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Annual Report

April 2021 - March 2022



Photo by Johnny Cohen

Our vision

An Aotearoa where all children flourish, free from poverty

Our mission

Child Poverty Action Group strives to help achieve the elimination of child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand. We provide research about the causes and effects of poverty on children and their families, to inform the public, policy makers, media and politicians of the policy changes needed to reduce the burden of poverty on children and their families.

We acknowledge Te Tiriti O Waitangi, and the rights of Māori as tangata whenua. We envisage an Aotearoa New Zealand where our society shows respect, generosity and care for all children.

Our pou

Mana: We acknowledge and uphold the mana of all children.

Manaakitanga: We believe that our society should show respect, generosity and care for all children as taonga.

Kotahitanga: We work collectively to uphold the mana of all children and to ensure they flourish.

Mātauranga: We believe that child-centred knowledge is essential to upholding their mana and enabling them to thrive.

Our focus on children

We focus on eliminating poverty for children because:

- **Overall effects of poverty are worse for children:** Child development is adversely affected by poverty, which can lead to detrimental effects for an entire life.
- **Children are more likely to experience poverty:** Children are over-represented among those in deprived households.
- **Children don't get to vote in elections:** Decisions affecting children are made without their input.

Our team

Management Committee

Michael Quirke (Convenor)

Janfrie Wakim

Dr Claire M. Dale

Associate Professor Mike O'Brien ONZM

Alan Johnson (Deputy Convenor)

Professor Innes Asher ONZM

Professor Nikki Turner

Therese Luxton

Helen Bull (Treasurer)

Frank Hogan

Douglas Higgins

Research Committee

Dr Gerry Cotterell (Chair)

Professor Emeritus Innes Asher ONZM

Associate Professor Susan St John ONZM

Associate Professor Mike O'Brien ONZM

Dr Belinda Borell

Professor John O'Neil

Alan Johnson

Janfrie Wakim

Staff

Executive Director

Laura Bond

Senior Engagement Advisor

Georgie Craw

Communications & Research Officer

Janet McAllister

Administration

Carmelite Müller

Researcher

Caitlin Newelt-Kearns

Regional Networks

Whangarei -Tim Howard

Nelson -Jean Simpson

Wellington -Rebecca Adams

Western Bay of Plenty -Charlotte Van Doorn

Christchurch -Sara Epperson

Dunedin - Jude Sligo

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Convenor's report

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Tēnā koutou katoa,

I am presenting this report as Child Poverty Action Group's Convenor since April 2022. Prior to that Michael Quirke ably filled the role but decided to relinquish it on account of work pressures. On behalf of CPAG I want to thank Michael for his leadership over the two and half years he was Convenor.

Longevity or permanence are not things anti-poverty groups such as ours should plan for. Ideally, we plan to be out in five years because the just and reasonable cause we are pursuing has largely been addressed. That CPAG has been attempting to eradicate child poverty in Aotearoa for nearly 30 years is perhaps testimony to the naïveté of such an idea, but it remains our ambition.

The question of our longevity has been at the heart of recent efforts to plan for succession and a generational shift in CPAG's leadership. To date, very limited progress on this has been made and it has not been helped by the isolations caused by Covid lockdowns.

Covid-related disruptions have been in the face of what can only be seen as resolute indifference on the part of the Government. This indifference is highlighted by the three year wait following the Welfare Expert Advisory Group's recommendations to increase benefits, the much delayed Working for Families review and also by the breathtaking nonchalance with which Covid wage subsidies were paid out at twice the value of benefits. These, coupled with the refusal of Government to pay the full Working for Families amount to all low-income families, exacerbated the hardship so evident in the media over the past year.

The push to further protect middle class incomes through a new social insurance scheme is alarming, as is the sale of Crown residential land to fund a few more state houses. Meanwhile, the list for social housing has increased, foodbanks have been overwhelmed by demand and the wealth divide has widened. It has been dismaying to observe Government spin the minor improvements in child poverty rates as being more substantial than they are – some so minor they sit in the margin of error.

Our resolve has not been blunted by these disruptions and this indifference. In fact, quite the opposite. The Management Committee is supporting a more active research programme and CPAG has a wider network of collaborators involved in this research. We know that social and economic change does not occur in a vacuum but through a contest of ideas and narratives. We will enter this contest well prepared with good evidence, compelling stories and authentic messaging, especially in the lead up to the 2023 General Election.

Central to these changes and prospects is the attention we are paying to CPAG's role in building a bi-cultural nation which truly honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi. As we move along this path and that of greater effort in research and advocacy, I hope that we begin to have more concern for our impact and effectiveness than for our longevity.

During the year we said goodbye to Janet McAllister our long serving CPAG supporter/ comms advisor/ researcher and part-time researcher, Caitlin Neuwelt-Cairns. Both were highly valued CPAG staff and their departure left us with some big boots to fill. Georgie Crow returned from maternity leave to take up a part-time position and Laura Bond, Executive Director indicated in early 2022 that she was off on her next adventure. We also bid farewell to Management Committee member Tala Ngata and welcomed Douglas Higgins all the way from Nelson.

As we reflect on what exciting times we live and work in, it is worth reflecting of a question the late Ngati Hine leader Ta Hemi Henare posed.

Kua tawhiti kē to haerenga mai, kia kore e haere tonu. He nui rawa o mahi, kia kore e mahi tonu."

'We have come too far not to go further, we have done too much not to do more'

Nga mihi ki a koutou and thank you all for your support for CPAG and the children it serves



Alan Johnson – Convenor
Child Poverty Action Group

Our impact: Some highlights

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While Covid-19 took hold in our communities, we worked alongside our allies to ensure that the wellbeing of low-income children was at the forefront of political decision-making.

We ensured that children remained front and centre in our Covid response

We showed the Government that hardship for children increased as a result of political decision-making.

Our report [The First Year of Covid-19: Initial outcomes of our collective care for low-income children in Aotearoa New Zealand \(July 2021\)](#) by Janet McAllister, Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns, Leah Bain, Nikki Turner and Donna Wynd showed that increased hardship for many children from March 2020 - March 2021 was not inevitable, but at least partly due to political decision-making. The report also highlighted the collective efforts of iwi, hapū, community organisations, schools, whanau, families and children who work well together to mitigate the effects of the poverty crisis in the face of political neglect – a wonderful news story that got great coverage.

We challenged the Government's Covid-19 income support measures

We funded interviews: [Income support in the wake of Covid-19 \(April 2021\)](#) by Louise Humpage & Charlotte Moore (University of Auckland), which asked those in poverty if the doubled 2020 Winter Energy Payment was enough to cover additional pandemic grocery costs for families. The answer was no. The study also found that benefit recipients, felt rejection and anger from being excluded from the higher Covid-19 income support made available to others. Continuing with approaches like this will create a more fractured society.

We pushed for a fairer income support system so all children can thrive

We kept liveable incomes on the national agenda.

Our second independent stocktake of progress towards implementing the Welfare Expert Advisory Group's recommendations, found that after three

years only 22 of the 42 key recommendations had been minimally or partially implemented, and there was no evidence of any implementation for the remaining 20 (see [Children can't live on promises: A 2021 stocktake of implementation of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group's 2019 recommendations](#) by Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns, Emeritus Professor Innes Asher and Alan Johnson).

We filled an important research gap on Working for Families.

We published two reports in the series: *Rethinking Income Support for Children* by Associate Professor Susan St John and Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns. In Part 1, [Ensuring Adequate Indexation of Working for Families](#) we found families in low-paid work with three children would have received up to \$1,900 more over the last two years if income support for children had been indexed to wages the same way it is for other age groups. In part 2, [Australia and NZ tax credits for children A 5-year comparison: July 2018 - July 2023](#), we established that when it comes to child tax credits, Australian children fare much better than New Zealand children in the poorest families.

We challenged the Government's April 2021 benefit increase claims.

Through the Fairer Future collaboration, we challenged the Government's claim that the April 2021 benefit increases were in line with WEAG's recommendations, showing that the increases were inadequate. Modelling showed that a sole parent with three children has a weekly budget gap of \$240 for total costs and \$111 for core costs.

This received widespread coverage, and alongside anecdotal reports from social service organisations proved that too many people simply don't have enough to get by.

Evidence of impact:

The Government followed our advice and began consultation on the review of the Principles and Purposes of the Social Security Act.

Alongside this is a review of Working for Families for which we provided research and evidence

to inform solid policy development to benefit all children.

Furthermore, the Subsequent Child Policy was repealed in 2021, a change we have long campaigned for. Up until now, parents or caregivers who had a child while they were already receiving a benefit were required to seek or begin work once their youngest child turned one, instead of three years old, or risk losing a substantial amount of their benefit income. This change means parents can make the best choices for their children during their critical early years.

We helped to ensure children aren't disadvantaged by proposed legislative changes

Along with other children's organisations, [we called on the Government to rethink the oversight of Oranga Tamariki and the Children and Young People's Commission Bill](#) to allow for proper consultation with children, young people and their families. The Bill would see the Children's Commissioner position replaced with a board and the establishment of an independent monitor of Oranga Tamariki within the Education Review Office, rather than as a standalone entity. Given that a key objective of the Bill is to 'strengthen advocacy for children and young people's issues', we remain concerned that children and young people have not been consulted to determine how best the system could be designed to promote their rights and interests and called for a pause on any progress.

We tabled **our concerns with the proposed Social Unemployment Insurance scheme and its potential to compound existing inequities**. [Our research](#) showed that those who are in precarious, part-time, irregular and low-paid work - disproportionately Māori, Pacific and/or women, particularly caregivers - will either qualify for a low rate of payment under a social insurance scheme or will not be eligible at all. We called on the Government to bolster adequate and individualised welfare payments to address the issue of large income drops resulting from unemployment and focus its effort on implementing the recommendations of WEAG.

Further research and submissions

We supported the publication of: [Where will we live in the future? Research into the Unmet Housing Needs of People with Disabilities, their Family and Whānau](#) by Colleen Brown and Alan Johnson, with Martine Abel-Williamson and Mike Potter, in partnership with Disability Connect. **The report called for improved data collection and planning for housing and care needs of those with disabilities, ensuring information is freely available so that those with disabilities and their whānau can make informed choices.** It also framed housing needs of disabled people as an issue of rights, rather than a social or health need.

We made a submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Drivers of Persistent Disadvantage - Terms of Reference noting 'Systemic discrimination is an enormous barrier to realising an Aotearoa where all children flourish free from poverty – and childhood disadvantage is perhaps the most important contributing factor toward persistent disadvantage over a lifetime.'

Our submission on the Inquiry into School Attendance noted the strong link between school attendance and poverty: 'Educational attainment is a key pathway out of poverty, assisting in breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty. However, attainment is linked to attendance, and non-attendance at school disproportionately affects children and families already living in the most socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances.'

[In our Budget Policy Statement 2021](#), we argued the **fiscal conservatism shown by the Government is unnecessary in an era of challenges around climate change, housing costs and deepening inequality**, and that questions around optimal levels of Government debt need to be seen within a framework of opportunity costs.

We presented to the Education and Workforce Committee on the Accident Compensation (Maternal Birth Injury and Other Matters) Amendment Bill, supporting its intent but suggesting it go further and cover all injuries, including mental injuries, for the birthing parent as well as injuries to the baby in order to achieve equity within the ACC system.

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Research showcase: Racism, State Care & Welfare.

Research showcase from our 2021 Annual General Meeting

Dr Belinda Borell

Ngāti Ranginui, Ngai Te Rangi, Whakatōhea; PhD, Hohua Tutengaehe Postdoctoral Fellow SHORE & Whariki Research Centre, Massey University

Whose lives matter most? Demographic representations of the poor

This talk examined the overrepresentation of non-white people, women and younger people as the primary recipients of poverty reduction measures. Such approaches drive lower empathy towards those in need, entrenching punitive attitudes and precluding necessary interventions to address poverty.

This speaks to the often racist and sexist underpinnings of national narratives of who is deserving of support and by implication, whose lives matter most. What are appropriate methods for examining these representations?

Tahirah Moton

Ngāti Maniapoto, 2020 Kupe Leadership Scholar Oranga Tamariki Youth Advisory Group Member, BHSc (hons) research conducted at Te Kupenga Hauora Māori University of Auckland.

Honouring care-experienced mokopuna Māori: Creating conditions of wellbeing

In this talk Tahirah explored how state care is a state-proposed solution that perpetuates social issues stemming from colonisation, stating that it will never work because of this. To remedy the issue a new system of care must be realised.

Tahirah expressed the need to give mokopuna the chance to imagine a new system that works for them.

Dr Rebekah Jaung

MBChB, MPH, PhD
Counties Manukau public health registrar

Caregiver experiences of racism and child mental health: A snapshot from Aotearoa New Zealand

This talk was an investigation into the experiences of indirect racism amongst children and the impacts on their mental health. It was based off data from the 2016/17 New Zealand Health Survey, conducted with Tōmaiora Māori Health Research Group, University of Auckland.

Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns

MA (Hons)
Child Poverty Action Group Researcher

What happened to 'welfare overhaul'? Government's progress on implementing the Welfare Expert Advisory Group's recommendations

In this talk, Caitlin examined the Government's claims about overhauling the welfare system and restoring dignity to those who interact with it - asking the question: to what extent are we seeing meaningful evidence of progress?



We offer evidence, and research-informed policy recommendations, to assist decision makers CPAG activities in 2021/22 – by the numbers

- 3 events
- 10 submissions
- 10 presentations
- 1 campaign
- 6 research reports
- 318 articles - op-eds and interviews
- 26 press releases
- 1 campaign
- 113 social media posts
- 8 blog posts

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Our Supporters, Collaborations and Outreach

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini
Success is not the work of one, but the work of many.*

Our Supporters

Our work is made possible because of the generosity of caring New Zealanders, businesses, trusts, and foundations. We are extremely grateful for this kindness and the support of this kaupapa.



juliette hogan



We are grateful to Te Tāpui Atawhai / Auckland City Mission, not only for the desk space they offer but the whanaungatanga that comes with working collectively.



The Child Poverty Action Group is funded entirely by donations from the public and grants from charitable trusts. It does not accept funding from the proceeds of gambling or alcohol.

Regional networks

We are thankful to diverse and ever-passionate regional networks for their continued energy and efforts across Aotearoa.

Whangārei → Te Moana-a-Toi / Western Bay of Plenty

→

Te Whanganui-a-Tara / Wellington → Whakatū /

Nelson → Ōtautahi / Christchurch → Ōtākou / Otago

Collaborations and Outreach

We are proud to collaborate with organisations working with and for, children and families in Aotearoa. We partner and support others with shared interests through collaborations and kotahitanga. Some of the groups we are formally associated with include:

Tick 4 Kids
Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga
Fairer Futures
ACC Futures Coalition
Children's Rights Alliance
Health Coalition Aotearoa

Child Poverty Action Group is committed to freely sharing its research and policy recommendations with a range of audiences to support a greater understanding of the causes and impacts of child poverty, and to stir public debate on effective solutions.

We work with students, both school and university level, to assist with research projects, the media to drive understanding, as well as disseminating materials through our website, social media and emails to supporters.

A special farewell

This year we bid farewell to our Executive Director, Laura Bond, fellow researcher Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns, and researcher, communications support and long-time supporter Janet McAllister.



Kia hora te marino, kia whakapapa pounamu te moana, kia tere te kārohirohi i mua i tō huarahi.

May peace be widespread, may the sea glisten like greenstone, and may the shimmer of light guide you on your way.

“He kai tahu me kikini, he kai tahu me tīhore, mā te tamaiti te iho”
“Pinch off a bit, peel off a bit, the inside is for the child” (said of the potted bird)

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