

Media Release: Serious concerns about TVNZ's *The Baby Borrowers* programme

Child advocacy groups around New Zealand have voiced unified concern about the airing of a controversial UK show, *The Baby Borrowers*, here on TVNZ. The groups calling for immediate withdrawal of this imported reality TV show include the Infant Mental Health Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (IMHAANZ), the Centre for Attachment, the Brainwave Trust, Parents Centre New Zealand, PORSE Network Childcare, La Leche League New Zealand, NZ Playcentre Federation, New Zealand Branch of the Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists and Neonatal Unity for Mothers and Babies (NUMB).

“At a time where many agencies in New Zealand are working diligently to correct our poor record of violent acts against children it is disheartening to see such a sensationalist reality TV program that disregards the primary needs of babies and children,” said Lauren Porter, a psychotherapist and Co-Director for the Centre for Attachment. “This programme violates the New Zealand Broadcasting Free to Air Code in several ways, seemingly just for the sake of producing high ratings.”

The show, in which babies are separated from their parents and given to teenage couples in order to prepare them for the realities of parenting claims to be a social experiment. As Dr Kim Powell of Massey University and President of IMHAANZ points out, however, “if this were a real social experiment, it would never have passed the ethics committee of any New Zealand university, social service agency or district health board.” Leaving infants and toddlers with inexperienced strangers who know nothing about the child nor who have formed a stable relationship with them is an emotionally unsafe and unethical practice that would never be sanctioned under current New Zealand guidelines in early childhood education, says Dr. Powell.

A disturbing aspect of the show, says Lauren Porter, is allowing teenagers who are both total strangers, without a relationship to the child and psychologically ill-prepared, to look after them for extended periods of time. The use of overnight care occurs in this show for at least two nights in which infants clearly cry and are distressed for extended periods. Such separations at any age - but especially before the age of one year - are widely discouraged by infant mental health experts unless the caregiver is well known for a lengthy period of time to the parents and the infant. International research clearly indicates that such stressful separations can have both immediate and long-term negative effects on infants. These include changes in brain/body cortisol levels, anxiousness and even instability in the infant-parent relationship.

The groups opposing *The Baby Borrowers* also contend that the show is misleading as a useful contribution to parent education. No published data from this ‘experiment’ exists to support claims of the producers that it discourages teen pregnancy. The show clearly disregards the rights of children under the Free to Air Code of the NZ Broadcasting Standards. The show has already been subject to a raft of British Broadcasting Standard authority complaints earlier in 2007 when it screened in the UK. A New Zealand Broadcasting complaints procedure has been launched and the concerned groups have formally notified TV2 of their concerns.

For more information and an extended version of this press release, contact Ms. Lauren Porter, Centre for Attachment on 021 721 115 or by email at [Lauren@centreforattachment.com](mailto:Lauren@centreforattachment.com).