 2), along with a copy of the final questionnaire used in each wave.

# 3 The impact of activities on parents

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The literature suggests that any evaluation of the impact of Participation Agreements on children needs to take into account the impact of such agreements on the children's parents. For example, rewarding experiences in the workplace or through study may enhance parenting, with positive flow-on effects experienced by children, while stressful workplace or study experiences may have the opposite effect.

Parents were asked whether their agreed activities had an impact on various aspects of their lives including income, skills and abilities, health, and emotional wellbeing. Both parents and children reported that the most prevalent impact on parents from undertaking agreed activities related to emotional wellbeing. These impacts were viewed as both positive and negative, although in most families the positive impacts were perceived as outweighing the negatives. The positive impacts related to improvements in confidence and self-esteem, both in terms of the parent's own skills and abilities, and in terms of their capacity to parent their children well and to provide them with a positive role model. The negative impacts on emotional wellbeing centred on various forms of stress. These were often related to increased time pressures and balancing work and family, as well as concerns about individual abilities and capabilities to take on new challenges.

## 3.1 Income

Parents were asked whether at any time since signing their agreement, their agreed activities had had any impact on their income. While children were not asked a specific question about the impact of their parents' activities on their parents' income, income was one of the factors probed for if children were unable to identify any general positive or negative impact on their parent emerging from the agreed activities.

In about half the cases, there was no reported impact on family income as a result of the parent undertaking the agreed activities. This is because many of the activities were not paid, and few or no costs were incurred. Among those who reported that the activities had financial repercussions, most reported an increase in income. However in a few cases the child, the parent, or both reported a decrease.

### ***Increased actual or anticipated income***

Not surprisingly, increases in income resulted from the parent being in paid work. However, as discussed earlier, most of the parents undertaking paid work in this study had commenced working prior to signing their Participation Agreement, with only a few having taken up employment subsequently. In all cases of paid employment though, the perceptions of parents and children was that the increased income was a positive development for the family.

The responses from children tended to focus more on what it could provide. Several children said that the activities their parent undertook were good for their parent because their parent had more money and could provide more material resources for their family.

She gets more money so we can get better food and everything. (Child of single mother, aged 41, working and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=147, both waves)

Oh, well, she can support us a lot easier and say if something breaks down, like my bike or something, she can just go to the shop and get it fixed. (Child of single mother, aged 38, working, had done job search and studied

for a truck licence in the past, all activities began after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 1).

Several children said that they personally benefited because they received more pocket money than they used to or because their parent could spend more on them individually.

Some parents also discussed the benefits of having an increased family income. One talked about being able to afford to do more activities with her child. Others described feelings of increased financial security and emotional wellbeing resulting from increased income, described further below.

Some parents, who were not currently benefiting financially from doing their agreed activities, discussed the future financial gains they hoped to receive. They referred specifically to increased employment opportunities that would result from completing studies or doing volunteer work.

Children also talked about this. In a few cases where the parent was studying as part of their agreed activities, the child indicated an anticipated benefit because their parent would be able to get more money or a job with increased pay in the future. In one case both the parent and the child talk about the parent's activities leading to increased income in the future.

### **Reduced income**

The negative impacts on family income reported by several parents were most commonly associated with the costs incurred as a result of doing agreed activities. These include the costs related to study and transport to and from activities. For one parent, undertaking her agreed activity (study) had reduced her income from paid work because her study commitments prevented her from taking any additional casual work that periodically arose.

I suppose it probably stopped me doing a little bit of extra casual work if you know, that might have interfered with the study (Single mother, aged 45, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=86, Wave 2)

This mother had a history of undertaking casual work when it was available.

## **3.2 Skills and abilities**

Parents were asked whether their perception of their abilities had changed in any way since undertaking their agreed activities. An increase in skill or ability has the potential to increase the 'job-readiness' or employment prospects of parents through an improvement in their human capital, which in turn could also improve the position of the family through greater income or income security. Increased skills and ability can also improve the confidence and self-esteem of parents, which also has the potential to improve their employability, but also has the potential to spillover into the dynamics of the family including parenting ability and how the parent is viewed by the child (role model effect).

More than half the parents interviewed reported an effect on their skills and abilities, as did almost half of the children. Among those who reported a change, almost all said the impact was positive – their perception of their skills or abilities had increased. There was a key distinction between those who said they had actually learned new skills, and those who said they had become more conscious or aware of their existing skills, strengths or abilities, as a result of undertaking their activities. In contrast, a few parents said that their perception of their abilities had decreased since undertaking their activities, because they had realised their own weaknesses or limitations.

A reported increase in the parent's skills and abilities was most common in cases where the parent was undertaking paid work or particularly study as part of their agreed activities, with some parents undertaking voluntary work also reporting this effect. Parents and children were also more likely to report an effect where the activities were taken on since signing the Participation Agreement, rather than where the activities were ongoing. In most cases parents

talked about acquiring specific skills required for a job. However, several parents mentioned more generic or personal skills like increased awareness of how to handle new situations or being more organised in terms of managing their time.

One parent said they had learnt to be more assertive since undertaking their voluntary activities.

I just think I've got more ability now that I can... like I was always very quiet. I think I'm a little bit more outgoing now, and stand up for myself a little bit more. And, you know, doing the part time... the voluntary work has helped me do that. (Single mother, aged 54, doing volunteer work, studied in the past, began activities after signing agreement, ID=96, Wave 2)

Parents frequently said that their awareness of their skills and abilities had increased as a result of doing the activities. This increase in awareness was often related to an increase in self-confidence (see later).

Now I know I can do something else besides cook and clean and look after kids. (Laughs). (Partnered mother, aged 42, doing volunteer work, worked in the past, began both activities after signing the agreement ID=173)

For some this was a result of meeting with their JET Advisor and talking through the various activities they might be capable of. Several parents were initially concerned that they did not have the necessary skills or abilities to undertake their activities, but once they began their activities found them easier than expected, and their confidence increased as a result.

I've achieved way more than I thought I would. I never thought eighteen months ago I would have learned what I have and achieved what I have. (Partnered mother, aged 41, working part-time and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

I said to my JET personnel officer, I couldn't see myself learning the computer. I thought, no, I couldn't do that, and she's, oh, go on and give it a go. And I did. And I thought well, I can do that. Or I'm doing it, and I enjoy it, so, yes. It's positive feedback when you think I could work one of these if I had to. (Partnered mother, aged 39, completed volunteer work and study in the past, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=186, Wave 2)

### 3.3 Health

Parents were also asked whether their activities had affected their health at any time since signing their agreement. Direct impacts on physical health were reported in very few cases. In two cases, the parent said they had become ill more often since undertaking the activities because of exposure to more illnesses due to direct contact with others.

In contrast, one parent said the agreed activities had a positive affect on her physical health. This parent had a leg injury prior to making the agreement and said she became physically stronger as a result of the additional activity.

I'm a lot stronger now. I've got muscles! (laughs). (Partnered mother, aged 42, doing volunteer work, worked in the past, began both activities after signing the agreement, ID=173, Wave 2)

While few direct impacts on physical health were reported, several parents maintained that the influence of the agreed activities on their emotional wellbeing had flow-on effects for their physical health. Parents mentioned both beneficial and detrimental emotional circumstances (stemming from undertaking activities) that had affected their physical health in some way. Beneficial circumstances related to an improvement in confidence and sense of

self-worth, whereas negative impacts stemmed from increased levels of stress or anxiety associated with undertaking the new activities.

A few parents made direct connections between increased stress and anxiety and physical health issues. This included the worsening of an existing medical condition and an increased tendency to engage in unhealthy behaviours such as not eating properly. A deterioration in health was more likely amongst parents that already had an existing ongoing medical issue or had caring responsibilities for another family member, highlighting the additional barriers to participation that people in these circumstances face.

### 3.4 Emotional wellbeing

The most common impacts on parents of undertaking agreed activities related to changes in emotional wellbeing. These impacts were frequently reported both by parents and children and included a range of both positive and negative effects, with respondents often experiencing both. The two main positive dimensions of emotional wellbeing reported were increased confidence (or self-esteem), and increased happiness (or a more positive mood or satisfaction with life). In contrast, the main negative dimension of emotional wellbeing related to stress or tiredness, sometimes manifesting itself as increased levels of anger or irritability. However, there was also a minority of parents that also experienced a decrease in confidence or self-esteem as a result of undertaking their agreed activities.

Parents who started new activities after signing their agreements were significantly more likely to report positive impacts on their emotional wellbeing than those who continued to pursue activities that had been set in place well before the agreement was made. For those with new activities, the improvement in positive wellbeing was particularly related to greater social connectedness and improved self-confidence. However, many who had started their activities before the agreement was made, also talked about the emotional benefits of doing these activities. Parents who were taking on new activities as part of their agreement were also significantly more likely to report increases in stress and therefore decreases in emotional wellbeing compared to those with ongoing activities (reflecting the fact that parents often reported both positive and negative effects). For some proportion of these parents, however, the stress was a transitory event that diminished over time as they became more confident with the requirements of the activities.

Parents who had caring responsibilities for others were more likely to report that their stress levels had increased compared to other parents, with more than half of the parents with other caring responsibilities reporting this. Also, more than three quarters of parents who had a long-term health problem reported that their agreed activities had increased their sense of stress, or decreased the confidence in their own abilities.

It is noteworthy that some parents said the activities in the Participation Agreement had no impact on their stress levels either at Wave 1 or Wave 2. For some, this was simply because they did not take on any new activities as part of their agreement. However, one parent mentioned that undertaking new activities was not stressful because she had chosen the activities herself and felt control over what she was doing.

The impacts on the emotional wellbeing of the parent are important to consider due to the potential for significant 'spillover' effects on the child and the family. Apart from altering the state of mind of the parent (which may or may not impact on others depending on the magnitude of the impact), changes in emotional wellbeing can also affect the parenting style or confidence of the parent, the relationship of the parent with the child and others in the family and how the parent is perceived within the family (role model effect). All of these consequences are explored in greater depth in the next chapter on the impacts of the agreed activities on the child and the family. Evidence of a spillover effect transferring from parents to children is confirmed by the fact that there was a high degree of consistency in the responses from the parent and child in the same family for these emotional wellbeing impacts.

The remaining discussion on emotional wellbeing provides some context within which the impacts were felt.

### ***Increased confidence in abilities***

As discussed earlier, many parents' confidence or self-esteem increased as a result of doing their new activities because they had acquired new skills, knowledge or abilities, or because they had become more conscious or aware of their existing skills or abilities.

I feel good about myself that I'm learning something new. And it's a credit to me – you know what I mean. (Partnered mother, aged 49, doing volunteer work and studying, began volunteer work before signing the agreement and began studying after signing the agreement, ID=183, Wave 2)

As mentioned earlier, many parents initially felt incapable of undertaking activities like getting a job or completing a course of study, but 'proved themselves wrong' and were proud of their achievement. In several cases, this had led to a significant increase in the self-confidence of parents.

I've got more confidence in my job that I can actually do it - yes. But if you had asked me this two years ago, I wouldn't have, if someone had of told me two or three years ago that I would be doing what I'm doing now – I would have just looked at them and said 'yeah – whatever'. (laughs) (Single mother, aged 45, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=86, Wave 2)

Other parents described increased feelings of competence from being able to incorporate their new activities into already busy lives, and being able to cope with the demands of both work and family life.

I'm feeling more capable of controlling my work environment, and my home environment and just being able to cope with the workload that I'm taking on, I know I'm responsible for it and I'm in control of it. (Partnered mother, aged 45, working, done volunteer work and studies in past, began working after signing agreement, began other two activities before signing agreement, ID=160, Wave 2)

One child said their parent's confidence had increased because they were able to undertake activities that matched their skills. Both of these previous two points are noteworthy because a significant number of other parents experienced a decrease in their wellbeing resulting from the pressures of balancing work and family or a decrease in their confidence as a result of being asked to undertake activities they felt were beyond their capabilities.

### ***Perceived inability to undertake activities***

Several parents said they were stressed prior to making the agreement because they did not know what would be expected of them. In these cases, the requirement to undertake a Participation Agreement and go into Centrelink was stressful, and parents began to feel better after they had made the agreement, gained a greater understanding of what was expected of them, or actually gained a job.

I think it did at first. It really stressed me. Um, because I'm thinking what do they want me to do. You know, what am I supposed to do because I had no clear understanding of what he was talking about. ... I came out of there feeling stressed and no real, um, resolution of anything. You know, it was just a waste of my time, and then I thought, well, what am I supposed to be doing. I am looking for work anyway. Do I have to have a job by a certain time? What did he get me to sign? Um, yeah, and I was totally

stressed about it for ages. But then this job came up, and then I thought, oh, that's great, I've got a job. And then it just went out of my mind. I thought, well, stuff Centrelink, I've got a job. That's basically it. (Single mother, aged 54, doing health maintenance program, started after signing agreement, ID=154, Wave 2)

A couple of parents were concerned about the extent or nature of their responsibilities and whether they would be able to fulfil them. This could be linked to confidence, but also to competing demands on time.

I think it's a more a personal effect like the panic 'am I going to get it done?' 'is it going to get done properly?' (Single mother, aged 41, doing volunteer work and paid work (past), volunteer work started prior to signing the agreement and paid work started after signing the agreement, ID=156, Wave 2)

Several doubted their own capabilities in managing the tasks required in a work environment. Others were distressed about their inability to handle particular work tasks or study assignments, sometimes to the point of severe anxiety or panic. Fear of failure was often an initial reaction to the activity requirements, but tended to diminish over time as confidence increased.

I'm much more confident now. ... It was really horrible at the beginning I used to panic and get panic attacks and get really scared but I don't any more. Now I just go pink. (laughs). (Partnered mother, aged 35, studying and doing three volunteer jobs, two volunteer jobs started prior to signing agreement, other volunteer job and study started after signing agreement, ID=192, Wave 2)

For some parents, undertaking their agreed activities actually reduced their confidence or self-esteem by making them more aware of their perceived lack of ability in certain areas. For one mother her reduced capacities due to a recently acquired disability were highlighted. For another, the process of discussing her options and developing her agreement with her JET advisor made her aware of her limitations.

I get really stressed because when they want to talk about what I can and can't do it really highlights what I can't do and I get very upset. Once I get out of the office and I clear my head, I think 'okay that was good it was in my favour, I'm okay. But because it's when I go in there, if they're going to expect me to go back to, you know, [if they say] you have to go back to so many hours of this and so many hours of that, which is physically challenging. (Single mother, aged 44, doing training and health maintenance, done volunteer work in past, volunteer work began before signing agreement, other activities began after signing agreement, ID=163, Wave 2)

Another mother with a long-term health issue said her perception of her abilities had decreased since undertaking the activities, as she had become aware of certain weaknesses.

I don't feel as capable as I thought I would be. I don't think I've got the concentration to do something you know to a better high standard. (Single mother, aged 45, completed training in the past, currently engaged in job search and health maintenance, began all activities after signing agreement, ID=134, Wave 2)

### ***The effect of doing something worthwhile***

A key reason parents' feelings of self-worth had increased related to the positive feedback they received from others. Several children mentioned being proud of their parents and

several parents felt their children's respect for them had increased since undertaking their agreed activities.

Because I was actually doing something and I felt that the kids were proud. (Single mother, aged 35, done job search and studied in the past, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=59, Wave 2)

One single mother referred specifically to breaking free from the stigma associated with being a non-working single mother and being seen to be contributing to society.

The positives are that we can get out of the dreaded single-mother-don't-work syndrome, where you're looked down upon. We can change our circumstances. We can plan. We can make a difference in our world. (Single mother, aged 38, working, had done job search and studied for a truck licence in the past, all activities began after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

Many parents and children said the parent's activities made the parent happier or more positive about life because it provided them with something positive or worthwhile to do, besides caring for the house and family.

Yeah, it made me happy that I could get out of the house, I suppose. I get grumpy doing all the washing and all the ironing all the time. (Partnered mother, aged 39, done volunteer work and studied in past, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=186, Wave 2)

[My sense of wellbeing] improved more than anything because I'm actually doing something. Because I'm actually getting out and doing something, not sitting around. (Single mother, aged 41, doing job search, began activity after signing agreement, ID=178, Wave 2)

Well oh I just think it's because it's given her something to do when she's a bit down sometimes or put her in a positive mood. (Child of partnered mother, aged 45, working, done volunteer work and studies in past, began working after signing agreement, began other two activities before signing agreement, ID=160, Wave 2)

Many parents and children said the parent had improved wellbeing because the parent enjoyed doing their activities – they were intrinsically rewarding. Another child said their mother was not as bored as she used to be.

Parents' self-esteem also increased because they considered they were doing something worthwhile, either for themselves or something helpful or useful for others. One child and several parents said that the parent's self-esteem had improved because the parent was providing a good role model for her children. In some cases this was also linked to an improved relationship between parent and child. The issues of parents as role models and the parent-child relationship are explored further in the next chapter.

### ***The effect of improved social connectedness***

Another reason commonly provided for improved emotional wellbeing of parents concerned the increased social interaction and connections made since undertaking the activities. Both parents and children suggested that parents were happier because they had made new friends and were socialising more often.

I like being in the social network, I reacquainted myself with how to mix with different kinds of people. (Single father, aged 40, working, studied in the past, began study before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=3, Wave 2)

She likes to get out there more. Like meet new friends and like just get more like a feel of the workforce again. (Child of single mother, aged 38, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=127, Wave 2)

Engaging in activities outside the home and developing new social connections were also seen as confidence boosters by many parents.

Well getting out into the workforce, meeting, being around other people and that instead of being home all the time you do get a bit more self confidence because you can lose it when you're sitting at home all the time. (Single mother, aged 45, working and doing volunteer work, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=95, Wave 2)

Also, among parents who identified a reduction in their levels of stress, the most common reason given was the social contact and support gained from undertaking agreed activities.

When you go out of the house and you talk to some other people and spend a few hours out of the house it helps a lot. (Partnered mother, aged 51, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=212, Wave 2)

I haven't been stressed out or anything....because it's getting me out the house. I'm not sort of sitting at home everyday. I'm getting out and meeting people and doing things. (Single mother, aged 54, doing volunteer work, studied in the past, began activities after signing agreement, ID=96, Wave 2)

While parents were not asked directly about the social benefits of undertaking their new activities, outside of the issues they were directly asked about, parents mentioned the social benefits of work more than any other issue. This includes 'just getting out of the house' as well as making new friends, meeting new people, going out more, and socialising more with others. Children also talked about the social benefits of activities for parents more frequently than any other issue. While some children were prompted to think about the social benefits (if they initially did not mention any other benefits for parents of undertaking their activities), most children talked about the social benefits without being prompted.

While increased social activity and social connections were consistently seen as a positive thing, some did not state this explicitly or elaborate on why. Increased social connections could be of benefit to parents for other reasons as well as their effect on parent's emotional wellbeing, including, for example, the opportunities they provide for economic participation.

## **Stress**

More than half the parents mentioned having higher levels of stress at some time since taking on their activities. Note, though, that this stress did not necessarily occur because of the requirements of the Participation Agreement, as many families had started their activities before the Participation Agreement was put in place. Stress related to time pressures was the most common concern amongst the respondents, as it is in many working families. Many parents were more stressed than previously because the activities had reduced the amount of time they had for other aspects of their lives. Several mentioned difficulty juggling work and family responsibilities, including concern about not being able to keep up with household tasks.

Oh well, the more teaching I had to do the more it could be stressful. Coming home was more stressful because you know the dishes would be piled in the sink 'Mummy's not there so we'll wait for her to do it' you know. (Single mother (partnered at Wave 1), aged 58, working and caring for relative, began both activities before agreement, ID=60, Wave 2)

One parent mentioned not having time for herself, in order to relax.

I don't even have the time to even veg out at times which I feel I need to on the weekend before I go back to work but I find I'm normally having to play 'catch-up'. (Partnered mother, aged 41, working part-time and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

One child also mentioned that her mother had less time for herself and needed a break. Several parents and children said the parent was more likely to be tired since undertaking their agreed activities. In a few cases, like the ones quoted below, both said the parent was more often tired, but parents were more likely than children to link tiredness to increased stress or reduced emotional wellbeing.

I don't even have time to recharge my battery and yes, I'm finding it, I'm becoming very tired at the moment actually and very stressed actually. (Partnered mother, aged 41, working part-time and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

When she gets home she's really tired and she's always sort of working like doing other things like when she gets home from work so you don't get to see her a lot. (Child of partnered mother, aged 41, working part-time and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

Several parents said the nature of their activity was inherently stressful. This includes some who were working, some who were studying and some who were undertaking job search. One mother said her work was inherently stressful because of the unpleasant and unsupportive nature of the work environment. Several parents who were studying found exam time and approaching assignment deadlines to be stressful. Another said that the study she was required to do was stressful because she felt unsupported and left to her own devices.

In some cases, parents and children said the parent was angry or irritable more often since undertaking their agreed activities. This was linked in some cases to 'a bad day in the office', or the stressful nature of the work environment. In other cases it was linked to difficulty keeping up with other activities and commitments, or physical or emotional exhaustion. In a few cases, stress and time pressures were exacerbated because parents found themselves working under difficult conditions, such as night time and shift work, as the following example suggests.

I just get so angry and you know, I just get so tired because I get up at 1.30, I go to work at 2.30, or may knock off at 7.30, then it's time to come home, get [my younger children] to school. My eldest [child] doesn't have a licence, then I've got to drive her 20 minutes to work, come home, try and get study done, housework done, all the rest of it, then it's time to go and pick them up again, and pick her up again, and try and get some sleep in between all this time. ... Yeah, I just ... some weeks I get very stressed with it, other weeks I just go with the flow. (Single mother, aged 41, working and studying, began both activities after signing agreement ID=147, Wave 2)

Sometimes she gets cranky over little things...because she's too tired. (Child of above parent, Wave 2)

Those reporting negative stress were spending, on average, longer hours per week in their activities, compared to those who reported that their activities had no impact on their stress.

In summary, a lot of parents and children indicated higher levels of stress when agreed activities were commenced, although there was not a lot of evidence that this was causing significant detrimental impacts on the family. Much of the stress was transitory in nature, which is reflected in part by the fact that respondents with new activities were more likely to report stress than those with ongoing activities. Where stress was ongoing, it often related to

time pressures and was something that any family would face in balancing work and family responsibilities. Less family-friendly work arrangements may exacerbate this problem.

### **3.5 Overall impact on parent**

In Wave 2, both parents and children were asked a concluding question about whether the impact of parents' activities on parents had been positive or negative overall. The overwhelming majority of both parents and children assessed the effect on parents as positive overall, with the balance reporting no overall effect. No parent or child felt the effect was negative overall.

Analysis of the comments of parents and children who elaborated on why they felt the impact was positive overall, shows mostly a reiteration of themes that arose in their responses to previous questions about impacts on parents. In the majority of cases, parents and children talked about effects on parents' emotional wellbeing, rather than more concrete benefits like increased money or skills and abilities. Many children and several parents said the parent had been happier or in a more positive mood since undertaking the agreed activities. Others reiterated that the parent's confidence or self-esteem had improved. After emotional wellbeing, the second most common impact mentioned were the social benefits for parents, which are also closely linked to improved emotional wellbeing. In a few cases, parents and children mentioned new skills and knowledge or increased money. But analysis in this chapter has shown that increased skills or money often led to improvements in parents' emotional wellbeing, for example through the effect they in turn had on parents' self-confidence, sense of security, or optimism about the future.

Additional comments from parents that were not mentioned by children were that the effect on them had been positive because they had needed 'a push' to get out of the house and consider new challenges. Several parents who had begun new activities as part of their participation agreement said they has always wanted or planned to return to work or start a new course of study or voluntary activity but needed a push, and some assistance, to get out there and do it. While this was not mentioned by children, it reverberated more widely in the comment made by both parents and children that the activities had been good overall simply because they had gotten the parent out of the house and 'doing something'. The parent having something additional to do outside the house and family – an additional dimension to their life – was seen as a generally positive thing, as long as it did not interfere with the quality of family life.

# 4 Direct and indirect impacts on children

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The previous chapter was concerned with the direct impacts on parents resulting from having to undertake their agreed activities. The direct impacts on parents were important to consider because of what the literature calls the ‘spillover’ effects from parents to children, which could impact on issues such as the nature of the relationship between the parent and the child, the parenting style adopted by the parent with respect to the child, and how the parent is viewed by the child and others (the parent as a role model).

This chapter considers how parent’s activities have affected the child with respect to these and other issues, both directly, and indirectly. It commences with a discussion of how the parent’s activities have affected the relationships in the child’s life. This is followed by a discussion of how parent’s activities have affected their parenting abilities, including their ability to supervise their child, and the child’s level of responsibility for themselves. How the parent’s agreed activities have affected how the parent is perceived by the child and others, and the parent’s specific involvement in the child’s schooling and social activities, are addressed in the next two sections. In the final section before a summary, there is an examination of behavioural changes in children as reported by their parents, including increased and decreased incidences of antisocial behaviour and problems at school, and positive behaviours such as doing well at school.

## 4.1 Impacts on relationships with family and friends

This section begins with an examination of the impact of parents’ agreed activities on children’s relationships. This includes the child’s relationship with the parent in receipt of Parenting Payments, with their other parent (resident or non-resident), siblings, friends and any other significant relationships. For couple families, there is also an examination of the impact on the parent’s activities on the parent’s relationship with their partner.

### *Relationship with parent interviewed*

In interviews with both parents and children, a lot of attention was given to changes in the relationship between the child and the parent doing the activities, as this was expected to be one of main ways in which the parent’s activities would impact on the child.

In the vast majority of cases, both parents and children reported that the activities had an impact on the time they spent together, with most having less time together since the parent began doing the agreed activities. However, in a number of cases the parent and child had more time together because the parent had taken on paid work or voluntary work at the child’s school or with a sporting or social group the child was involved with, as part of their Participation Agreements.

Reduced time together was usually, but not always, seen as a negative thing. However, while in the vast majority of cases an impact on the time the parent and child spent together was reported, in only a small number of cases did the parent or child feel this had affected how well the parent and child were getting along. Moreover, where the quality of the parent and child relationship was affected, positive effects were reported more often than negative ones.

The few negative effects on the quality of the parent and child relationship stemmed from time pressures. Some parents were concerned about having less time overall, some about having less ‘quality time’, and some about not being available for their children at times when they were most needed (e.g. when they were sick, or when they first got home from school).

As reflected in the quote below, having less time together, or less “quality time”, was seen to have a negative impact on the relationship when it led to a deterioration in communication between the parent and the child.

When [child] used to come home from school, I’d pick her up – we’d come home from school, we’d sit down and have a talk about the day. I’d say to her you know ‘what’s happened in your day?’ Now I sort of rush home to pick her up now I’m sort of throwing washing in the washing machine, either sorting out bills or further food shopping or whichever and getting ready for my course and I don’t really have [much time], and I really miss that and I know for a fact she misses that. But we don’t have that quality time of just sitting down, just girl time and talking about things. (Partnered mother, aged 41, working and studying, both activities begun after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

In the following case, both the parent and child reported that they no longer had time to talk and that as a result they had less of an understanding of each other.

Negative. Because we don’t have the time to talk like we used to and sometimes I think we both feel frustrated and tired with the situation that we don’t understand where each other are coming from do you know what I mean? (Partnered mother, aged 41, Working and studying, both activities begun after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

We have an alright relationship but I don’t think it’s as good as it used to be because we don’t get to talk any more and like I used to tell her everything, like about school and everything but I don’t get to do that any more so I think it’s changed (Child of above parent)

Several parents said their relationship with their child was weakened, or they were not as close to their child, as a result of having less time together. This meant they were less in tune with their child’s lives and less able to monitor their child’s behaviour.

Oh not picking up things as quickly with the kids or things tend to slip through; don’t notice, not as in tune with them and what they’re doing. (Partnered mother, aged 47, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=100, Wave 2)

One mother reported friction in her relationship with her son because she was not home when he first got home from school, and she was less in touch with what he was doing.

Well, because I’m not here to always know what he’s doing, then, um, he can gloss over a lot of things, or I might be too tired to ask or, and then later on they’ll turn into issues. Whereas before I would have known that. And that’s caused a bit of friction between us, I guess. (Single mother, aged 38, doing paid work, job search (past) and truck license, all after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

While most respondents considered a reduction in time between the parent and child to have negative ramifications for the parent-child relationship, this was by no means universal. One parent felt that she and her child had grown apart a bit and that her child had become more independent, but did not allude to the change being particularly negative, but rather inevitable.

Maybe we’ve grown apart a little bit. Her age and sharing a little bit and growing apart a little bit more, becoming more independent. (Child of partnered mother, aged 45, working, done volunteer work and studies in past, began working after signing agreement, began other two activities before signing agreement, ID=160, Wave 2)

Other parents talked about appreciating their time with their child more because they had less time together overall. One said they made better use of the little time they did have.

It's bringing us closer I think. ...Well we're making more use of the time that I am available and we're learning that it's more precious and we're putting more into it (Partnered mother, aged 45, working, done volunteer work and studies in past, began working after signing agreement, began other two activities before signing agreement, ID=160, Wave 2)

A similar response was provided by a parent whose child was doing more activities on his own. This was seen as a positive thing because doing more activities separately meant that the time they did spend together had improved, and this improved their relationship.

I think we're like probably not so much in each others faces – [child's name] found friends of his own now and also that we have separate activities that we find we are getting on better and that when we are together we enjoy it more and we use it more to our advantage to like to do different things you know. (Partnered mother, aged 44, studying (past), started after signing agreement, ID=161, Wave 2)

Similarly, another child said her mother's activities were of benefit to their relationship because they provided an opportunity for them to have a bit of a break from each other.

Well, it gives me time to be like myself and it gives her a bit of a break from us. (Child of partnered mother, aged 43, activities unknown, ID=55, Wave 2)

Undertaking agreed activities not only affected the time available for the parent to spend with the child, it also affected the parent's ability to perform other tasks such as household chores, which often lead to an increased role around the house for children. Having less time for household tasks and thus calling on children to help more was seen by two parents to have improved their relationship with their child. The fact that their child was co-operative and helped out when needed was seen as a positive and resulted in a greater level of mutual appreciation.

While the majority of respondents identified a reduction in the amount of time spent together as a result of the parent undertaking the agreed activities, this was not always the case. Some parents and children had more time together because the volunteer or paid work parents were doing involved helping out at their child's school or with a sporting or social group the child belonged to. On the whole, this increased involvement was seen as a positive thing. It usually meant the parent felt closer to the child and was more involved in the child's life. Parents talked about their relationship with their child improving as a result of having a common interest in the activities and being able to do them together.

Positive...because she enjoys the activities as well. Therefore we're doing them together and enjoying it – yeah. (Single mother, aged 41, doing volunteer work and paid work (past), volunteer work started prior to signing the agreement and paid work started after signing the agreement, ID=156, Wave 2)

I think it would be a positive thing...because it's a common interest that we share (Single father, aged 38, helping out as a volunteer with his son's sport, started before signing agreement, ID=142, Wave 2)

However, one mother who was doing volunteer work at her child's school had mixed feelings about the effect on her relationship with the child. On the one hand she felt it brought herself and her child closer together because her child knew that she was there for him if he needed her. On the other hand she thought it had caused tension in her relationship with her child because they were spending too much time together. However, even after prompting the child did not mention any negative effects.

I think it's [a negative effect on relationship] because I'm at school as well. I suppose most kids get away from their parents during the day. So he doesn't have that ... (Single mother, studying, started before signing agreement, child has dyslexia, now appears to be doing part time paid work at child's school, ID=179, Wave 2)

Finally, in some cases, communication between the parent and the child had improved because the parent was doing something new, even if it was not an activity the parent and child did together, because it gave them more to talk about, and this in turn improved the parent-child relationship. For one parent, undertaking a course of study meant she was doing something that she and her child could both identify with, thus providing them with common experiences that they could discuss together.

Well, we've got things to talk about – like when you do a course, you find out all these sort of (even if it's trivial) information, something to talk about. Yeah, the communication between us has – oh, we've always had a good relationship, but now we've got something different to talk about, other than me, oh, I vacuumed today. (Single mother, aged 45, working and doing volunteer work, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=95, Wave 1)

### ***Relationship with other resident parent***

About half the families in this study were couple families. In these families, both parent and child were asked whether they felt that the parent's activities were affecting the relationship the child had with the other resident parent. In the majority of cases neither parent nor child felt there had been any effect. In most cases where an effect was reported, the effect was seen as positive. In these cases, the child's relationship with their other resident parent was said to have become closer, because the child spent more time with their other parent, or more 'one on one' time. Both parents and children reported this effect.

Well yes it does in a way because if I'm not here, she's there with [my partner], and you know sometimes they sit and have a talk or whatever and I think it does because it's more one on one for them. (Partnered grandmother, aged 57, six volunteer jobs, some begun before signing agreement and some begun after signing agreement, ID=153, Wave 2)

Yeah, it's got better because Mum's not here sometimes. (Child of partnered mother, aged 53, volunteer work (past) and study (past), both begun after signing agreement, ID=155, Wave 2).

In two cases, negative effects were reported. In both the mother had begun new activities under the Participation Agreement and the child felt resentful towards the father because they now had less time with their mother, and felt their dad was responsible. In the first case it was clear the child thought the father should be the one working.

I think because like Mum has to work and not him and in a way like he should be the one working but like I think for daughters they mainly you know spend time with their Mums but it's like the opposite and I think that's why I guess I can't understand why he can't work. (Child of partnered mother, aged 41, working and studying, both activities begun after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

In the other case the mother said her son was resentful because he saw her working and thought his father was not helping as much as he could, also possibly implying that the child felt the father should be the one working, or else that the father should be helping more in other ways.

### ***Relationship with non-resident parent***

In all cases where the child had a parent living elsewhere, changes in the relationship between the non-resident parent and the child were explored. In about a third of these cases the child had no ongoing relationship with their non-resident parent. Of the remaining families, only one reported any impact on the relationship between the non-resident parent and the child as a result of the resident parent now undertaking their agreed activities. In this case, the mother said the child's relationship with their non-resident father had improved because the father had had to help more since she had become busier.

### ***Relationship with siblings***

In only a couple of cases did children report any effect on their relationship with siblings as a result of their parent undertaking agreed activities, and in both these cases the effect was seen as negative. As the following two quotes illustrate, in both of these cases the child said they argued more with their siblings because their mother was not around as much to prevent or control it.

Probably my relationship with my sister's getting a bit worse. ... There's been more arguments and stuff because Mum hasn't been around to stop it. (Child of partnered mother, aged 47, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=100, Wave 2)

We used to how to handle each other and when not to speak and stuff and when to control it but now we just go psycho at each other. (Child of single mother, aged 41, doing job search, began activity after signing agreement, ID=178, Wave 2)

While there were no cases in which children said their relationship with their siblings had improved as a result of their parent's undertaking their agreed activities, several children mentioned that there had been an improvement in their relationship with their siblings over the past year for other reasons, for example, just getting older and becoming more responsible or mature.

### ***Parent's relationship with partner***

Partnered parents were also asked whether their relationship with their partner had been affected in any way as a result of them undertaking their new activities. This was considered important because children may be affected by any changes, particularly tension, in their parents' relationship. Overall, partnered parents reported little change in the relationship with their partner as a result of having to undertake their activities. The few who did report an impact were fairly evenly split between positive and negative effects.

Positive impacts included their partner being interested in or supportive of their activities, as well as the opportunity that the activities provided to have a break from each other. One mother said that undertaking her agreed activities had enabled her to have a bit of a break from her husband who had a medical problem that required her care.

Maybe it's a bit better because otherwise you'd be here you know, all day...because he's [partner is] slowing down and doing more and in more pain. You're doing sort of more but if you didn't get out, I think I'd be, you know, yelling at him. (Partnered mother, aged 57, doing six volunteer jobs, some started before and some started after signing agreement, ID=153, Wave 2)

In terms of negative impacts, one mother explained that the increased time pressures resulting from her agreed activities had placed a strain on her relationship with her partner, which, in turn, had generated considerable personal stress. Another mother said that having to undertake her agreed activities placed more demand on her former partner (they were

separated at Wave 2) to help out with running the household, which in turn created considerable stress between them.

Two other mothers whose partners had significant health problems felt that the limited time they had to look after their partner (as a result of having to undertake their agreed activities) placed considerable pressure on the couple's relationship. One had a husband who suffered from severe depression and was often suicidal – problems that were more difficult for her to monitor given her agreed activities. The other had a husband with a chronic illness where he was constantly in pain. Her work commitments interfered with her ability to take him to medical appointments. This mother also noted, however, that the break from caring responsibilities necessitated by her agreed activities was also beneficial to the relationship.

Finally, it should be noted that one parent clearly did not want to answer this question. It is possible that some of the other parents who maintained that the agreed activities had no effect on their relationship with their partner also felt uncomfortable about discussing this issue.

### ***Relationship with friends***

Respondents reported both positive and negative effects of the parent's agreed activities on the child's relationships with his or her friends, although positive effects tended to outweigh negative effects overall. In several cases, the child spent more time with their friends because the parent was not around as much, and this was generally seen as a positive thing by both parents and children. In one case the child said she was closer to her friends as a result.

Yeah I've been closer with my friends and stuff because we go out more and hang out more. (Child of single mother, aged 41, doing job search, began activity after signing agreement, ID=178, Wave 2)

The parent in this case also viewed this development positively, as it provided her daughter with opportunities to demonstrate more responsibility for making decisions about whom she wanted to spend time with.

Actually yes, it's probably given her more freedom to be with them. It's improving her responsibility because she's got to make the choices now, it's not me doing it for her. (Single mother, aged 41, doing job search, began activity after signing agreement, ID=178, Wave 2)

One mother suggested her son was more willing to introduce her to his friends, and another mother indicated that her son was more willing to bring his friends over, although she was not sure if this was because of the agreed activities.

Well they seem to be here more often so they're quite comfortable coming here. So, I don't know whether its because of the agreed activities or he just wants his friends at home. (Partnered mother, aged 45, working, done volunteer work and studies in past, began working after signing agreement, began other two activities before signing agreement, ID=160, Wave 2)

One mother, who was doing voluntary work at her daughter's soccer club as part of her agreed activities, said she received more respect from her daughter's friends since undertaking these activities.

It might have had a positive on her there because most of her friends play soccer too. So they respected me and respected her and because of my involvement with the soccer everybody appreciated that. And what I did. (Partnered mother, aged 42, was doing volunteer work (past), started prior to signing agreement, ID=188, Wave 2)

One child said that her father was happier since undertaking his agreed activities and because of this has gotten to know her friends better and got along with them better.

Oh maybe yeah a bit only because Dad gets along with them better because he knows them much better. He [used to be] home more but he was more stressed out so he didn't have time to get to know my friends and you know stuff like that. But now he's happy. (Child of single father, aged 40, working, studied in the past, began study before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=3, Wave 2)

One parent said she was able to monitor her child's friendships more easily because she was doing voluntary work in the community and at the child's school as part of her agreed activities. While it is not clear how this would affect the child's friendships, the parent felt the child would be less likely to 'play up' with her friends as a result.

In contrast, one parent said her child was less able to go out with friends because she was less able to supervise this activity. In this case the parent's activities were seen to have a negative effect on the child's friendships. Similarly, one child said his friends didn't come around as much because his mother was now working.

Well, my friends don't come around as much any more because [my mother] is working heaps. (Child of single mother, aged 31, working, did volunteer work and study in past, began all activities before signing agreement, ID=148, Wave 1)

Another parent, who was working at her child's school as part of her agreed activities, thought her presence at the school created problems with the child's school peers.

Because I'm at the same school as him it's caused a few problems with some of his peers so I've had to request to not be in any of his classes. That hasn't worked out because one of the special education students that I work with is actually in a couple of [child's name]'s classes so we just pretend we don't know each other (laughs). (Single mother, studying, started before signing agreement, child has dyslexia, now doing part-time paid work at child's school, ID=179, Wave 2)

Finally, one mother whose son had behavioural problems prior to her starting her agreed activities said that her son had become more anxious and more aggressive with his friends since she had undertaken her agreed activities.

I think it's negative because he sort of has this thing in his mind that he's really tough and he's quite aggressive and he's, yeah, he's a bit of a bully, so the fact that I don't know every move, I think that has had an effect on his friends. I think there are a few ripples of anxiety out there. ...Well, he's a bit of a stand over merchant, you know. He'll sort of stand over and intimidate and that's sort of how it's been since I've been working. He sort of feels that, you know, because I'm not here all the time. Like, he can't just go between here and school, there are other great things out there now, and he's sorting of lording it over the other kids at the moment. In an aggressive way, but I think we can settle that down, too. Hopefully. (Single mother, aged 38, doing paid work, job search (past) and truck license, all after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

## **4.2 Parent's capacity to parent and supervise their child**

Parents were asked whether the activities they had undertaken as part of the Participation Agreement had affected the way they felt about themselves as parents. Around two thirds of parents indicated that the agreed activities had had some impact on their parenting abilities, but interestingly about two thirds of those impacts were positive in nature. Most parents talked about having more or less time with children, or being more or less stressed, or happy, with these resulting experiences either compromising, or alternatively, enhancing their ability to parent. Similar issues also arose in the child interviews (time together, quality of parent-

child interaction, and parent's stress or happiness), but children were less likely to link them to parenting behaviour or children's needs. The reporting of impacts on parenting was mainly concentrated in families where the parent was undertaking a new activity as a result of signing the Participation Agreement and where families were having to make adjustments to the way the family functioned.

### ***The impact of tiredness and stress on parenting***

As noted in the previous chapter, a significant proportion both of parents and children mentioned that the activities parents undertook had made them more tired or stressed. Many parents were concerned that this had affected their capacity to be a good parent.

I feel angry. I feel sad. Not sad I feel tired and I feel worn out and I try to do the best I can as a parent. (Partnered mother, aged 49, doing volunteer work and studying, began volunteer work before signing the agreement and began studying after signing the agreement, ID=183, Wave 2)

Sometimes she gets tired because she's doing like other work and stuff but she's always willing to help. (Child of above parent, Wave 2)

In addition, several parents and children said that the parent got angry or irritable more often because he or she was more often tired and stressed. This was mentioned by both the mother and child in the following family, where the mother was doing shift work as part of her agreed activities:

Some days I just feel horrid because I've yelled at the kids or something because they don't do what I want them to do. ... and then they get upset, and then I feel horrible because I've yelled at them. ... some days are worse than others. It all depends on how it's gone. Like, at 2.30 in the morning, whether I've had a bad day at work or not. Whether the machine's broken down, or whether everything has just run perfectly or not. (Single mother, aged 41, working and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=147, Wave 2)

Sometimes she gets cranky over little things. ... Because she's too tired. (Child of above parent, Wave 2)

On the other hand, several parents felt they had become better parents because they were now happier and more satisfied with their lives and therefore more calm and tolerant as parents. In some cases, parents and children commented that this had indirectly improved the parent-child relationship. By doing the agreed activities, parents were generally happier and felt better about themselves and these sentiments transferred to the household, reducing tension and resulting in a more amicable relationship.

I can be more calm with [child's name] now. I'm not so uptight at times. ... I was getting a bit short-tempered with him sometimes. ... I think because I was stuck at home. You know, and I was getting a bit uptight, but now I'm like getting out a little bit more. (Single mother, aged 54, doing volunteer work, studied in the past, began activities after signing agreement, ID=96, Wave 2)

If you're not doing anything and you're curled up in a ball and you're depressed and you feel absolutely terrible you're not going to have a very nice welcome for when she comes home from school. I'd be jumping on her I suppose. More. It's your own happier frame of mind for yourself makes a happier frame of mind of everybody else. (Partnered grandmother, aged 57, six volunteer jobs, some begun before signing agreement and some begun after signing agreement, ID=153, Wave 2)

I reckon it's a positive effect. ... Because she's not as grumpy as she used to be. (Child of the above grandmother, Wave 2)

### **Supervision**

Parents were also asked whether their agreed activities had had any effect on their ability to supervise their child. Only one third said it had any effect at all. This was often because parents were doing their agreed activities during school hours and were therefore available to supervise their children when they were home. For one parent, her activity was carried out at home, which meant that she was able to keep an eye on her child and do her activity simultaneously. There were also parents whose agreed activities meant that they were absent from home outside of school hours, but who still felt that their ability to supervise their children was not jeopardised. They ensured that alternative care was available with their partner, older siblings, another trusted adult or a trusted friend of the child. One parent also kept in regular phone contact with her child when she could not be around.

There were a small number of cases in the study where the parent's activities were undertaken outside school hours and the child was on occasion left unsupervised when the parent was doing these activities. One might expect all of these parents to report that their activities had a negative impact on their ability to keep an eye on their child, but in most of these cases the parent was not worried about their ability to monitor the child. This was usually because the child was very rarely left alone, the parent stayed closely in touch with the child and/or felt they always knew where the child was and what they were doing. In only one of these cases did the parent feel their ability to monitor their child had been reduced since undertaking their activities. This child had experienced behavioural problems since he was young, but the mother felt that they had worsened between Wave 1 and Wave 2, because in the past she could always be there to monitor and manage him.

Oh, yeah, it's definitely done a big, big slide downwards. ... He just seems to go completely off the rails when he thinks I'm not going to be here and when he gets home, and he's been skipping class and walking out of school. Not turning up for school, and he thinks I might be not home. So, it's very much changed that. ... When I started the job, when I was here, before I got a job, everything was fine on the home front, but as soon as I started working, they started to wobble. (Single mother, aged 38, doing paid work, job search (past) and truck license, all after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

Even in this case the mother only left the child alone for an hour or so after school. However, this parent felt that the child's behaviour had become so bad that by Wave 2 she had sent him to live with his father for a while.

Oh, yeah, absolutely. That is a negative. That's why he's going off the rails because he knows that I'm not going to be home sometimes till 5.30 or, you know. And he can't be babysat at 15 all the time. So, yeah, that's why he's down at his dad's, pulling him back a bit. ... It's just harder to do what I have to do, to please the government and still be a good parent without having to send him down, and everybody thinking I'm a bad parent because I can't keep it together. (Single mother, aged 38, working, had done job search and studied for a truck licence in the past, all activities began after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

Several other parents felt their agreed activities had had a negative effect on their ability to keep an eye on their children, even though the child was never left unsupervised. One mother whose activities were outside school hours but whose child was looked after by someone else when she was working said she felt her ability to supervise her child was inadequate because she was not able to be there for her child in the mornings or evenings, and felt out of touch with what he was doing.

Yeah because see, he leaves school like at quarter past eight, I pick him up at 3:30 and then I start work at four so I've got no idea what he's doing of a night. I don't finish until 10:30. (Single mother, aged 31, working, did volunteer work and study in past, began all activities before signing agreement, ID=148, both waves)

Another parent who was undertaking her activities only within school hours felt her level of supervision was inadequate because she was not able to spend as much time with her child.

I just can't be there 24/7. Basically, I mean in one way it's good looking for work but in another way it's preparing for the work type thing, it's I just don't spend that much time with her...(Single mother, aged 41, doing job search, began activity after signing agreement, ID=178, Wave 2)

Another mother who was undertaking activities only within school hours said her son's schooling had gone downhill since she had undertaken her new activities because he skipped class if she was not around to ensure he attended. Another was concerned that she could not be contacted if her child got into trouble at school.

The school can't get hold of me if he doesn't turn up. He's known for truanting at times, getting into trouble at school. They just can't get hold of me. (Partnered mother, aged 42, doing volunteer work and study, both started after signing agreement, ID=121, Wave 2)

For one other parent, supervision was not an issue except for when her child was suspended from school and she could not be home to keep an eye on him. Instead she had to make alternative arrangements with extended family members. This parent did not relate the child being suspended with the requirement to undertake activities.

It is important to note that in some of these cases where the parent was concerned about their capacity to supervise and be available for their child, the child had pre-existing behavioural problems – an issue followed up in the final section of this chapter.

Two parents reported a positive effect of their agreed activities on their ability to supervise their children. One was doing voluntary work at her child's school and was therefore better able to monitor the child during school hours. The other parent had built up social networks by doing volunteer work and through these social networks was kept well informed about her child's whereabouts and activities.

### ***Increased responsibility***

One of the most commonly reported consequences from both parents and children stemming from parents undertaking agreed activities was an increase in responsibility on the part of the child. Just over half of families reported such an increase. In most cases, either the child had to do more for themselves, or had to do more around the house, since the parent had commenced their agreed activities. Examples included the child having to make their own breakfast or lunch, transport themselves to and from school, or do more household chores.

Often the change had occurred because the parent was not at home in order to do these things for the child or family, with increased responsibility being reported more frequently in cases where the parent was undertaking new activities or activities outside school hours. However, changes also occurred in cases where parents were not doing any activities outside school hours, simply because the parent was busier than they used to be and the child had to contribute more.

Most parents and children considered the child's increased responsibility a positive development, with the taking on of increased responsibility for oneself or others seen as an important part of growing up.

Well it's making her more responsible for herself. She's learning to do things for herself – I don't have to run after her. ... she's got to make the choices now, it's not me doing it for her. (Single mother, aged 41, doing job search, began activity after signing agreement, ID=178, Wave 2)

Yeah well we had to start looking after ourselves more since Mum's been out we have to like sometimes we cook dinner for ourselves and stuff which is cool. ...because she doesn't have that much time anymore and we should probably learn to do it because we have to like start doing it for ourselves. (Child of above parent, Wave 2)

I think it actually helped him because I actually was away, for a little bit longer than usual. And he wasn't doing what he was supposed to do. So he saw that I was doing something and that he had to actually look after himself more. So yeah I think it did have a positive effect on him. (Partnered mother, aged 44, studied (past), started after signing agreement, ID=161, Wave 2)

It's improved a bit. Because I've been more independent. ... Because she's not around I have to do stuff for myself and I've just learned to do that. (Child of above parent, Wave 2)

In most cases, the child was willing to take on this additional responsibility without a lot of discussion and as a result parents reported an increased respect for, and/or increased expectations of, their child. One parent noted that her daughter's self-confidence had improved since being given more responsibility for herself.

Well she's now got house keys so she can let herself in if her sister happens to not be home and I think the responsibility of having keys makes her feel much better about herself (Partnered mother, aged 42, doing paid work (past) and volunteer work, both started after signing agreement, ID=173, Wave 2)

And one child noted feeling more trusted by their parent.

He's been able to trust us more...because we're older and more mature. Like mature enough to look after ourselves. (Child of single father, aged 38, helping out as a volunteer with his son's sport, started before signing agreement, ID=142, Wave 2).

While most parents and children saw increased personal or social responsibility as a good thing, a few parents said it was a negative thing. In one case, this was because their child was not seen as mature enough to take responsibility for themselves.

Oh well sometimes he'd do the stuff that you asked him to do and he'd make sure it was done, but other times he wouldn't. You know the telly or play station would get in the way but that's a kid being a kid too. (Single father, aged 40, working, studied in the past, began study before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=3, Wave 2)

In a few cases, the parent was concerned that their child had had to grow up too fast.

One parent had reported that the increased responsibility her son had for taking care of himself was a negative outcome at the time of first interview, but had changed her perceptions by the time of second interview, as the child had successfully learned to do more for himself.

In one case the mother worried that her daughter had had to take on more responsibility for her sick husband since she had started her activities. While this mother was evidently proud of her daughter, who she saw as mature and responsible, she felt bad that her daughter had always had a big load placed on her because of family difficulties, and felt this might prevent her from doing the kinds of things other children did. Similarly, in another family, the mother

said her son had to take more responsibility for himself, because his dad was sick and she was much busier, but she felt this was a good outcome and had made her son a stronger person.

It is also worth noting that, while in a large number of cases no impact on the child's level of responsibility was reported, in many of these cases the respondents said that the child had more responsibility in the past year but this was due to the child being older rather than being related to the parent's agreed activities.

### 4.3 Parents as role models

For some parents and children, the undertaking of agreed activities such as work or study had improved the standing of the parent within the family so that the parent was now seen as a better role model for his/her children. The most concrete example of this was where several parents felt their children's respect for them had increased since undertaking their agreed activities, which had in turn directly improved the relationship between the parent and the child. In some cases, the child had echoed the sentiments of the parent, as in the following family.

Because I was actually doing something and I felt that the kids were proud.  
(Single mother, aged 35, done job search and studied in the past, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=59, Wave 2)

Well she provided a good role model because she's setting example for us getting a job. (Child of the above parent, Wave 2)

One respondent talked about the child developing a greater sense of community, rather than personal, responsibility. This grandmother was doing voluntary work as part of her agreed activities and felt that undertaking this community work instilled in her granddaughter a greater sense of social responsibility – a kind of role model effect.

I think if you can instil in their heads community work I think that helps. It helps her in her living experiences and if she wants to be in the police force or whatever she wants to do in life you just give back a bit you know.  
(Partnered grandmother, aged 57, six volunteer jobs, some begun before signing agreement and some begun after signing agreement, ID=153, Wave 2)

One parent whose son had long-term behavioural problems at Wave 1 said that she felt his hope for the future had increased as a result of her starting her new activities, even though his behaviour had worsened in some ways. She linked her son's increased optimism and hope for the future to him being able to see her do and achieve something.

Yes, I do, because he's now starting to see that there's hope for us. He always feels it with himself because he's got so much energy, and he'll be right, no matter what, but I feel it's good for him to see that I'm reaching up because I think he was starting to get worried that I was going to end up this little prune old woman, with no money or no prospects. So, yes, it has.  
(Single mother, aged 38, doing paid work, job search (past) and truck license, all after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 1)

One child said that her parent's self-esteem had improved since undertaking her agreed activities because she was providing a good role model for her children. Another child talked about his parent teaching him right from wrong, and another about setting a good example by working.

Several parents thought their child was doing better at school because, in undertaking their agreed activities, they had provided a positive role model for their children. Parents talked about children being inspired by this, or learning from this. Whether or not parent's direct involvement with their child's schoolwork had changed (an issue discussed later in this

chapter), they implied that the child saw them as busy and hardworking, and as a response, had taken on more responsibility.

Her schoolwork has been going well ... I think it's because she's growing up and learning how to manage her study time. Which is probably setting examples to her because she sees my studying when she comes home from school (Partnered mother, aged 44, doing volunteer work and study, volunteer work started before signing agreement, study started after signing agreement, ID=135, Wave 2)

I thought it might help him be encouraged to do something more positive at school and I did get him to go back to school for a couple of days on a special programme and so when I was doing the course so perhaps that did rub off a little bit. .... I think he saw me doing something so it really did spark him up a little bit. ... Looking back now I can see that he was taking some heed of what Mum was doing so he might have a go but yeah. I suppose that was a good thing. (Partnered mother, aged 44, studying (past), started after signing agreement, ID=161, Wave 2)

I think it does, because I've tried to make him believe that I'm not just doing it for myself, I'm doing it for him, so if he wants to benefit from what I'm doing he has got to keep up with the quality of school work that he is doing (Single father, aged 38, helping out as a volunteer with his son's sport, started before signing agreement, ID=142, Wave 2)

#### **4.4 Parent's involvement in child's schooling and social activities**

Earlier analysis in this chapter revealed how the undertaking of agreed activities by parents had often reduced the amount of time generally available for the parent and child to spend together and how both parents and children usually, although not always, viewed this in a negative light. This section considers how the undertaking of agreed activities has impacted on the parent's ability to be involved in the child's school, social and sporting activities.

##### ***Involvement in child's schooling***

Where there had been a change in the parent's involvement in the child's school, it was typically the case that the parent had become less involved in the child's school since undertaking their agreed activities. In several cases, parents said they could not get into the school as often because they were working during school hours, and could not get the time off work when needed; and in one case both the parent and child reported this.

Yeah if I want to go and see a teacher about an issue she's got – it's harder to fit around it. If there's any activities going around at the school like sports carnivals or swimming carnivals, I can't attend any of those. I can't get time off work. (Partnered mother, aged 41, Working and studying, both activities begun after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

Yeah well I guess like school events and carnivals like swimming carnivals, since she started working you know she's never at them. And I guess, well I'm in year ten now but if I needed help with my schoolwork and like also she just used to come round and help in school. Like just in like anything the school had the parent helped but she can't now since she started working. (Child of parent above)

Other parents mentioned not being able to attend school functions such as parent-teacher nights because they worked nights or evenings. Others said they just had less time or energy than in the past and that this restricted the amount of time they could devote to any additional

activity. This included parents in diverse situations, including several who were working or studying long hours, and one parent who was undertaking 15 hours of activities per week but had to travel a long way to undertake those activities and also had an illness or injury that meant she tired more easily.

While most parents who had taken on a new activity were less involved in their child's school, several parents who were doing voluntary work at their child's school as part of their agreed activities had become more involved with the child's school as a result. This was true also of one mother who had started teaching at her son's school as part of her agreed activities.

In a few cases, parents had become more engaged with their child's school since undertaking their new activities because they had become more confident in their ability to deal with teachers. One parent had become more confident with the English language and was therefore able to talk to the teachers, whereas she felt she could not before.

In another case, a child said her mother had begun to protect him more from the teachers at his school since undertaking her new activities. While it was not clear why this was the case, it is possible that the parent's confidence had increased as a result of undertaking new activities.

Most parents and children saw parental involvement in the child's school as a positive thing, and so cases where the parent was less involved were seen in a negative light. Some parents who were less able to be involved discussed not being able to deal with issues and problems that arose with their child's schooling when needed, and as a result, felt less in tune with how their child was progressing at school.

On the other hand, parents who had increased their involvement at their child's school said this was a positive thing because they got to know their child's teachers better, got to see who the child associated with, and were better able to monitor the child's development.

Well you get to know the teachers that are there, and they get to know you as being [child's name] parent. (Partnered mother, 47 years, doing 4 volunteer jobs, all started after signing agreement, ID=44, Wave 2)

Ah well I get to know the teachers and see who he associates with. (Partnered mother, aged 44, doing volunteer work and study, volunteer work started before signing agreement and study started after signing agreement, ID=57, Wave 2)

In the positive side I know exactly what he's got to do and I'm able to keep an eye on it. And try to keep on top of him and if he has any problems he know he can (tape cuts out) me. Because I'll be able to help him with exactly what he needs to be doing. (Single mother, studying, started before signing agreement, child has dyslexia, now doing part-time paid work at child's school, ID=179, Wave 2)

On the other hand this same mother said that her teaching at the school had caused some problems with her son's peers, so it could also have some negative effects. (As illustrated in quote from this mother included in earlier section on the impact of parent's activities on children's friendships).

### ***Involvement in the child's homework***

In this study, more than half of families reported some impact on the parent's involvement in the child's homework. Where this was the case, it was most often that parents were less able to help with the child's homework since taking on their new activities. This was usually because the parent had less time overall, or was not home or available at times when the child was doing their homework. Both parents and children mentioned this.

The only time it could be [affected] is if I'm not able to help her work something out. I guess then it could be because I'm not here to ask. (Partnered mother, aged 41, working and studying, both activities begun after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

Yes it has; but then again when she gets the chance she does help me [with homework] but then again it's nowhere near as much as she used to but I'm grateful for the amount that she still helps me with seeing that she's got like work and everything. (Child of above parent)

While in most cases parents were spending less time helping with their child's homework, in a few cases parents were spending more time. More importantly, some parents were able to provide increased assistance to the child because they had increased their knowledge or skills as a result of undertaking their agreed activities, and were able to use their new knowledge or skills to assist the child.

If anything I think it's probably helped me to understand a little bit about what they're doing with their assignments and stuff like that and I can actually help her a little bit more from some of the things I've learnt. So that you know when she has assignments and that. (Single mother, aged 45, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=86, Wave 2)

She was able to help me more – said she was going to teach stuff and she kind of passed that on to me and that helped me with my homework too. (Child of partnered mother, aged 53, volunteer work (past) and study (past), both begun after signing agreement, ID=155, Wave 2)

When I tell her things I feel like she'll have a better understanding with the English, like with my English subjects. (Child of partnered mother, aged 51, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=212, Wave 2)

Several parents who said that they had become less involved in helping the child with their homework also felt this had been a positive thing because the child had learnt to take more responsibility for completing the homework themselves. One father said his daughter's schoolwork had improved because when she was left to her own devices she just got on with her homework herself (the daughter reported no change in the level of assistance her father gave her with her homework).

It was more of a positive effect on the schoolwork because she just had so much time alone. ... she got bored, she just sort of thought 'oh well I'll just study', (Single father, aged 41, doing paid work (past), volunteer work (past) and training (past), all started after signing agreement, ID=189, Wave 2)

In a similar vein, another mother said her daughter was better behaved at school and she thought this might be because she had started working.

### ***Involvement with child's sport and social activities***

Around half of the families reported there had been some impact on the parent's involvement in the child's social or sporting activities. Overall, equal numbers of positive and negative responses were given although children were more likely to give positive responses and parents were more likely to give negative responses.

Most negative impacts on parent's involvement in children's sporting or social activities were experienced in cases where parent's agreed activities were done outside school hours. However, some parents who were doing agreed activities during school hours experienced a reduction in involvement with the child's sport or social activities because they had less time overall and therefore other tasks had to be completed outside school hours (which may have been done in the past while the child was at school).

Most negative responses came from parents who said they were less able to attend sporting or social activities with their child since undertaking their agreed activities, and were regretful about this.

I wasn't there and basically it was other people who sort of had to take my place and she didn't like that and I didn't like that. (Single father, aged 41, doing paid work (past), volunteer work (past) and training (past), all started after signing agreement, ID=189, Wave 2)

One parent said that her child was not able to participate in any sporting activities because her work was unpredictable and it may not fit with the timetables required for regular sports. Another mother who was undertaking study as her agreed activity and had difficulty setting aside money for this, said her son could only be involved in school sporting events because they did not have enough money for him to play sport through the local clubs. In contrast, a couple of children saw their parents' reduced involvement in their sporting or social activities as a positive thing, as they were happy to do more on their own or because they spent more time with their friends.

In terms of other positive changes, in several cases both parent and child said that the parent was more involved with them socially or more involved in their sporting activities since commencing the Participation Agreement. In several cases this was because the parent's (or carer's) voluntary activity involved helping out with a sporting or community group the child belonged to.

In a few additional cases, it was not clear why the parent was now doing more with the child socially, but it was seen as a good thing. In one case it may have been increased enthusiasm on the part of the parent, as the child said her mother had become more interested in her music. In another case it could have been the increased income that paid work provided, as the child said that her mother took her out shopping more since she started her new activities, and said that the good thing for her family about her mother's new activities was the additional income.

We do go out a lot more than we used to. Like shopping and all.

(Child of single mother, aged 41, volunteer work and paid work (past), volunteer work started prior to signing the agreement and paid work started after signing the agreement, ID=156, Wave 1)

### ***Transport difficulties***

A few parents said the distance required to travel between their workplace and their child's school made it more difficult for them to attend the school on a regular basis.

Two parents said that their child was missing school more often because they were not able to transport them to and from school since starting their agreed activities, which was likely in turn to have an effect on how the child was doing at school. One mother said her son was late to school more often because she no longer drove him there, and another said her daughter was more likely to stay home from school if she was unwell because she was no longer able to pick her daughter up from school half way through the day if needed.

Yes, there have been a couple of times when she's actually been sick on the day that I have had to go in, so instead of sending her to school and then possibly getting a phone call half way through in the day to go and get her, I have actually decided to leave her at home. (Partnered mother, aged 42, doing paid work (past) and volunteer work, both started after signing agreement, ID=173, Wave 1)

A few parents said they were less able to transport their child to sporting or social activities. One parent said this was difficult because they had to arrange alternate transport to ensure their child could continue with the activity.

Yeah, it does sometimes. Because you can't drive her. If you're working... to the netball, you have to make sure that there's car pools, so that everybody shares the car. You can't take her to netball, drop her off, go and pick her up every week, you just can't do it because of work: time and circumstances. So you tend to be organised and carpool, but it does interfere sometimes, but there's not much you can do about it. (Partnered mother, aged 43, working and doing volunteer work, began both activities before signing agreement, ID=159, Wave 2).

## **4.5 Behavioural changes in children**

In this section, there is a focus on the child's behaviour more generally, including both positive and negative changes. Changes in antisocial behaviour by the child, as well as changes in more positive behaviours, are considered for the period since the parent has been undertaking the agreed activities. Changes in children's behaviour are linked to the types of activities parents are undertaking and their reported impacts on families outlined in the previous sections. However, caution is needed in doing so. Unlike in previous sections where respondents were asked directly about the impact of their activities on various aspects of the parent and child's life, in this section respondents' were only asked about the frequency of incidences of the child behaviours, which are compared at Wave 1 and Wave 2. Parents were not asked to relate changes in the child's behaviour to the undertaking of the agreed activity by the parent. However, several respondents made these links anyway at some point during the interview.

### ***Negative behavioural changes***

In both waves of the study, children were asked to indicate how many times (not at all, once, or more than once) in the six months prior to each survey they had done the following:

- Got into physical fights (but not with brothers or sisters)
- Damaged something in a public place
- Stolen something
- Driven a car without permission
- Done graffiti in a public place
- Wagged school
- Been in trouble at school
- Been suspended or expelled from school

Responses at Wave 1 and Wave 2 were compared and it was found that 20 of the 55 children who participated in both waves of the study reported increased incidences of adverse behaviours, 10 for whom there was only a slight increase and 10 for whom there was more of a marked increase. It is these 20 children on which the analysis of adverse behaviour is focussed.

Of the 20 children who reported an increase in the incidence of adverse behaviours, most had parents who had begun at least one of their agreed activities after signing the Participation Agreement.

To the extent that parents undertaking agreed activities would be associated with increases in adverse behaviour by children, one likely cause would be a reduction in ability of parents to supervise their children. Interestingly however, only two of the 20 parents felt they were less able to supervise their children as a result of undertaking their agreed activities. Both of these parents were doing paid work outside their children's school hours. One parent was not able to be home when the child got home from school and sometimes had a friend look after her

son at this time, but often left him at home by himself. This parent made a direct link between her inability to personally supervise her son and a decline in his behaviour.

That is a negative. That's why he's going off the rails because he knows that I'm not going to be home sometimes till 5.30 or, you know. And he can't be baby sat at 15 all the time. So, yeah, that's why he's down at his dad's, pulling him back a bit. (Single mother, aged 38, doing paid work, job search (past) and truck license, all after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

At another point in the interview she said:

He just seems to go completely off the rails when he thinks I'm not going to be here and when he gets home, and he's been skipping class and walking out of school. Not turning up for school, and he thinks I might be not home. So, it's (the Participation Agreement) very much changed that. (Single mother, aged 38, doing paid work, job search (past) and truck license, all after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

While her son had behavioural problems that existed well before she started her activities, this mother made it clear that the problems with her son had become worse after she started them.

When I was here, before I got a job, everything was fine on the home front, but as soon as I started working, they started to wobble, and then, yeah. (Single mother, aged 38, doing paid work, job search (past) and truck license, all after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

This child's negative behaviours were mostly related to schooling. In both waves he reported that he had been in trouble at school more than once and that he had been suspended or expelled once. In Wave 2, he reported that he had wagged once and been involved in a physical fight.

In the other case, the child's grandparents looked after the child while the mother was working. Nonetheless, this mother felt that her agreed activities had affected her ability to keep an eye on her son, because she did not know what he got up to when she was not there.

He leaves for school like at quarter past eight, I pick him up at 3:30 and then I start work at four so I've got no idea what he's doing of a night. I don't finish until 10:30. (Single mother, aged 31, working, did volunteer work and study in past, began all activities before signing agreement, ID=148, Wave 2)

This mother had begun her agreed activities before signing her Participation Agreement so the negative effects she expressed were related to doing her job rather than specifically having to do activities for her Participation Agreement. Both the mother and her son reported that they spent much less time together since the mother had begun her job. The mother also reported feelings of inadequacy as a parent.

I feel inadequate as a parent sometimes...Because if [my son] needs me [at] night I'm at work and because I'm basically relieving kitchen hands I can't leave. (Single mother, aged 31, working, did volunteer work and study in past, began all activities before signing agreement, ID=148, Wave 2)

The only adverse behaviour her son reported in the six months leading up to Wave 1 was getting into trouble at school, which had occurred more than once. However, he reported that during the six months leading up to Wave 2 he had also wagged more than once and damaged public property more than once.

Apart from the above cases, there were two additional children who reported increased incidences of adverse behaviours and who were left unsupervised for at least some of the time

whilst their parents did their agreed activities. Whilst neither of the parents in these cases felt that their ability to supervise their child had been affected, in both cases the level of monitoring reported by the parent and the child were substantially lower than average. The level of monitoring was measured using a range of questions, and for these two children their parents were less likely than others to know where the child was, who he or she was with and when he or she would be getting home.

Whilst inadequate levels of supervision and monitoring can be important in explaining increases in adverse behaviour in children, so can the ‘spillover’ effects of parents experiencing negative impacts of undertaking the agreed activities. For example, if a parent is more tired or more stressed, his or her parenting may be negatively affected which may in turn cause changes in child behaviour. Of the 20 parents whose children reported increases in adverse behaviours, most reported negative impacts on their emotional wellbeing as a result of undertaking the activities, and many of these reported negative impacts on their feelings about themselves as parents. Whilst this last result is not surprising – in the presence of increased adverse behaviour by their child, many parents will assess their parenting abilities more negatively – what is interesting here is that a lot of parents had drawn a connection between their parenting abilities and the undertaking of the agreed activities.

For one parent the increased stress was the reason why she felt her parenting had been adversely affected by undertaking her agreed activities. She had taken on a paid job and a study course since signing the Participation Agreement and found the workload difficult and stressful to manage alongside her parenting obligations. Her increased stress levels sometimes meant that she was less patient and more often angry with her children.

I just... I just get so angry and you know, I just get so tired because I get up at 1.30, I go to work at 2.30, or may knock off at 7.30, then it's time to come home, get [child's name] and [child's name] to school. My eldest daughter is 20, but doesn't have a licence, then I've got to drive her 20 minutes to work, come home, try and get study done, housework done, all the rest of it, then it's time to go and pick them up again, and pick her up again, and try and get some sleep in between all this time. (Single mother, aged 41, working and studying, began both activities after signing agreement)

For other parents, the issue with respect to their parenting was the lack of time they spent with their children, including the two cases discussed earlier where parents felt their ability to supervise their children had been affected. One parent felt that she was letting her children down and was not fulfilling her duties as a parent.

Yes. I feel angry. I feel sad. Not sad I feel tired and I feel worn out and I try to do the best I can as a parent...I feel like I haven't got time to spend with my children...Yeah. How I felt is that I'm not fulfilling my duty as a parent. You know to participate at school things I usually do. You know what I mean like we have some parents nights they have some two hours of morning tea at school and things like that – I can't go to some of them. A lot of them. And all in all I think I did a good job in bringing up these kids (laughs). (Partnered mother, aged 49, doing volunteer work and studying, began volunteer work before signing the agreement and began studying after signing the agreement, ID=183, Wave 2)

Similarly one parent felt guilty about spending less time with her children.

Sometimes I feel guilty that I'm not home as much as I could be. (Partnered mother, aged 35, studying and doing three volunteer jobs, two volunteer jobs started prior to signing agreement, other volunteer job and study started after signing agreement, ID=192, Wave 2)

One parent reported feeling less in tune with her children as a result of spending less time with them.

Probably oh not picking up things as quickly with the kids or things tend to get slip through; don't notice not as in tune with them and what they're doing. (Partnered mother, aged 47, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=100, Wave 2)

### **Positive behavioural changes**

There are two ways in which to measure positive changes in children's behaviour. The first is to identify decreases in the incidence of negative behaviours and the second is to identify increases in the incidence of positive behaviours. As well as the series of questions on the occurrence of negative behaviours, in both waves of the study children were asked to indicate how many times (not at all, once, or more than once) in the six months prior to each survey they had done the following:

- Been noticed for doing well at school
- Been noticed for doing well at sport or other things
- Stood up for a friend when they were in trouble

Comparison of Wave 1 and Wave 2 responses to the behaviour questions revealed around a third of children reported some level of improvement in behaviour. In some cases this was a reduction in incidences of adverse behaviours (as detailed above), in some case an increase in positive behaviours, and in some cases both.

Parents of children exhibiting positive behavioural changes were doing a diverse range of activities, including paid work, voluntary work, study, and job search and caring. However, in direct contrast to the findings on increased adverse behaviour, the parents of children exhibiting positive behavioural changes were less likely to have undertaken new activities and more likely to have ongoing activities. This suggests that periods of transition within families can be ones where children can become more antisocial. However, it is also possible that parents who did only continuing activities had fewer problems, or greater strengths, to begin with.

In cases where children reported positive behavioural changes, parents were also less likely to report adverse impacts on their emotional wellbeing from performing the activities. Almost all parents whose children showed improvements in behaviour reported that doing their agreed activities had had positive impacts on their self-confidence, and very few reported increased levels of stress. In addition, most had reported positive impacts on their feelings about themselves as parents. Several of these parents talked about changes in their attitudes and temperament, including being more tolerant with their child, being better able to cope with their child, or being calmer and more patient with their child. Others talked about providing a better role model for their child, or the child being proud of them for what they were doing.

## **4.6 Overall impact on child**

In response to a question asking them whether they felt the impact of parent's activities on children were positive or negative overall, all parents, and all but one of the children, felt the overall impact on the child was either positive or had no impact. The split between positive and no impact was about half and half.

Only one child indicated that they felt the overall impact on themselves was negative. This child highlighted that they do less together and have less time together with their parent since their parent started their agreed activities.

Most of the reasons given for positive assessments were again a reiteration of those covered in earlier questions about impacts on children, and the reasons given were similar for parents and children. Several parents and children said the child benefited because they had more time with their parent, the parent and child had become closer, communicated better or had more shared interests. Others said the parent's activities had been good for the child because they provided a good role model for the child, for example, in being active, achieving things, providing income, etc. Several parents said the child had grown or developed into a stronger or more mature person either because the parent was in a better position to guide the child or because the child had taken on increased responsibility since the parent began their agreed activities. Related to this, a few parents and children said their relationship had improved because of increased respect on the part of either parent or child – either for the parent who was now working or undertaking study or other activities, or for the child who was taking more responsibility for themselves or others, or both. One child also said their parent trusted them more since undertaking their new activities, presumably because the child had demonstrated maturity and responsibility in adjusting to the change.

Some respondents said the parent was happier and that this made the child happier or led to a more harmonious household. This was reported by both parents and children but more often by children.

And a few said the child benefited from the increased community involvement that resulted from their voluntary activities. Some other parents and children said the child benefited from having access to more money or material things.

While there were a number of cases in which children reported increased levels of antisocial behaviour between Wave 1 and Wave 2, in only some of these cases there any evidence this was connected to the parents' agreed activities. Parents doing activities outside of school hours seemed to play only a minor role in increased levels of antisocial behaviours, mainly because in most cases parents were able to make alternative care arrangements, or else kept closely in touch with their child, and always knew what the child was doing. The exception was a small number of cases in which the parent attributed increased problem behaviours to the parent's activities and their reduced ability to supervise their child. In these cases the child had existing behavioural problems and any reduction in the parent's ability to supervise or be involved with the child was likely to have been problematic.

For some of the children showing increased adverse behaviours, there also seemed to be some connection between how the activities affected the parent's emotional wellbeing - including stress, coupled with a reported negative self-perception of themselves as parents - and the child's behaviour. However, more often than not, the parents of the children in this study reported much more favourable changes in their own wellbeing for the reasons outlined above, including reduced levels of stress, increased self-confidence and improved perceptions of their abilities as a parent.

# 5 Parents' attitudes to work, income support and the Participation Agreement

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The earlier analysis in this report has set out a range of impacts on recipients of Parenting Payments and their children of parents having to undertake agreed activities in order to become more job-ready in the longer term. In this chapter, we consider whether attitudes to work, income support and the Participation Agreement have changed over the first 12 months of the operation of the agreement.

In Wave 1, all parents were asked a series of questions about their attitudes to work and receiving government benefits. Each question was measured on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. In Wave 2 parents were asked a series of open-ended questions about whether or not their attitudes to work and income support receipt had changed since undertaking their agreed activities.

## 5.1 Parental motivation to work, changed aspirations

Several parents mentioned having increased motivation or desire to work since undertaking their agreed activities.

I'm just keen to get out there and you know, be part of the workforce. (Single mother, aged 45, doing job search and health maintenance, done training in past, began all activities after signing agreement, ID=134, Wave 2)

One father who had previously been out of work said the study he had undertaken as part of his Participation Agreement had given him the motivation he needed to return to his former trade.

Yeah they [my attitudes] changed big time because I didn't want to go back to my trade and I just restarted again wanting to earn money through you know because I'd been studying and realised that you know that there's a big picture back out there and that so yeah I regained my work ethic. Then I went back to me trade. And I think a lot of it's to do with because of my study. (Single father, aged 40, working, studied in the past, began study before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=3, Wave 2)

One mother who was studying as part of her agreed activities said she had increased work aspirations as a result and wanted to find a job that was more financially or personally rewarding than those she had had in the past.

Before I used to work in a factory you know, but if I want to work again I will try to do something better, ... that's why I'm doing the course now so if I want to work I will try to do something better (Partnered mother, aged 51, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=212, Wave 2)

For many, the feelings of being more motivated to work were related to having increased confidence in their ability to find a job or find a job that suited them. Most said their confidence had increased because they were more aware of their skills and abilities and the types of jobs that were available to them, or because they had learnt new skills since

undertaking the agreed activities. This included one parent who had been out of work because of an injury.

It's probably given me hope that I'll be able to get back to work. (Single mother, aged 44, doing training and health maintenance, done volunteer work in past, volunteer work began before signing agreement, other activities began after signing agreement, ID=163, Wave 2)

Finally, one parent also mentioned they had increased appreciation of the benefits of study and its capacity to lead to better jobs in the future.

I think that it has helped me realise that doing courses and things does help getting a job in the future. (Partnered mother, aged 44, studied in the past, began activity after signing agreement, ID=161, Wave 2)

## 5.2 Attitudes to work

In Wave 1, parents were asked to respond to three statements about how important it is to get or keep a job regardless of personal preferences. Overall, work was regarded highly, with an overwhelming majority agreeing with the statements 'Any job is better than being unemployed' and 'Once you've got a job, it's important to hang onto it even if you don't really like it'. Responses to the statement 'Nobody should have to take a job they don't want to do' were more evenly divided.

When asked in Wave 2 whether their attitudes to work had changed since undertaking their agreed activities, about half the parents said their attitudes had changed. Of those who reported a change, the majority of responses were positive.

There were the only two clear examples, however, of any substantive change in the value and importance parents had placed on paid work (rather than changes in their capacity to work or confidence in getting a job). The first suggested they now understood that they needed to work either because it was expected of them or because it provided some greater good to themselves or society (not clear which).

They've [my attitudes] changed in a positive way in that I know now that I need to go to work and I know what I need to do to go to work. (Single father, aged 41, did paid work, volunteer work and training in past, began all activities after signing agreement, ID=189, Wave 2)

And one mother whose increased confidence in her employability had led to a positive change in her identity in that they started seeing herself as a worker as well as a mother.

I'm employable in a positive way. I can be an active member of the workforce. Not that I didn't think I was but I was more into raising [my child]. (Partnered mother, aged 44, doing volunteer work and studying, began volunteer work before signing agreement, began study after signing agreement, ID=135, Wave 2)

Based on their responses to questions in Wave 1, however, both these parents placed a very strong value on paid work at the time of first interview, which would have been shortly after signing their Participation Agreement.

## 5.3 Attitudes to reliance on government income support

In Wave 1, parents were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement 'A person should take any job rather than staying on government payments'. More than half the parents were in agreement with the statement. However, it is important to note that the question asks about 'a person' rather than 'a parent'. Attitudes to parents or to themselves as parents receiving income support may have been quite different.

In Wave 2, respondents were asked whether or not their attitudes about receiving government benefits while raising a child had changed since undertaking their agreed activities. All but four respondents reported that their attitudes about this issue had not changed. The views of those who reported no change centered around three main themes. Firstly, there were those who suggested they had always held the view that government benefits should be available to those who need them.

I think it's just the help out for low-income families. We live in an isolated area. There's only just so much that you can do. You can't ask for more than what's available in the community. Sensible people make the most of what's available. Um, and sometimes you just do need the help out. (Partnered mother, aged 43, working and doing volunteer work, began both activities before signing agreement, ID=159, Wave 2)

I think if you have children you should look after them. And, yeah, be responsible for them. And I think government care, or supporting parent benefit or whatever it's called is essential for that. (Single mother, aged 54, doing health maintenance, began activity before signing agreement, ID=154, Wave 2)

There were also those who had always felt grateful that they could receive government assistance and doing their agreed activities had not changed this view.

I've really appreciated the help because [my child's] been so full on. We've been really, really hard to work. I don't know what you would say to that, but I've been... yeah, I've really appreciated it. I guess, you know, I'm glad to be earning money, but I have really appreciated, so, no, I don't think it's changed. (Single mother, aged 38, working, did job search and training in the past, all activities began after signing agreement, ID=67, Wave 2)

Finally, there were those who had never liked receiving government benefits, but who felt that their circumstances required this.

I don't like receiving anything, ... but it's a case of have to so it's nice it's there. I'm not in Centrelink because I want to be, I'm dealing with Centrelink because I have to. (Single mother, aged 44, doing training and health maintenance, done volunteer work in past, volunteer work began before signing agreement, other activities began after signing agreement, ID=163, Wave 2)

I still don't like it. No I've never been comfortable with it I mean sometimes I just have to be but ... I'd rather be working. (Single mother, aged 41, doing job search, began activity after signing agreement, ID=178, Wave 2)

Of the four respondents who reported a change in their attitudes, two described an increase in feelings of guilt, either about receiving income support payments, or about not earning an income. One parent said their desire to be independent of government benefits had increased, but was aware that her personal circumstances meant that this would be very difficult.

I'd like to be self sufficient and not depend on Centrelink but in the situation I've found myself in with a disabled husband, children to support and knowing that I've got limitations I've got to be able to accept those payments too and be able to financially survive for my children sort of thing. (Partnered mother, aged 41, working part-time and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

Another respondent indicated her guilt about receiving income support had diminished due to personal illness (rather than because of her agreed activities).

I've always felt guilty but not so much now because I know I'm not well enough to support myself entirely. (Single mother, aged 45, doing job search and health maintenance, done training in past, began all activities after signing agreement, ID=134, Wave 2)

## 5.4 Attitudes to parents staying home to look after children

Another issue for some parents was that their sense of responsibility to provide financially for their children conflicted with the need to spend time with their children.

I sacrifice time with my children if I work, and these are very important years, [but] if I don't work, financially I'm sacrificing for my kids because I'm not giving them the education, being able to pay bills and put food on the table so either way which ever way I go, and I find it very frustrating. I'm sacrificing – do you know what I mean? (Partnered mother, aged 41, working part-time and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=33, Wave 2)

In Wave 1, parents were not directly asked about their attitudes to parents staying home to look after children, although they were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statements 'Raising children is the most important thing in life' and 'Work is the most important thing in life'. Not surprisingly, respondents were extremely supportive of the first statement, with the vast majority agreeing, but less so of the second, with the majority disagreeing (but with a broader spread of responses). Respondents were also asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'For children growing up, having a working parent is a good role model for leading a busy and productive life'. While work was not perceived to be the most important role for most parents interviewed, most agreed with the notion that working parents provide good role models, with only one in five parents disagreeing.

In Wave 2, respondents were asked whether or not their views about parents staying at home to look after their children had changed in any significant way. Only one parent reported a change in her attitude and another indicated that her existing attitude – that parents should be able to stay home and look after their children – had been reinforced by her agreed activities.

The parent whose attitude had changed felt more comfortable about leaving her child and going back to work. By taking study as her agreed activity, she had discovered ways to juggle both work and family responsibilities.

I used to worry about leaving [my child] while I went out to work. Yeah. But now, no. You can do it. There's always a way around it. (Single mother, aged 38, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=125, Wave 2)

Of those who reported no change, the majority felt that parents should be able to stay at home to look after their children and that this should be a priority.

I still think that they're best cared for children for the first eight or nine years, as mum should be home. That's my personal opinion, of course. And I was very lucky that we went without income for quite a while – well, my extra income – because we felt that it was more important for me to be home with the children and be there and cook. (Partnered mother, aged 43, working and doing volunteer work, began both activities before signing agreement, ID=159, Wave 2)

I still totally agree that mothers should be home with their children. Um, when their are children are home... I mean I don't believe in mothers working and leaving their children to come home to an empty house. I still believe that that should not happen. Or have them thrown into care. I don't agree with that either. I think if you have children you should look after

them. And, yeah, be responsible for them. (Single mother, aged 54, doing health maintenance, began activity before signing agreement, ID=154, Wave 2)

However there were some parents who felt that those who could work should work.

I think there are genuine cases where parents do need to stay at home, but I do think there are also cases where once the kids go to school parents should go to work or they should retrain – right. Because the kids aren't there so what are they going to do? Sit around drinking cups of coffee all day? Some cases you know, going to the pokies or watching telly or whatever they do. I feel that's not a good way to set an example for your kids. I think they should see that you're out there having a crack so they learn that. (Single father, aged 40, working, studied in the past, began study before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=3, Wave 2)

To me being a single parent, they still should try to even work casual part time anything to get extra income and self confidence and everything a really big plus it really is. Yeah it really is. (Single mother, aged 44, working, began activity before signing agreement, ID=151, Wave 2)

There was a third group who felt it was acceptable for parents to work as long as they could fit their job around their children's needs. This required restricting work hours to within school hours.

Well I believe, that you know if you have to work full time... I don't like children coming home from school, to an empty house. Whereas my hours of course I'm home. By the time [my child] gets home from school. (Single mother, aged 45, working and doing volunteer work, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=95, Wave 2)

I've always said that if I could get a job that fitted in with my children's school hours I would have gone back to work anyway. And this way, with me working early, I'm always home before they go to school because I take them to school. And there's always someone here with them. (Single mother, aged 41, working and studying, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=147, Wave 2)

## 5.5 Attitudes to being required to undertake activities

Parents' views about the compulsory nature of the agreement were sought in both waves of the study. In Wave 1, the parents whose Participation Agreement included only continuing activities were asked whether the fact that their activities were now a compulsory requirement, rather than something they were choosing to do, had affected them personally in any way. Respondents who linked these issues back to the compulsory nature of the agreement tended to focus on problems of juggling work and family obligations.

In Wave 2, all parents were asked whether, since undertaking their agreed activities, their views about being *required* to undertake activities changed in any significant way. Only nine parents said they had. The main response amongst this group was that in undertaking the activities, their acceptance of the requirement had increased.

I think it's a good thing that I've been forced to get out and do something rather than sitting home and cooking and cleaning and looking after kids. ...Yeah [at first] I thought it was wrong. I thought I shouldn't have to go out and do this if I still had a house and kids to look after. (Partnered mother, aged 42, doing volunteer work, worked in the past, began both activities after signing the agreement, ID=173, Wave 2)

I think it's a good push for parents when your child gets into the teen years it's a good push because you can get lazy, you can get lazy and think 'oh well this is it for the rest of my life'... the whole idea of the parenting payment is to eventually get people off it and to get people working. (Partnered mother, aged 44, doing volunteer work and studying, began volunteer work before signing agreement, began study after signing agreement, ID=135, Wave 2)

One parent said that the activity requirements were a valuable means of alleviating a 'welfare mentality' that can develop with long-term absence from paid work.

Oh look [now] I think it's a good thing. Yeah yeah. I think that every person who's got school age kids should be doing something. Look before I started doing it I thought 'oh look I don't know about this – this is a bit suss' but then again that's the welfare mentality that I had too. When I don't have that I'm a firm believer in getting in there and having a go, or I always was. It's just now my attitudes changed. I think it's because I've been back in the workforce... (Single father, aged 40, working, studied in the past, began study before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=3, Wave 2)

Several parents emphasised that the compulsory nature of the activities forced them to get over their fear of taking on paid work or study and to realise what they were capable of achieving, what they wanted to do, or what work or study opportunities were available to them. As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter (in relation to perceptions of abilities and emotional wellbeing), many parents were fearful at first about being required to undertake new activities because they did not know what was expected of them or were uncertain they would have the capacity to do what was required of them. This was particularly so for those who had had many years out of the workforce and felt they had few relevant skills or experience. However, after receiving more information or beginning their new activities they realised the requirement to undertake activities represented an opportunity to update skills and 'make a new start'.

It's a bit scary at first, I though 'strike, what am I going to do?' when I realised that what I've got to fall back on probably isn't relevant now as far as experience, between from when I last worked and now a lots changed in the workforce like, technology has increased like a million fold, and I'm just not there. ... So really it's an opportunity for me to rediscover what's out there and it's potential and whether,... you know, it just depends on you too whether you've got that ability to jump in, say 'well I'm employable as much as anyone else' and use what's available. (Partnered mother, aged 44, doing volunteer work and studying, began volunteer work before signing agreement, began study after signing agreement, ID=135, Wave 2)

Some said their attitude changed early on when they were provided with more information about what was expected of them or after they had a positive experience with their case manager or JET Advisor.

Before I made the interview, I wasn't happy. And when I make the interview with lady she was very nice lady and the way she talked to me, and all that she made me feel happy. When I signed I felt more happy. (Partnered mother, aged 51, studying, began activity after signing agreement, ID=212, Wave 2)

A couple of parents maintained that the requirements provided a catalyst for change. These parents gave the impression that they always expected and wanted to return to the workforce, but felt they needed 'that little push' to make a change.

Because it's got me off my b – it's got me out of the house and getting to do something and realising that you know, I will be going on the dole in July and this has made me aware that I've got to go out there and earn my own living. So yeah, it's just made me get up and do it. (Single mother, aged 45, working and doing volunteer work, began both activities after signing agreement, ID=95, Wave 2)

Finally, one mother expressed a distinct lack of tolerance for those who do not carry out required activities, suggesting they should be punished in some way. One possible reason for this view is that this mother felt she had been unfairly singled out for attention by Centrelink.

I think that like the people that are required to do the activities if they don't do them they should be in more trouble than what they are. ...I see other people out there that don't get hassled by Centrelink at all. I get hassled flat out. I don't know how to explain that. (Single mother, aged 31, working, done volunteer work and studied in past, began all activities before signing agreement, ID=148, Wave 2)

While these comments highlight how some parents' views about the compulsory nature of the agreement became more positive over time when they saw the benefits of change, one mother who said her views had not changed about the compulsory nature of the agreement emphasised that she had always been unhappy with not being able to make her own decisions.

I think, I think it's wrong that they tell me I HAVE to do something. Right yeah? Because I'm me. Why are they my boss? You know. That's how I feel. I feel they're telling me I should, should, should you know. Who are they to tell me what to do? (Single mother, aged 41, doing volunteer work, worked in past, began volunteer work before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=156, Wave 2)

Some parents mentioned that being compelled to undertake compulsory activities had had a negative effect on their self-esteem. This was particularly the case for those who believed that working could compromise their ability to be good parents.

I think having to sign that sort of agreement is demeaning. I think it's a put down. I really don't like that sort of thing. I mean, there are people who don't look for work, but then there are people who do, and I have been, but I have to take a particular type of job that allows me to be home when my children are home. I will not work and leave my children at home; being a single parent. (Single mother, aged 54, doing health maintenance program, started after signing agreement, ID=154, Wave 2)

## 5.6 In summary

The largely positive effects on parents of undertaking the agreed activities described in earlier analysis seemed to be borne out by the attitudes to work described in this chapter. There is some evidence that a positive change in attitudes about work has come about due to an increase in confidence or a better appreciation by parents of their abilities or the opportunities available, as a result of undertaking the agreed activities. In addition, there was no reported negative shift in attitudes as a result of undertaking the agreed activities, although there were a couple of parents whose negative opinion about their own abilities had been reinforced by the requirement to undertake activities.

Attitudes about parents receiving government benefits or staying home to look after children were much more immutable. These attitudes seem much more intrinsic to the individuals and less likely to be affected by undertaking compulsory activities. A positive development though, was the greater acceptance by parents of the requirement to undertake some type of agreed activity in order to be more job-ready. Much of this positive response seems to be

attributable to parents appreciating that undertaking the agreed activities is benefiting both themselves and their families.

## 6 Discussion and concluding comments

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The primary objective of this study was to identify the impacts on children of activity requirements for Parenting Payment recipients whose youngest child is aged 13 to 15 years. It was also to identify the perceptions both of Parenting Payment customers and their children on the advantages and disadvantages of the parents undertaking these activities and to consider whether these perceptions change over time.

Of course, many Parenting Payment recipients were already undertaking activities before signing the Participation Agreement. Some were working, others studying or doing voluntary work, and a few others were doing different activities which were able to be included in the agreement. For these people, the agreement was significant because it meant that these activities became compulsory. However, for the majority, this was not a problem. For those not undertaking activities at the participation interview, people were required to take up one or more new activities, as agreed with their JET adviser.

The fieldwork for this study asked parents about the impacts, on themselves and their youngest child, of undertaking the activities in their Participation Agreement. Further, information was collected from the child on these impacts, although the questions asked of the children were not always exactly the same as those asked of the parents. The detailed analyses of these data, presented in this report, showed impacts in a number of areas. Some impacts were direct effects on the parent undertaking the activities, for example on their health and wellbeing. Some impacts were broader, looking at how the family was affected, for example, considering any financial changes. These impacts were often recognised as flowing onto the child, while other changes had direct impacts on the child.

### ***Parental wellbeing***

Increased stress was reported to be a consequence of undertaking the activities by many of the parents. This was mainly associated with the need to manage the work and family balance, or if not work, then study or other activities. This is consistent with other studies of the work-family balance, or the work-family ‘spillover’ (Lewis, Hand and Tudball 2001; Pocock and Clarke 2005). The time issue caused stress for many parents, and in particular, the issue of not being there for their children was mentioned in relation to increased stress. Children were less likely to discuss parental stress, as such, but were likely to discuss the time aspect, which is certainly consistent with other studies, for example, that of Pocock and Clarke (2005).

A related issue was increased tiredness of the parent, noted by some parents and some children. This was sometimes linked to increased irritability and stress by parents and children. Again, this result – that children note the mood of parents before and after work – has been found in studies of work-family spillover, such as those mentioned above.

Stress was also discussed in relation to having to do a certain activity, especially where the activity was new. Encouragingly, this stress often dissipated over time, as parents found that they were successfully able to manage the activity, and the balance with other responsibilities that was required. Other studies of the transition from income support to work have also found this period of transition can be difficult and stressful for the person involved as well as to their family (Hofferth, Smith, McLoyd and Finkelstein 2000; O'Connor and Boreham 2002). These difficulties go beyond just having to take on new activities, and are likely to relate to the range of difficulties parents and their families face – including the changes to time pressures and changing roles within the family.

While ‘stress’ was a commonly-raised theme, more positive aspects of wellbeing were also raised, with increases in parental self-esteem, happiness and confidence expressed by parents and children. Improvements in these aspects were noted in the context of health benefits, as parents felt better about themselves and their lives. Children also noted such improvements. Much of this change seems to be attributed, simply, to ‘getting out of the house’, but also to trying something new, and to making new social contacts. This is extremely positive – as was noted earlier, parents had an expectation that improvements in self-esteem and confidence would be linked to greater chances of employment either in the short- or long-term. Further, in the context of this research, higher levels of wellbeing amongst parents can be expected to have positive effects on their children. Studies reviewed earlier in this report (for example, Sallinen, Kinnunen and Rönkä 2004) drew the link between higher levels of parental self-esteem and wellbeing, improved parenting behaviour and improved outcomes for adolescents.

Using this same argument, however, increased levels of stress could be linked to poorer parenting behaviour and worse adolescent outcomes. It has already been shown that in a number of families, parents were stressed by the difficulties of managing activities and family responsibilities. Related to this, in terms of their role as parents, some parents felt the activities had had negative consequences, but the majority thought there were positive consequences. The negative consequences were related to the parent’s increased levels of stress or lack of time to be there for the child – parents and children perceived that the increased tiredness, irritability or stress of the parent resulted in a worsening of parenting style. However, the vast majority of the respondents in this study reported that, overall, the impact of undertaking the agreed activities was positive, even if some level of increased stress was experienced. Positive aspects of the participation agreements on parenting were related to parents being happier people, which then resulted in better relationships with the children.

Similarly, in the literature, the link has been made between higher levels of parental stress and deterioration in the quality of the parent-child relationship (Brooks, Hair and Zaslow 2001; Montemayor 1984). There was no evidence of increased parent-child conflict, and indeed little deterioration in quality of the parent-child relationship, except in relation to the time parents and children spent together. While some reported declines in the quality of communication, others thought there had been positive changes. The most significant change to the relationship was in relation to the time spent together, and the availability of parents to participate at school or other aspects of the child’s life. This time aspect was particularly relevant to those families in which the parent undertook their activities outside school hours – these families were most likely to note the negative time impacts on the parent-child time.

### **Financial impacts**

However, the vast majority of the respondents in this study reported that, overall, the impact of undertaking the agreed activities was positive, even if some level of increased stress was experienced. Positive aspects of the participation agreements on parenting were related to parents being happier people, which then resulted in better relationships with the children. Some children noted parental employment led to improvements in the ability to buy things, or more pocket money for themselves. Financial issues also came up in the context of improvements in parenting – some parents thought they were able to fulfil their role as a parent better with greater income. This is in line with suggestions by Gennetian *et al.* (2002) that improvements in income mean additional resources for the family and children. Some respondents in this study related improvements in income to improved outcomes for the children through the idea of being able to provide better for the future.

### **Parents as role models**

A strong link was made between the benefit of acting as a more positive role model for the children and adolescent outcomes. A number of parents and children discussed this when asked about the impacts on schooling – some parents felt that their working or studying provided a good role model for their child, which had a positive impact on the child’s

motivational performance at school. This is consistent with suggestions by Gennetian *et al.* (2002) that positive parental role models would help to improve outcomes in families such as these. Whether or not this eventuates into actual long-term outcomes cannot be discerned over the time period covered in this research.

### **Health**

Health issues were a concern for some, particularly for those with existing long-term health problems. While the activities actually improved health issues for some, for others they did not. It was noted that those with long-term health problems were more likely to have reported negative stress associated with undertaking their activities. The existence of health barriers amongst this population is not a new finding (for example, King and McHugh 1995; Shaver, King, McHugh and Payne 1994), and it is important that these barriers continue to be recognised in programs to help parents return to employment.

### **Child's schooling**

The child's schooling or homework was perceived to be affected by undertaking the agreed activities, according to just less than half of the parents and children. On the whole, the impacts on schooling were seen as negative, as the parent had less time to be involved with the school or school functions. There were, however, some positive aspects for those families in which the parent had become more involved in the school as part of undertaking some of their activities. Similarly, some reported that the parent had less time to be involved in homework (reported by some parents and children), while in other cases parents were more involved, given that they had acquired new skills or a new understanding of their child's work.

In the context of the child's schooling, one parent commented that because they were not around as much to supervise their child, this had meant the child's schoolwork had deteriorated. On the other hand, another parent noted that their child was doing better at school, as they were taking more responsibility for themselves. Despite the importance of this as a concern in the literature on parental employment, the decreased availability of parents to supervise their child was noted by only a minority of parents. In two cases, the parents linked their inability to supervise to behavioural problems in their children.

### **Responsibility**

Another change brought about through parents' activities was increases in the level of responsibility of children. This change was at times associated with parents not being there to do everything they had done before, but at other times it was related to the parent being busy, and needing more help to get things done. This increased responsibility, however, was not seen as a negative thing by parents or children in the majority of cases.

### **Involvement in child's life and child's relationships**

One of the major issues considered by this report was the extent to which the undertaking of agreed activities affected parents' involvement in children's lives, in particular the child's motivational performance at school, homework, and sporting and social activities. Not surprisingly, undertaking the agreed activities meant that parents were on the whole less involved in these aspects of their child's life, primarily due to a clash of timetables or just having less time available, overall. This lack of involvement was more acute when parents had other caring responsibilities or long-term health issues of their own. However, there were cases where the activities provided opportunities for parents to have greater involvement in their child's life, usually when the activity involved paid or volunteer work at the child's school or where the parent was a volunteer for social activities in which the child was also involved.

Parents almost universally felt that less involvement was a bad thing, and on some issues so did children, although for some social activities a number of children saw the parents' lower involvement as a good thing – not that surprising from young teenagers. Children mainly saw a lack of parental involvement in social or sporting activities as a bad thing when this meant they could no longer participate as a consequence.

In many cases, the lower level of parental involvement, although a bad thing when considered in isolation, had created significant positive opportunities where children had been given greater responsibility and had embraced the opportunity positively. In many of those cases, it had led to greater mutual trust and respect between the parent and the child, particularly where parents had had some initial concerns about the effects of less supervision and the manner in which the children would react to the greater expected responsibilities. Often this compensated for concerns parents had about less involvement with the child's school or homework as some children had actually performed better under these increased levels of personal responsibility. Frequently, the activity the parent was undertaking (working or studying) had provided a positive role model to the child who had responded positively to the parents new commitment and this had again increased the level of respect between parent and child.

This was by no means universal though, with a number of parents reporting increases in negative behaviour by their child. In the more extreme cases, this seemed to be where the child had a history of antisocial behaviour prior to the participation agreement commencing, or where the parent considered the child not mature sufficiently to handle the increased responsibility. In less extreme cases, a number of parents were simply concerned about being less in tune with what their child was doing or less involved with the child's homework and this was causing them some concern without them actually identifying particular changes in the child's behaviour.

These changes in parents' involvement in children's lives were echoed in what parents and children said about how the parent's agreed activities had affected the child's relationships, including with the parent undertaking the activities. Where impacts were reported, they were generally positive, usually based on an increase in mutual respect stemming from the child exercising greater responsibility and/or the parent's agreed activity giving the parent and child more to talk about or a common task (like studying).

### ***Changes in behaviour***

The analysis on changes in adverse behaviour of children, unlike other analyses in this report, could not draw upon direct connections made by the respondents between that behaviour and other events and issues. Whilst this means some care must be exercised in drawing too much from this analysis, there were some interesting relationships that warrant further investigation. Adverse changes in behaviour were certainly more concentrated amongst parents undertaking new activities (as distinct from those who had ongoing activities), suggesting that children are more prone to antisocial behaviour during these transitional periods within families. Interestingly, activities done outside of school hours did not elicit higher levels of negative behaviours, mainly it would seem because most parents who did activities during this time ensured their child had adequate alternative supervision.

The main finding from this analysis was the relationship between the impact of activities on the parent and their resultant wellbeing and subsequent behavioural outcomes for the child. Negative impacts on parents in terms of stress and health, particularly if coupled with negative impacts on their perceptions of themselves as parents, were associated with negative behaviours in children. At the same time, where changes in parent's wellbeing were positive (even where they were stressed), they manifested in improved self-confidence and positive perceptions of themselves as parents, and the children in these families tended to show decreases in adverse behaviour and/or increases in positive behaviour.

### ***Attitudes to work, income support and compulsory activities***

The previous sections have considered direct impacts on the activities or the Participation Agreement on the parents and children. Another possible impact is on attitudes to work or to receipt of income support. Paulson (1996) found that attitudes to work were an important factor in adolescent outcomes. This is also relevant when considering that parental stress or wellbeing is likely to be associated with the extent to which their employment preferences are matched by their actual activities (Pocock and Clarke 2005). Where parents' motivation to work or attitudes to work increase, such that employment is seen as a preferable option, then there would be expected to be a better outcome for the family when that parent does work.

Parents were asked questions about how their attitudes had changed. When asked whether their attitudes to work had changed, many said they had become more positive towards work, and this reflected personal increases in self-confidence and motivation in the workforce, often as a result of overcoming initial concerns about abilities and a more general fear of the unknown. Respondents' attitudes about undertaking agreed activities through the compulsion of having a Participation Agreement also appeared to shift in a generally positive fashion in a similar way to the attitudes about work. By Wave 2, a number of parents were much more accepting of having to undertake agreed activities and a few even considered them to be of significant benefit, mainly in terms of motivating them to change their circumstances or encouraging them to take on new challenges.

In contrast, almost all parents said their attitudes about receiving income support or staying home to look after children were unchanged 12 months after signing their Participation Agreement, suggesting that these attitudes are much more ingrained and unlikely to be shifted by being involved in the agreed activities. There were a number of parents who had become more comfortable with leaving their child while they worked, based on their experiences with the agreed activities, which was a promising outcome. However, there is a need to recognise the increased feelings of guilt that some parents obviously have in terms of being reliant on income support, as this can be detrimental to the wellbeing of the parent and ultimately the child.

### ***Caveats***

It is important to recognise that while the aim of this study was to evaluate the effects of the activity requirements on adolescent outcomes, the results related more to the effects of actually undertaking activities. The activity requirements differed to the actual activities most noticeably in the amount of time people spent in their activities (almost all spent longer on average per week than required). Related to this, despite policy guidelines that activities do not have to be undertaken outside school hours, many activities were held in these outside-hours times. This does not mean all respondents had taken up new long hours, outside-school activities, as many were already doing activities before signing the Participation Agreement.

It is also important to keep in mind the following points about this study. Firstly, many of the issues from which information was sought from respondents is quite subjective. Consequently, responses can be influenced by the state of mind of the respondent at the time the interview and this has the potential to contaminate the interpretation, particularly when assessing change using responses from two different points in time.

Secondly, due to the size and manner in which the study sample was drawn, the results of this study are not able to generalised to the entire population of Parenting Payment recipients.

Thirdly, it is difficult to assess the longer-term impacts of a policy intervention such as that being evaluated in this study, given information was initially collected 3-4 months after the Participation Agreement was signed and then again 8-9 months after that. Longer-term impacts may take longer to emerge. Further, a small number of parents had not commenced their agreed activities at the time of the first wave.

And finally, this study is attempting to assess the impacts of parents undertaking agreed activities at a point in the family life-span that is often one of significant change. Not only are adolescents entering a period of rapid change from childhood to adulthood, this is traditionally a time when mothers have tended to shift their focus from the domestic sphere to activities outside of the home, including paid work.

### ***Concluding comments***

Many of the issues and concerns raised by respondents in this study were similar to those found in the national and international literature, although of course, this study is unique in its focus on this specific group who were, in the near future, about to make the transition from Parenting Payment. This is likely to be a difficult time for many parents, and in the absence of any Participation Agreement, there may have been significant issues raised by parents anticipating the loss of Parenting Payment as there were for a similar group of sole parents studied by Shaver *et al.* (1994).

This study did find significant issues for parents with respect to stress and the time pressures resulting from undertaking the agreed activities. Parents and children were both concerned with the reduction in time that they spent together and the consequences for the quality of their relationship that stemmed from undertaking the activities. Although these concerns were more prevalent amongst families where the activities were new, they were certainly present in families with ongoing activities as well. Part of the higher prevalence in new activity families could relate to the fact that many of the negative consequences of the activities were transitory in nature and tended to diminish over time.

It is also worth noting that studies often find balancing work and family is not easy for parents. There are significant stresses involved, particularly that of the time pressure experienced by those trying to juggle competing demands on time. Parents often feel conflicted over employment decisions when it means compromising some aspect of parenting, particularly that of always 'being there' for their children. Parents who make the choice to work, do so to make other gains, including having the financial benefits of earning a wage and maintaining the connection to employment (and keeping continuity of skills). That is, the issues identified by the parents and children in this study are not unique to these Parenting Payment recipients.

Overall, the impact on parents and children of Parenting Payment recipients undertaking agreed activities was positive. In most cases, the stress and time pressures of undertaking activities were outweighed by the positive impacts on confidence and self-esteem that followed from the challenges that new activities created, the increased social connectedness they provided and the benefits of actual or anticipated financial benefits of participation. Many parents and children commented on the improved wellbeing of the parent and this report has identified how this has translated to improved parenting and the concept of parents as role models to their adolescent children. These positive effects were further reinforced by how children responded to their parent's activities through increased levels of responsibility, maturity and respect for the parent.

Finally, a positive assessment of the policy intervention is also reflected in the overall impacts reported for parents and children of the agreed activities. Overwhelmingly, parents and children both indicated that the overall impact on the parent was positive and none suggested it was negative. For children, the overall impact was about half positive and half neutral, with only one child assessing its impact as negative overall. In justifying these overall assessments, most respondents pointed to positive impacts that have been described throughout this report, particularly that of improved positive wellbeing.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that parental involvement in activities such as those included in Participation Agreements, does have an impact on adolescent children. These impacts were most clearly observed in the 'spillover' from activities to home. On the negative side, increased levels of parental stress, especially due to time pressures, were apparent, as

was the reduced amount of time that parents and children have to spend together. These did not, however, result in widespread increases in behavioural or relationship problems. In fact, there was very little evidence that reduced levels of supervision or monitoring, or increased levels of responsibility taken on by children had negative consequences for these children.

On the positive side, respondents also identified increases in parental self-esteem, confidence and happiness, and these were perceived to have positive flows onto parenting behaviour and to children. Other specific gains to families came about through increases in financial resources (or expectations of future increases), and increases in skill levels of parents. More direct positive impacts on adolescent children were found with respect to an improved parent-child relationship, increases in adolescent responsibility and greater mutual respect between the child and the parent. Overall, these positive developments were seen to outweigh any negative aspects of the Participation Agreement.

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# **Appendices**

# Appendix 1 Sample Characteristics

This section describes the demographic characteristics of the respondents (both parents and children) who were interviewed at both Wave 1 (June/July 2004) and Wave 2 (March/April 2005) for this study. Information is presented that was obtained directly from the respondents, as well as Centrelink client administrative records held by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS).

## A1.1 Sex and age of parent

Of the 60 (parent) respondents in Wave 1, all except six were female. In Wave 2, 50 were female and five were male. The median age of respondents at Wave 1 was 43, and the range was from 31 to 58.

**Table A- 1.1 Sex and age of participants at each data collection wave**

	Wave 1	Wave 2
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	6	5
Female	54	50
<b>Age</b>		
31-39	14	13
40-49	35	31
50-59	11	11

## A1.2 Benefit type and relationship status

Table A- 1.2 first shows the distribution of each variable as at Wave 1. In the case of administrative data, this has been tabulated as at Wave 1, although it was extracted from administrative records some months before this. Secondly, the table shows how these variables were distributed across the Wave 2 sample, *as measured in Wave 1*, to show whether attrition occurred more in some groups than others. The third column shows how the variables were distributed in Wave 2, *as measured in Wave 2*, where available.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of the Wave 1 interview, the administrative data indicated that 34 of the respondents were receiving Parenting Payment Partnered, and 26 were receiving Parenting Payment Single. This mostly corresponded to relationship status as given by respondent – 33 were recorded as partnered and 27 as single. Two people on the partnered rate of payment said they were lone parents, and one person on the single rate said they were living with a partner. Given that the administrative data was drawn from Centrelink records some months before the Wave 1 data were collected, some discrepancy is not surprising.

<sup>8</sup> The administrative data were not updated for Wave 2.

**Table A- 1.2 Relationship variables**

	Wave 1	Wave 1 Data item – distribution at Wave 2	Wave 2
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Benefit Type (administrative data)</b>			
Partnered	34	33	
Single	26	22	
<b>Partner Status</b>			
Partnered	33	31	30
Lone parent	27	24	25
<b>Marital Status (administrative data)</b>			
De facto	6	6	
Divorced	1	1	
Married	28	27	
Separated	17	16	
Single	8	5	

There was little change in relationship status between Wave 1 and Wave 2. Of the 33 who said they were living with a partner at Wave 1, only two were no longer living with a partner at Wave 2 (and two of the original number did not respond in Wave 2). All 29 who had a partner during each wave of data collection were with the same partner on both occasions. Of the 27 lone parents in Wave 1, one had partnered by Wave 2 and three were non-respondents in Wave 2.

Most partnered women were legally married (27 of the 33 partnered women in Wave 1). Most lone parents were recorded as separated from a previous partner – of the 27 lone parents at Wave 1, 16 were separated and another one was divorced. A further eight were recorded as single.

### **A1.3 Partner's main activity**

The main weekly activity of the partner was collected for all partnered respondents at Wave 1. A very high number of these respondents (12 of 33) said their partners were not working or studying, and were on a disability pension. Some had employed partners (eight full-time, three part-time), three had partners who were studying (two full-time, one part-time), five had unemployed partners and two had retired partners. There had been a little change by Wave 2, with a few movements across these categories.

**Table A- 1.3 Partner's activities**

	Wave 1	Wave 1 Data item – distribution at Wave 2	Wave 2
<b>Partnered total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Partner's main weekly activities</b>			
Full-time work	8	7	9
Part-time work	3	3	5
Full-time study	2	2	
Part-time study	1	1	
Looking for work/unemployed	5	4	2
Disability pension	12	12	10
Retired	2	2	
Caring/community work	-		3
Not stated			1

### A1.4 Place of residence

Respondents were located in each of the States, although the largest numbers came from NSW (18 respondents), Queensland (14 respondents) and Victoria (12 respondents). The State distribution was similar in Wave 2.

Of the total, 26 resided in capital cities, and 34 lived outside capital cities. Of these, all except four in capital cities and one rural/regional respondent did not participate in Wave 2.

**Table A- 1.4 Place of residence**

	Wave 1	Wave 2
<b>State</b>		
ACT	1	1
NSW	18	17
NT	1	1
Qld	14	13
SA	3	2
Tas	7	6
Vic	12	11
WA	4	4
<b>Location</b>		
Capital City	26	22
Other	34	33

### A1.5 Indigenous status and main language spoken

Only one respondent identified as Aboriginal (and she also had an Aboriginal partner) and one as Torres Strait Islander, but the Aboriginal person did not respond in Wave 2. Also, all except two respondents spoke mainly English in the household, with both exceptions indicating that the main language spoken in the household was Arabic.

**Table A- 1.5 Indigenous and language indicators**

	Wave 1	Wave 2
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Indigenous Indicator</b>		
Aboriginal	1	0
Torres Strait Islander	1	1
Neither	58	54
<b>Main language spoken at home</b>		
English	58	53
Arabic	2	2

### A1.6 Education of respondent and partner

Of the Wave 1 respondents, 41 had not completed school beyond Year 10, while 19 had completed Year 11 or 12. However, even amongst those who did not complete secondary schooling, some had gained other post-school qualifications. As a result, 33 people had completed some type of post-school qualification, with most having a basic vocational qualification. A further four had a skilled vocational qualification, seven had an associate diploma, and one of each had an undergraduate diploma, a bachelor degree or a post-graduate qualification.

**Table A- 1.6 Education levels**

	Wave 1	Wave 2
<b>Highest education level</b>		
Year 10 secondary or less	21	19
Year 11 or Year 12 secondary	6	6
Basic vocational qualification	19	17
Skilled vocational qualification	4	4
Associate or undergrad diploma	8	7
Bachelor or post-graduate qualification	2	2
<b>Highest education level of partner</b>		
Primary school only	3	1
Secondary school only	21	21
Basic vocational qualification	3	3
Skilled vocational qualification	1	1
Associate or undergrad diploma	3	3
Bachelor or post-graduate qualification	1	1

For partnered respondents, the education level of their partner was also collected. The partners also had quite low levels of education, in fact compared to the respondents, a higher proportion had no post-school qualification. Of the 33 partnered respondents in Wave 1, 24 had partners with no post-school qualification, four had basic or skilled vocational qualifications, three had an associate diploma and one had a post-graduate qualification.

### A1.7 Duration on payment

The duration on income support in general, and Parenting Payment in particular, were calculated for respondents as at Wave 1. Some eight respondents had been on income support for less than one year, all of whom had been on Parenting Payment. On the other hand, 11 respondents had been on income support for more than 10 years, with nine of them having

been on Parenting Payment for this time. The median duration of time on income support and Parenting Payment was 6.4 years and 5.5 years, respectively.

**Table A- 1.7 Duration on payment**

	Wave 1	Wave 1 Data item – distribution at Wave 2
<b>Duration on income support (administrative data)</b>		
Less than 1 year	8	7
1 to less than 2 years	10	10
2 to less than 5 years	9	8
5 to less than 8 years	8	8
8 to less than 10 years	14	12
10 years or more	11	10
<b>Duration on Parenting Payment (administrative data)</b>		
Less than 1 year	8	7
1 to less than 2 years	10	10
2 to less than 5 years	11	10
5 to less than 8 years	9	9
8 to less than 10 years	13	11
10 years or more	9	8

## A1.8 Health issues

At Wave 1, most respondents rated their health favourably – 18 said their general health was very good and 24 said it was good. Another 14 said it was fair, two said it was poor and one rated it as very poor.

**Table A- 1.8 Health measures**

	Wave 1	Wave 1 Data item – distribution at Wave 2	Wave 2
<b>Rating of own health</b>			
Very good	18	15	14
Good	24	24	19
Fair	14	12	18
Poor	2	2	4
Very poor	1	1	
<b>Ongoing medical problems or disabilities?</b>			
Yes	30	28	29
No	30	27	26
<b>Care for someone else with ongoing medical problems/disabilities</b>			
Yes	26	23	19
No	34	32	36

In Wave 2, most people reported the same health status as in Wave 1 – 32 out of 54 (one person had not stated their health status in Wave 1). Some 14 people gave a lower rating on the health scale in Wave 2, with many of these dropping from ‘very good’ to ‘good’. Another eight people gave a higher rating of their health in Wave 2 – in particular all of those who had given the lowest ratings in Wave 1 increased their rating of their health status.

Despite most rating their health quite favourably, around half of the respondents reported that they had an ongoing medical problem or disability that limited the work they could do, the kind of study they could undertake or the hours they could work. Of the 60 respondents in Wave 1, 30 reported that, at the time of the JET interview, they had such conditions. Most of these (23) reported having a physical condition (not actually specified). Some five reported having a psychiatric condition, two reported having an intellectual or mental disorder and one reported having a sensory disorder.

Those with no ongoing medical conditions were most likely to say their health was ‘good’ or ‘very good’, while those with ongoing conditions were more likely to say their health was ‘fair’ or ‘good’. (One person reported multiple health problems and rated their health as ‘very poor’).

Most of those with health conditions reported that these had lasted six months or more (27 of the 30). Of the 30 with health conditions at the time of the JET interview, two no longer had the condition when interviewed in Wave 1.

Of the 28 Wave 2 respondents who had reported having medical problems or disabilities in Wave 1, 24 said they continued to have such conditions at the time of the Wave 2 interview. An additional five people, who had not reported a problem in Wave 1, indicated that they had a medical problem or disability in Wave 2. All these five respondents referred to a physical problem.

Of the 22 respondents who had the same medical problem or disability in both waves, 10 indicated the severity of the condition had not changed between Wave 1 and Wave 2, eight said it had worsened and four said it had improved (although they still had it).

In addition to their own health concerns, many had responsibilities for others in the family with health problems. Of the 30 who reported personal medical conditions, 14 were providing assistance to others in the family with ongoing medical problems or disabilities. A further 12 respondents without a personal medical problem or disability were also providing some care to another household member with such conditions. As indicated by the large number of partners on disability pension (12 of the 33 partners at Wave 1), some respondents were providing care to their partners. Others were caring for children with health problems or disabilities. The conditions these children had included asthma, diabetes, ADHD, anxiety problems and other physical problems.<sup>9</sup>

Most people who reported providing care to another household member with some health condition in Wave 1 continued to provide this care in Wave 2. Of the 26 who were caring for another person in Wave 1, 19 continued to provide this care in Wave 2, four said the person they had cared for still had the condition but they no longer provided care for them, and three were non-respondents in Wave 2.

In Wave 2, respondents who had caring responsibilities were asked whether providing this care limited the kind or hours of work or study they could do. Most said it did limit their options – 12 of the 19 who were still caring in Wave 2, and three of the four who were no longer caring in Wave 2 said this was the case.

## **A1.9 Work status and expectations**

In Wave 1, one-third of the sample was working. Among those not working, while some had recent workforce experience (for example, eight had worked in the last year), most had been out of the workforce for a long period (24 had last worked five or more years ago).

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<sup>9</sup> Parents with children who have severe disabilities were not required to have a Participation Agreement.

Of those recorded as not working, most (28 of 40) indicated that they would prefer to be in paid work. Some nine people said they did not want to work and three did not know. Those that did not want to work were partnered women, with five of the nine having a partner who worked full-time; two had an unemployed partner and two had a partner on a disability pension.

**Table A- 1.9 Employment history and aspirations**

	Wave 1	Wave 1 Data item – distribution at Wave 2
<b>Time since paid work</b>		
Currently working	19	17
Less than one year	8	7
1 to less than 2 years	4	4
2 to less than 3 years	4	4
4 to less than 5 years	1	1
5 years or more	24	22
<b>Whether would rather be working</b>		
Currently working	19	17
Yes	28	26
No	9	8
Don't know	4	4
<b>When want to start paid work</b>		
N/A (currently working, don't want to work)	32	29
Less than 6 months	16	15
Within one year	5	4
Within 2 years or more	5	5
Don't know	2	2

Of those who preferred to be working, most wanted to start work in the next year.

While three respondents moved into work between waves, most of those working in Wave 2 had also been working in Wave 1 (nine of the 12 with a Participation Agreement and working at Wave 2 had been working at Wave 1) – details of transitions into and out of work are discussed in Appendix 2.

### **A1.10 The youngest child**

There were slightly more boys than girls in the sample of children interviewed (that is, the youngest child in the family) – 34 boys and 26 girls. At Wave 1, children were mostly aged 13 (22 children) or 14 (35 children) although three were already 15.

At Wave 1, almost all the children were still in school - one was in Year 6 or lower, 19 were in Year 8, 33 were in Year 9, and 5 were in Year 10 or above. Two children were not in school. By Wave 2, most children had moved up one grade. One of those not in school in Wave 1 was in Year 10 at Wave 2. The other remained not in school and was looking for work at Wave 2. No children left school between Wave 1 and Wave 2.

Of the school children, 10 were working for pay outside the home in Wave 1 and nine were doing so in Wave 2. However, only three school-aged children reported working at both Wave 1 and Wave 2.

**Table A- 1.10 Child details**

	Wave 1	Wave 1 Data item –	Wave 2
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<b>distribution at Wave 2</b>			
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	34	32	32
Female	26	23	23
<b>Age</b>			
13	22	20	
14	35	32	20
15	3	3	32
16			3
<b>School Attendance</b>			
Year 6 or below	1	0	0
Year 8	19	18	17
Year 9	33	31	33
Year 10 or above	5	4	4
Not in school	2	2	1

Most children recognised the importance of getting good grades at school – 36 thought it was very important and 20 said it was important. Only two thought it was not important. When children were asked how much they liked school, the majority response was ‘it’s OK’ (42 respondents). Some were more positive, saying they liked it a lot (11). There were also some who were more negative, saying they did not like it much or at all (5).

The majority of children hoped to finish high school (47), although some did not aspire to this – seven hoped to leave after completing year 10 and two preferred to leave after completing year 11. Post-school aspirations were quite varied, with 19 of the total hoping to go to university. Another eight hoped to do an apprenticeship, one to get a traineeship, two to go to TAFE, and three do some other studies. Others mentioned work options.

# Appendix 2 The Activities and the Agreement of respondents

## A2.1 Administrative issues

The Participation Agreement formalises the approved activities and hours of participation a parent has negotiated with their JET or Personal Adviser. Some parents already may be undertaking activities that fulfil their participation requirements, at the time of their initial participation interview. For others, an assessment may have been made that they would benefit from undertaking some new activities in order to become more 'job-ready'.

This section commences with a discussion of the respondents who were already undertaking activities (such as working or studying) that could qualify as agreed activities when they were first interviewed about developing a Participation Agreement. These respondents are then compared with those who were required to undertake new activities in order to fulfil the obligations of a Participation Agreement.

### Ongoing versus new activities

In Wave 1, respondents whose Participation Agreement covered only ongoing activities were asked a more limited set of questions than those whose agreement included new activities. It was thought at the time that those with new activities would be more affected than others by the Participation Agreement. On analysing the Wave 1 data, it became clear that even amongst those with only ongoing activities there were some who were having difficulties with the activities themselves, or the compulsory nature of the agreement. Therefore, at Wave 2, the same information was collected from all people with a Participation Agreement, regardless of whether the activities were new or ongoing.

As shown in Table A- 2.1, just over half of the respondents (33 out of 60) had only ongoing activities in their Participation Agreement at Wave 1. Of those who had one or more new activities in their agreement, 11 had already started in that activity by the time of the Wave 1 interview.

**Table A- 2.1 Whether agreed activities were new at Wave 1**

Agreement includes -	Agreement includes new activity/activities?			Of those with new activities, how many were already doing activity at Wave 1
	No	Yes	Total	
Work-focused activity	15	10	25	4
Study-focused activity	9	14	23	6
Volunteer work	14	6	20	3
Health maintenance	2		2	
Other	8	6	14	
<b>Any of the above</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>11</b>

Those with new activities in Wave 1 included people with work-focused activities or study-focused activities predominantly. Some also had volunteer work or other activities. Just over half of those with new activities were doing *only* new activities, while the remainder took on new activities in addition to ongoing activities.

Those doing new activities only included:

- three with a work-focused activity (but these people were not working at Wave 1);
- seven with a study/training activity (six of these were already studying at Wave 1); and
- six with voluntary work activities (four were doing these activities at Wave 1).

A number of those with ongoing and new activities had previously been doing paid or unpaid work, and undertook to study as well for their Participation Agreement.

Of those who were continuing with an existing activity, most were happy to do so, although for some, this was due to financial imperatives rather than enjoying the activity.

### **Process of developing the agreement.**

Generally, people were positive about the process of developing their agreements.

On the whole, positive comments were made by those already undertaking activities, but some of these respondents did not recall much discussion of options. The impression given, by some respondents, was that the interviewer just said that what they were doing at the time was sufficient. This was not necessarily relayed in a negative light, for example: “She simply asked me what I was doing, and what I had planned, and she said, ‘okay, well, you’re doing everything you need to do’. She sort of didn’t really need to push me in any direction, I was sort of doing it on my own” (Single father, aged 40, working, studied in the past, began study before signing agreement, began working after signing agreement, ID=3, Wave 1).

### **JET adviser contact and making changes to agreements**

Of the 55 Wave 2 respondents, about half had one or more contacts with the JET adviser since the initial participation interview, usually initiated by JET Adviser.

About one fifth said they had changed their agreement (although some of these were unclear as to whether or not they had actually changed) and no one reported a problem.

### **Understanding of Centrelink regulations**

In Wave 2, respondents were asked about their understanding of how they could change their agreement if their circumstances changed. Specifically, they were first asked whether Centrelink rules would allow them to alter the number of hours they usually performed, should their personal or family circumstances changed. They were then asked if the rules allowed them to do more hours of their activities in some weeks and fewer or no hours in other weeks, should they require this. They were also asked if the rules allowed them to change activities should they need to do so. Only about one third understood that they could change the agreement if necessary.

When commenting on the impact of their agreed activities, respondents sometimes referred to their experience of time pressures. It is therefore interesting to see how many people were spending more time in activities than the maximum requirement of 150 hours in each 26 weeks (which averages to about six hours per week).

Even though participants are required to undertake only up to six hours a week (on average), the majority spend much longer than this in their activities. The average time spent in activities, by those with a Participation Agreement at Wave 2, was 21 hours per week. About one-third of those with an agreement at Wave 2 were spending 25 hours or more a week on activities. Of the 11 undertaking their activities for 25 hours or more, six were working (of which two were also studying), three were combining voluntary work and study, one was just studying and one was undertaking caring responsibilities. Only eight of the Wave 2 respondents who said they still had an agreement were doing six hours or less a week on their

activities, and of these, four reported doing no hours, so were perhaps ‘between activities’ (see ‘Those with no agreement at Wave 2’ page 87).

Respondents were questioned, in Wave 2, about whether they were doing sufficient hours in their activities. On average, those who said they were doing more than required, and who still had an agreement, spent 23 hours a week on their activities. Those who reported that they were doing about the same or less<sup>10</sup> than they were required to do on average, spent 17-18 hours a week on their activities – clearly much more than the six hour average that is required.

Why were so many people spending more time than they were required to on their agreed activities? Those doing study or voluntary work indicated that they were doing longer hours because this is what was required of the activity to which they had committed. For paid workers, it was because this is what the job required, and because they needed the income associated with that work.

## **A2.2 What is in the Participation Agreement?**

This section commences with details of the Participation Agreements found to be operating in Wave 2 for those who indicated they still had an operating agreement, and compares the extent to which the same activities were being undertaken in Wave 1. This comparison is based entirely on the information provided by the respondents in Wave 2, when they were asked to detail all activities that were in their current or any previous Participation Agreements, and the date at which these activities were commenced. Unfortunately, the responses collected at Wave 1 as to what activities respondents were undertaking at the time were of poor quality and cannot be relied upon to provide a full and accurate picture. What can be done, however, is compare the activities in Wave 2 with the agreed activities recorded by Centrelink as to the broad content areas of the Participation Agreement.

The section then continues by giving more detail of the three main areas of activities being undertaken at Wave 2: paid work, volunteer work and study or training. It also considers any past activities that respondents indicated they have now ceased plus any activities yet to be commenced. Finally it looks at the circumstances of those respondents who indicated that they no longer had a Participation Agreement and the reasons for this change.

## **Those with a Participation Agreement at Wave 2**

In Wave 2, 32 of the 55 respondents still had a participation agreement and were undertaking activities as part of this agreement. (An analysis of those who said they no longer had an agreement is given on page 87).

**Table A- 2.2 Types of activities undertaken in Wave 2**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Volunteer work	16
Study or training	11
Paid work	10
(+unpaid family workers)	2
Caring for family member	6
Job search	2
Health maintenance	2
Achievement of driver’s license	1

Note: Respondents can be counted more than once.

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<sup>10</sup> While there is no minimum hours specified in the agreement, the question asked respondents if they thought they were doing more than or less than the minimum numbers of hours they were required to do.

Most of these respondents were engaged in one (14 respondents) or two (12 respondents) activities, although smaller numbers reported doing more (four respondents carried out three activities, one engaged in four and another one was engaged in five activities). Some of those carrying out multiple activities were undertaking different types of activities and others were engaged in multiples of the one type of activity. For example the person with five activities was engaged in six volunteer jobs, some regularly and some irregularly.

The types of activity undertaken at Wave 2 are shown in Table A- 2.2. These activities are explored in more detail later.

### Changes between Wave 1 and Wave 2 activities

Table A- 2.3 compares the activities being undertaken at Wave 1 with those being undertaken at Wave 2. The first thing to note from this table is that there were considerable numbers of people who stated they did not have an agreement at Wave 2. These people have been excluded from the counts of working/studying/voluntary work at Wave 2, even if they were engaged in these activities, as the focus is on those who have an agreement at both waves. The Wave 2 counts, therefore, undercount the number of people actually engaged in these activities at Wave 2.

Of those who still had an agreement at Wave 2, most workers stayed working, and most of those not working, remained not working. Twenty-three were engaged in activities other than work in both waves and nine were working in both waves, while 3 had commenced work by Wave 2 and one had ceased work by this time.

Most of those who said that they no longer had an agreement were not studying at Wave 1. Of those not studying at Wave 1 who had an agreement at Wave 2, the majority were also not studying at Wave 2. On the other hand, half of those studying at Wave 1 were no longer studying at Wave 2.

**Table A- 2.3 Wave 1 and wave 2 agreed activities compared**

	No agreement Wave 2	Working Wave 2	Not working Wave 2	Non- respondent Wave 2	Total
<b>Working Wave 1</b>	8	9	1	2	20
<b>Not working Wave 1</b>	11	3	23	3	40
<b>Total</b>	19	12	24	5	60
<b>Studying Wave 1</b>	3	8	5		16
<b>Not studying Wave 1</b>	16	3	20	5	44
<b>Total</b>	19	11	25	5	60
<b>Voluntary work Wave 1</b>	7	12	3	3	25
<b>Not voluntary work Wave 1</b>	12	4	17	2	35
<b>Total</b>	19	16	20	5	60

Twelve people were in voluntary work in both waves and 17 were engaged in activities other than voluntary work in both waves. A further four had commenced voluntary work and three had ceased such work by the second wave.

## **Agreed activity, Wave 1 and Wave 2 activity**

Table A- 2.4 summarises the relationship between agreed activities at Wave 1, and at Wave 2 for all those who responded to Wave 2.<sup>11</sup> Of all the 26 who had a work-related activity agreement at Wave 1, and who still had an agreement at Wave 2, a number were not working at Wave 2. Furthermore, those with a work-related agreed activity were more likely than others to be working at Wave 2. This is likely to be related to the fact that many of those with work-related activities in their agreement had been working prior to signing the agreement – they were committed to employment for reasons other than their need to adhere to the obligations of the agreement.

Of the 20 working at Wave 1, 15 had already been working at the time of the participation agreement interview. Of the 12 with a Participation Agreement and working at Wave 2, seven had been working at the time of the participation interview and the Wave 1 interview; three had not worked at either and two had worked at Wave 1 but not the JET interview.

None of those who were not working at Wave 2 but who had work-related activities in Wave 1 indicated that they had changed their agreement. One had left a job between Wave 1 and Wave 2; one was doing voluntary work as per her agreement, but she had not undertaken any activities to “develop other business interests” as she said was specified in the agreement; one was looking for work; one was not doing any work or job search but had looked for work in the past.

Table A- 2.5 focuses on study and training activities. At Wave 1, 23 respondents had an agreed study activity. More than half of the respondents (13) were not studying at Wave 1 (two of these had already completed a course by the time of Wave 1). Then, at Wave 2, only seven of this initial 23 were studying. A further eight did not have an agreement (or thought they did not); six still had an agreement but were undertaking no training, but had in the past participated in training for their agreement; two were non-respondents in Wave 2. Others – those without a study-related activity agreement – were also studying, which brought the total number studying at Wave 2 to 11, as shown earlier.

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<sup>11</sup> Agreed activity at Wave 1 refers to activities recorded by Centrelink about the original Participation Agreement.

**Table A- 2.4 Agreement activity and Wave 1 and Wave 2 work activity**

Agreed activity at Wave 1	Wave 1 Work Activity			No agree-ment	Wave 2 Work Activity			Total Wave 2
	Working	Not working	Total		Still has agreement	Not working	Total, still has an agreement	
<b>Work</b>								
Part-time work	11	3	14	6	6	1	7	13
Job search	0	5	5	2	1	2	3	5
Self employed	6	1	7	2	4	1	5	7
<b>Study</b>								
TAFE course	4	11	15	6	2	5	7	13
Transition to work	1	1	2	1	0	1	1	2
Other training	1	5	6	1	1	4	5	6
<b>Voluntary</b>								
Formal Voluntary-Approved Organisation	0	9	9	3	0	6	6	9
Formal Voluntary – Non Approved Organisation	0	3	3	0	0	3	3	3
Informal Voluntary work	0	7	7	2	0	4	4	6
Voluntary Work Initiative	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Other</b>								
Health maintenance	0	2	2	0		2	2	2
Other	5	9	14	4	2	6	8	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>55</b>

Note: People were counted more than once in the above if they had more than one agreed activity.

**Table A- 2.5 Agreement activity and Wave 1 and Wave 2 study activity**

Agreed activity at Wave 1	Wave 1 Study/Training Activity			No agree- ment	Wave 2 Study/Training Activity			Total Wave 2
	Studying	Not Studying	Total		Still has agreement	Not Studying	Total	
<b>Work</b>								
Part-time work	3	11	14	6	2	5	7	13
Job search	3	2	5	2		3	3	5
Self employed	0	7	7	2		5	5	7
<b>Study</b>								
TAFE course	7	8	15	6	4	3	7	13
Transition to work	0	2	2	1		1	1	2
Other training	3	3	6	1	3	2	5	6
<b>Voluntary</b>								
Formal Voluntary-Approved Organisation	2	7	9	3	1	5	6	9
Formal Voluntary – Non Approved Organisation	1	2	3	2		1	1	3
Informal Voluntary work	3	4	7	2	3	1	4	6
Voluntary Work Initiative	0	2	2	2				2
<b>Other</b>								
Health maintenance	1	1	2	1		1	1	2
Other	3	11	14	3	2	5	7	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>55</b>

Note: People were counted more than once in the above if they had more than one agreed activity.

## Wave 2 activities

### *Those engaged in paid work*

For 10 of those with an agreement and working at Wave 2, details were available about the nature of their job. Of these, eight worked for an employer and two had their own business; four were in permanent positions and six did casual work; five worked regular hours and two worked varied hours; two worked full-time hours, seven worked longer part-time hours (more than 15 per week) and one worked for an average of 10 hours per week. The remaining two people worked for a family/their husband's business, and details were not available about their jobs.

**Table A- 2.6 Job details for those working at Wave 2**

Works for employer/ own business	Permanent or casual	Hours regular or varied	Mean hours per week	Job description	Agreed activities at Wave 1
Employer	Permanent	Varies	26	Receptionist/administrator	Part-time work
Employer	Permanent	Varies	22	House/accommodation cleaning	Part-time work
Employer	Casual	Regular	30	Kitchen hand	Part-time work
Employer	Casual	Varies	23	Delivery driver	Part-time work
Employer	Casual	Regular	17	Delicatessen assistant	Other
Employer	Casual	Regular	16	Cleaner	Part-time work & job search
Employer	Casual	Regular	16	Paper deliverer	TAFE
Employer	Casual	Varies	10	Odour assessor	Part-time work
Own business	Permanent	Regular	50	Family day care	Self-employed
Own business	Permanent	Varies	40	Dressmaker	Self-employed

Of the 12 with an agreement and working at Wave 2, seven were already doing their paid work before signing the agreement and five began their current job after signing the agreement. However, some of those who started work since signing the agreement were actually working in other jobs around the time they had their participation interview. For example, a paper deliverer was working for a different employer, a cleaner had occasionally been doing casual cleaning work, and a receptionist had been engaged in other switchboard work.

According to the data provided by FaCS, the majority of those working at Wave 2 had had a work-related activity as part of their agreement at Wave 1.

Those working at Wave 2 included both single and partnered parents, although single parents were somewhat more likely to be working. Single parents were more likely to be regular casual workers, while the partnered parents were more likely to be permanent (although in two cases, these respondents were self-employed). Workers included those with and without personal health problems in equal numbers, but included few of those with caring responsibilities.

### ***Those engaged in volunteer work***

Sixteen people were doing volunteer work at Wave 2 as part of their agreement. Of these, 11 had one volunteer job, two held two such jobs, another two were engaged in three such activities and one had six volunteer jobs.

The types of volunteer work activities undertaken included working for charities sorting clothes, books or food; undertaking church work (visiting, cleaning or Sunday School teaching) or school-related work (helping in canteens or with school events). Others did administrative work such as doing bookkeeping or other office-related work.

There was considerable variety in the hours of volunteer work undertaken, with six doing regular hours, six doing varied hours and two doing a combination of regular and varied hours (plus one who was unable to specify). The number of hours spent doing volunteer work ranged from three to 40 with an average of 13 hours.

Many of those doing voluntary work had been engaged in such activities for a number of years – especially those doing volunteer work in churches or schools. Clearly, the volunteer work adopted by some respondents aligned with other interests they held (for example, being church-goers or having children in school). Of the 16 who were engaged in volunteer work at Wave 2, only two had not been doing volunteer work before the initial participation agreement.

### ***Those engaged in study/training***

There were 11 people undertaking study or training as part of their agreement at Wave 2. Of these, only seven had training/education programs specifically included in their agreement (according to FACS Wave 1 data). The transcripts suggested that some had discussed study options with the JET adviser at the time of the initial interview, although not all had study included in their agreements. It appears some thought they were to undertake study even though the agreement did not specify this.

Of those studying at Wave 2, the course-work hours ranged from one to 25 hours per week, with the average number being eight. The number of hours spent studying outside of course time ranged from 1 to 20 per week with the average number of hours being five.

There were many different types of courses being undertaken – including basic adult education, accounting, computing and welfare (counselling, youth work). Of the 11 people, seven had started their study since the initial participation agreement interview, while the other four had been studying in this or other courses before the interview.

### ***Past activities***

A number of respondents indicated that they had already completed some of the activities in their participation agreement. Most had completed only one (23 respondents), while 11 had completed two activities, one had completed three activities and three had completed four activities. Of the remainder – those 17 who had no past activities – three were recorded as having no present activities (the rest had current activities only). On further examination of the transcripts it is apparent that those respondents who seemed to have no current or past activities had in fact undertaken, or were undertaking activities, but had only offered this information when asked for details of their activities.

Not surprisingly, completed activities were most likely to be study or training (Table A- 2.7).

**Table A- 2.7 Types of past activities (no longer being done at Wave 2 interview)**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Study or training	26
Volunteer work	9
Paid work	7
Job search	7
Cared for family member	1
Health maintenance	0
Other	1

Of the 29 who had completed study or training, eight continued to be engaged in study or training at Wave 2. All but four of those who had completed study or training said they finished when the course finished, while the others indicated that they ceased these activities because of financial difficulties, an injury, personal/family difficulties or relocation away from the area.

Of the seven who worked in the past, five worked for an employer and one had their own business and the other person did not provide information about their work; two had been in permanent positions, three had undertaken casual work and two had been engaged in temporary work; three worked regular hours and four worked varied hours; three worked full-time hours, two worked longer part-time hours (more than 15 per week) and two worked shorter part-time hours (15 or fewer hours per week). There were various reasons for stopping work, the most common being that the work was casual or temporary.

Of the nine people who had been engaged in volunteer work in the past, eight were not currently doing volunteer work and one was doing a different volunteer job. Time pressures were expressed as the most common reason given for stopping voluntary work. These pressures were usually linked to an increase in hours spent in paid work, for example, when more paid employment became available to casual workers. Personal or family reasons were given by three respondents.

Of the seven who had undertaken job search activities in the past, two had found work or increased their work hours. Of the rest, most said that they had not stopped looking for work. Two had stopped for a period while they had health problems, but were still looking for work.

### ***Activities not commenced***

Only two people said they had activities in their agreement that they had not commenced. Both were related to training courses in which they had enrolled, but the courses had been subsequently cancelled.

### **Those with no agreement at Wave 2**

In Wave 2, 15 said that they no longer had a participation agreement with Centrelink, and three were unsure as to whether or not they had such an agreement. Of these, seven were no longer in receipt of Parenting Payment. The reasons for this were varied, but few had ceased their agreement because they lost Parenting Payment due to their own employment.

A number of people seem to be confused about their agreement. The remaining eight were still on Parenting Payment but said they had no agreement (plus three were still on Parenting Payment but did not know if they had an agreement). Some, by the end of the interview, realised that they probably had one. The most common reason offered for no longer having an agreement was that the activity in the agreement had been completed. As noted above, this was most likely to apply to those who had taken a training course. Some of those whose agreement covered a longstanding activity (such as home-educating their children or doing book-keeping for the husband's business) forgot that these were actually part of their

agreement. (Not remembering the agreement is not surprising. Many parents will only review their agreement at the annual interview. The agreement is only revisited if a change is needed.)

Similar issues arose for those people who said they had an agreement, but then did not provide details of their activities. In total there were 23 people who said they had no activities, but of these 19 no longer had a Participation Agreement with Centrelink or did not know whether or not they had an agreement. The remaining four, while recording no current activities, had past activities recorded. Three of the four appeared to be 'between activities' at the time of Wave 2, but the fourth realised by the end of the interview that she had one current activity.

### **A2.3 When activities are done**

In Wave 1, only the 25 respondents with new activities were asked about when their activities were undertaken. Most said they performed their activities on a regular basis each week. Despite policy guidelines that only require people to undertake their activities in school hours, half said they carried out their activities outside the child's school hours or on the weekend. However, it was not always the 'new' activities that were being done outside school hours. There was a range of activities that involved outside school hours time:

- Sometimes this was because of working hours, although in most cases the work was not a new activity (almost all work involved working outside school hours or on the weekend);
- Some undertook courses which were held in the evening or finished just after school hours;
- Some undertook voluntary work outside school hours, some of which included their children assisting with their outside school hours sports; and
- Some only occasionally did activities outside school hours, for example, having to attend meetings in the evening.

For students and for voluntary or paid workers, those spending longer on their activities were not necessarily those who undertook their activities outside school hours. Some of those whose activities involved shorter hours per week undertook those activities outside school hours.

When activities were done outside school hours, in three families the child was with the parent at these times, in six families the child was cared for by someone else (two by resident parents and siblings, three by just siblings and one by grandparents), and in three families the parent said the child looked after himself, and one said they did not know.

Of the 37 who were recorded as having current activities in Wave 2, 21 said they did their activities outside school hours or on the weekend. As noted for Wave 1, these outside school hours activities were not necessarily new activities, but that they had to be done in these hours nevertheless indicates there are issues in being able to find suitable activities that can be done during school hours. In particular, those working are usually doing some activities outside school hours (eight of the 10 working). Of the 16 engaged in volunteer work, nine did activities outside school hours, but some of this voluntary work was done with the children. Of the 11 in study or training, six worked on their activities outside school hours, including attending courses and doing study at home. Some respondents were engaged in more than one activity, so the total of these adds to more than 21. For example, three respondents were working and training, and all three had activities outside school hours.

For those 21 whose activities were undertaken outside of school hours or on weekends, none used formal paid care arrangements for their children; five children looked after themselves; six were looked after by the other (resident) parent; five by a brother or sister. Another four

had no care, as they were with the parent while he or she undertook the activities. Smaller numbers were cared for by grandparents (2) other relatives (1) friend or neighbour (1) or a non-resident parent (2).

Looking at those children who looked after themselves, one child was only occasionally left at home alone on a Saturday morning, one child was at home an hour or so before the single parent on school days, and in two cases the parents (single mothers) worked at night and the child was left alone (one only once a week and one more regularly). In the fifth case the circumstances were unclear.

## **A2.4 Children's knowledge of parent's activities**

At Wave 1, children were asked whether they knew about the Participation Agreement their parent had signed. Most (46) said they did not know. When reminded of the information sent to the family and told more of what the Participation Agreement was, around half of these children said they did then remember.<sup>12</sup> In total, then, 36 appeared to know something about the Participation Agreement and 24 did not.

More detailed information collected from children on what they knew about the agreement showed that in almost all cases, very little was known. Most spoke of the activities their parent was doing – whether work, study or volunteer work – but few mentioned knowledge of the details of the Participation Agreement.

The fact that only 36 of the children in Wave 1 knew about their parent's agreement (even after prompting) has significant implications for data analysis. It was only those children who knew about the agreement who were asked questions about what they considered were the good and bad things about the agreement in relation to their parent, to their family and to themselves.

The Wave 2 results were similar. Of the 55 children responding in Wave 2, 37 initially said they did not know or were unsure about the participation agreement signed by their parent. On further prompting 14 of these 37 children said they did know about the agreement, leaving 23 who did not know or were unsure. As in Wave 1, children's understanding about the agreements was fairly limited, but a few knew about the need to undertake activities:

In only eight families did the children state that there had been some discussion about the Participation Agreement. In some families, the parent had actively sought feedback from the family. In others, the focus seemed to be more on the parents telling the children what was happening.

Despite the limited knowledge the children had about the agreements, when children were asked if they knew about the activities their parents were undertaking – being specifically prompted about these activities – all children were aware of their parent's activities.

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<sup>12</sup> Before in the initial Participation Agreement interview, leaflets were sent to the family outlining the new requirements. One leaflet was specifically directed to the children in the family.