

Discrimination against our children, our greatest taonga, cannot be justified

06 March 2012

On Children's Day, Sunday 4 March, Child Poverty Action Group launched a major nationwide appeal for donations to hold the Government to account for policies that have contributed to child poverty. Childhood poverty has lifelong consequences on health, education, and social and economic participation. "Children's day reminds us to treasure our children, it is time for us to actually do this" says Dr Susan St John, CPAG's economics spokesperson.

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Since 2004, CPAG has challenged the Government over its discriminatory policy regarding the In Work Tax Credit (IWTC), a child-related family assistance payment. This controversial payment worth at least \$60 a week is specifically for children, and is one of the means government uses to reduce child poverty. But only some low income families get it, while 230,000 children live in families that are excluded. "It is no wonder we have such a poor record on child poverty," says St John.

In November last year, CPAG's case was heard in the High Court. The Judge ruled that the IWTC does discriminate against some of our poorest children, but such discrimination is 'justified'. CPAG argues that this discrimination cannot be justified on moral or ethical grounds, nor on the grounds that it is supposed also to be a work incentive. "We believe all kiwi kids have the right to a fair go" says CPAG.

The IWTC, a payment to help with the costs of children, is withheld from parents who are in receipt of benefit income, or are unable to work a minimum number of hours per week even when work is not available, or when parents cannot meet the work requirements because of their child-caring responsibilities, disability or sickness. Families lose the IWTC even when they lose work because of events beyond their control like recession, illness or an earthquake. The needs of their children do not change, but they are given a significantly lower amount for them.

CPAG launched its **2012 CPAG Appeal Campaign** on National Children's Day with an exclusive screening at Academy Cinema of Bryan Bruce's '**Inside Child Poverty**', the documentary that sparked a national conversation and a NZ on Air controversy.

Campaign leader, Janfrie Wakim, said: "We are preparing to appeal against lawful discrimination against children to the Court of Appeal, and if we fail there, to the Supreme Court." Wakim explains: "Until now, the Office of Human Rights Proceedings at the Human Rights Commission has paid for CPAG's top legal team. The Office is pledging to provide our junior counsel, but can no longer fund

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our senior counsel, court fees or expenses. Although our senior counsel has committed to do some of the work pro bono, we still have to raise the money to cover the rest of the costs.”

At the launch, special guest, Bryan Bruce, the documentary’s multi-award winning producer and presenter, spoke in support of the Appeal, saying: “Children’s health and well-being is an ethical and moral issue, not a political issue. In trying to generate wealth in this country, we are bankrupting their future.”

The other special guest was Jazmine Heka, the 16 year old from Whangarei inspired by Bruce’s documentary to launch a nationwide petition: **‘Children against Poverty’**.

Although New Zealand has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the rights of our poorest children are being ignored.

CPAG calls for public assistance to end discrimination against our poorest children.