

CHILDREN'S NEEDS PRIORITISED AT LAST

08 November 2011

“Child Poverty Action Group warmly welcomes Labour’s announcement on the need for investment in children’s well-being - it is long overdue” said Co-convenor Mike O’Brien. He went on to say that the package represents a range of key policy initiatives which will make a significant difference for children in New Zealand.

Redeeming ‘welfare’ from National’s ‘dependency’ argument, Labour has pledged to ensure a better start for the 230,000 children who currently go without breakfast, can’t go to the doctor when they need to, don’t have adequate clothing or housing for winter, aren’t able to participate in school sports or trips, and all the other obstacles to their health and well-being.

In particular, the extension of Working for Families to all families with children is a major policy change and will significantly reduce the levels of child poverty. “Too many of New Zealand’s children have lived below the poverty line for too long and have gone without adequate meals, educational and recreational opportunities and access to medical care. This change is a critical first step in providing opportunities for all New Zealand children” Associate Professor O’Brien said.

Alongside this, the other parts of the package in relation to access to early childhood education and to health services, to dental services for expectant mothers and the additional support for children and families requiring additional services provide a comprehensive approach to supporting the needs of children. “CPAG has long argued for such a comprehensive plan and is delighted to see that there is now a commitment to this”, he said.

The plan to develop an official poverty line and to monitor progress is an important part of measuring progress on reducing child poverty and provides a tool to see what is happening for families and then act accordingly. “While there is clearly more work to do on this, CPAG is very pleased to see the commitment to moving forward on this issue” he said.

Associate Professor O’Brien concluded by noting that the investment in these programmes has social and economic benefits for all New Zealanders. “We cannot continue to waste the potential of this generation, both now and into the future. We are all much better off by providing well for all children”, he said.