

## **Beverley's story**

Beverley's life changed dramatically when she took custody of her three grandchildren two years ago. Her daughter was struggling to care for her five year old and two year old twins and they came to a mutual decision that the children would be better off with their grandmother for a time.

Beverley had to give up her full time job as a production manager for a clothing manufacturer and go on a single person's Emergency Benefit when she took custody of the children. She is not able to work at present - the cost of child-care for the twins is prohibitive and she needs flexibility to care for them if they are sick and during school holidays.

Beverley battled for over a year to receive the Unsupported Child Benefit (UCB) for the children. WINZ insisted there should be a Family Group Conference (FGC) before she qualified. However, this requirement was already met as custody had been determined legally. Beverley eventually had to involve the children's lawyer to resolve the situation. During this time she was forced to use her own savings and refinance her house. Although things are easier now, she was not reimbursed and is still paying off debts incurred over that period.

She also receives a Special Benefit, which was recently reduced by \$14 per week - from \$120 to \$106 – and has been told her Special Benefit will continue to be cut back as her expenses are low. Essentially, the impact of this will be to reduce the amount the family spends on food. Beverley is very thrifty, she sews for the children and buys second hand clothing. However, as a home-owner she has many fixed costs, including rates and utilities, and little opportunity to make savings.

"You're never, ever told what you're entitled to," says Beverley. Her hot water cylinder broke down and she paid for it to be repaired herself, out of savings. She was entitled to claim for it through WINZ but they will not reimburse her for it. "My little grandson had to go to Starship hospital and we had to stay overnight. Car-parking and medication cost \$90, which I paid, and WINZ won't reimburse that either. What was I supposed to do? We had to pay to get out of the car-park. That was \$90 out of our food budget for that week."

Beverley says another daughter with two children will receive \$80 a week from Working for Families. "That would make a massive difference for me and the children." They would have enough money to deal with emergencies like when her grandson was hospitalised, and to give the children an occasional treat like a trip to the movies.

At the end of the year, Beverley will be working to return the children to their mother. She is concerned the funding the children receive will drop significantly when they are back with their mother. She says the money she receives to

support the children (the UCB) will drop by \$300 (\$100 per child), but her daughter (also on a benefit) will only receive an extra \$120 (\$40 per child).

She says it is unfair that children in foster care are eligible for more than children who are placed with relatives. “They get support to do dancing or swimming, whatever they want. If they are with their grandparents they don’t get the same privileges. They are putting children into categories.” Beverley believes children should be treated (and funded) equally, regardless of who is caring for them.