

My name is Amy. I am a Mum to three children. The youngest is 15 and at school, the other two are a little older and in part-time employment or study. They are still reliant on me to a large extent.

I work hard in my job as a parent. Life is busy, but I also volunteer my time to help those in need.

Right now, I help to provide full time counselling and advocacy for a major NGO that helps families who are struggling. Some are in isolation because of Covid. Others have no transport, and no whānau to support them. Without the support from foodbanks and budgeting servicing, including help with getting supplementary assistance from the state, these families and the communities they live in would not survive.

I am not the only one volunteering in my community. Across Aotearoa 11.8% of people undertake informal volunteering work. This amounts to 7.8 million hours of volunteer labour per year. The value in monetary terms of that volunteering is estimated to be \$4 billion dollars per year. That's a lot of money!

When I lost my paid job in the lockdown it was devastating. I had to return to a benefit and our lives fell apart. My children are big eaters, and many weeks I had no money left after rent and power. My son refused to go to school until I sorted a loan to pay for the device the school requires for him. The bills keep mounting and it is hard to do more than get through the day. When my job folded, I did not get some of the payments I was entitled to because the employer disappeared.

Not only did I lose my job, I also lost the ability to claim the "In Work Tax Credit" for my son. This was a terrible financial blow, and it amounted to a significant loss of \$72.50 a week. As a result, I am now further in debt and face food insecurity and hunger most of the time.

I still work though. It is just that it is voluntary work for the community. Why does the voluntary work I do count for nothing?

Just think about how much volunteers do for your community.

- Free food stalls for the families that were struggling, such as the Otara kai village.
- Food packages and safety parcels.
- Looking after elderly family members to keep them in their home
- Looking after children with disabilities

Most of the volunteers I work with are also parents on the benefit. Like me, they are not acknowledged for the voluntary mahi they do for the community. Though we acknowledge and appreciate the efforts and the mahi the community groups put into food parcels, this is no way for families to survive. If each family with children received the tax credit, many wouldn't have to rely on surviving on food parcels or food grant assistance from WINZ each week.

How can it be fair that because I look after my family and volunteer my time, my son misses out on getting the full benefit of "Working for Families" tax credit? An extra nearly \$4000 a year would help me get on my feet.

Currently, I am barely treading water financially. If something else happens, like a family member dying, getting Covid, or my washing machine breaking down, I fear I will drown financially.

I have tried to get a job.

I have been in work before.

Sometimes it works out. And sometimes it doesn't.

But I don't give up. I keep trying. I keep looking after tamariki. I keep volunteering to help others who are worse off than myself.

Sometimes it feels like no one cares about the work I do that is not paid. This work is not valued because I do it for free out of love and devotion for my family and the community. But that work is still valuable. I know that. You know that. How can we get the government to recognise that?

It's time that MSD and the government acknowledge the value and importance of the work that we do, through extending the tax credits to everyone who is a parent as well as to whaeas and matuas who are looking after their mokos.

The paid work that is valued in our society could not happen without the unpaid work that happens at home, raising and caring for children, making meals, doing the housework.

This is hard work with sleepless nights, on our feet 24/7, no lunch breaks, no days off, administering medicine, emotional and mental support for the children, physical heavy-lifting, doctor's visits, emergency trips to the hospital, not to mention school trips, sports activities and events, volunteering for community organisations, and all for free. Allowing people like me to access the tax credit of \$72.50 week seems like a small price to pay for all this work.

People ask me what I would do with the money. That's easy. I know exactly what I would spend it on. The extra bit of money will help go a long way towards costs that are constantly increasing. It would pay for petrol in my car. It would pay for enough food on the table for my children. It would pay for electricity so I can have a warm home and my children do not get sick each winter. It would pay rent.

I know I will probably never be able to buy a house, but I would like to be able to keep food on the table and afford rent to keep a roof over my head.

Without this support, families receiving the benefit will continue to live in the cycle of generational poverty and the ones who will suffer the most will be the children. Kids are our future, and their families need liveable incomes to be able to thrive.