



CHiLD  
POVERTY  
ACTION  
GROUP

Annual  
Report  
2011-2012

*Ka Whangaia ka tupu, ka puawai*

That which is nurtured, blossoms and grows



## About Us

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) was formed in 1994 out of deep concern for the rising level of poverty in New Zealand and its effects on children. CPAG has over 1,400 members and supporters across New Zealand including academics, teachers, health workers, community workers and many others concerned about the poorest children in New Zealand society. CPAG works closely with other child-focused organisations and has branches in Whangarei, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

## Our core objectives

- To promote better policies for children and young people.
- To promote awareness of the causes and consequences of child poverty.
- To ensure all activities and decisions of the group honour Te Tiriti O Waitangi.
- To ensure all activities and decisions respect other cultural perspectives.

CPAG works to produce evidence about the causes and effects of poverty on children and their families. It looks carefully at how Government policies affect children. CPAG publishes reports, makes submissions and conducts small-scale research projects to achieve its goals.

CPAG is an independent, registered charity. It is funded entirely by grants from charitable trusts and donations from the public. CPAG does not accept funding from the proceeds of gambling.

***The guiding principle of CPAG is the right of every child to security, food, shelter, education and healthcare.***

# CPAG Comment: Children First

In the current economic and political climate, is the wellbeing of New Zealand's children a key issue? It is difficult not to arrive at the conclusion that it is not. Furthermore, of all our children, poor children matter least of all. Yes, there has been some lip service and headline-grabbing pronouncements but there is also a complete failure to acknowledge and attend to the major issues that are the root causes of child poverty.

Child poverty certainly did feature as an important issue in the 2011 election, particularly as a result of the timely screening of Bryan Bruce's 'Inside New Zealand: Inside Child Poverty' documentary which aired in the week before polling day. In recent months, the commentary has dropped out of the headlines but the child poverty issue has not gone away and requires major commitment. A commitment which is lacking.

Surely we can do better than have one in five of our kiwi kids living in conditions that will do absolutely nothing to help them live happy and constructive lives for themselves and society as they grow up? The proposals for welfare reform are focused on adults, not on the needs of children. The Green Paper on Vulnerable Children is premised on a small group of children who are certainly at risk but, significantly, issues of child poverty are relegated to a brief comment and the inherent vulnerability of all children is neglected.

Why are we in this position after more than two decades of research? We have local evidence on many fronts; international evidence contrasting New Zealand with other developed countries; and some policy initiatives. Rightly, there has been considerable debate around how best to provide effectively for retired people to allow them to live in dignity and above the poverty line. As a community we want to make sure that retired people have enough to support themselves adequately. We are not giving the same priority to children and families.

In stark contrast, when the needs and position of children are considered, the emphasis is placed on judging parental inadequacy - their spending patterns, poor decision making and neglect or alleged lack of initiative. A second argument that is often made is that improving parental income will not solve the problem of poverty. There are, the argument goes, a range of other issues causing poverty such as education, health care access, housing quality and affordability, addiction and mental health issues – the list is a long one. Of course these issues are important, but without improving the incomes of families below the poverty line then we cannot eliminate poverty.

Somehow when it comes to supporting children and families money doesn't matter. But everywhere else in our society it matters above all other considerations. Money **alone** won't eliminate poverty **but** without improving incomes for those below the poverty line we will **never** eliminate poverty. Of all the issues to be tackled in order to reduce poverty, improving incomes is one of the most critical but the one that is actively avoided.

So, why then have we abandoned the twenty percent of New Zealand's children who live in poverty? The fundamental answer has to be that as a society we have chosen to do so. Policy decisions and allocation of resources are issues of choice and for the last two decades the needs and interests of this twenty percent have been at best marginalised and minimalised and at worst ignored and neglected. Much attention has been placed in recent times on the abuse and neglect of children. It is time we said to our decision makers across the community that allowing poverty to continue and deepen is a very clear form of neglect and abuse.

We need to hold all our decision makers accountable. Choice dominates policy decisions these days. Decision makers could choose to prioritise children in poverty - but they choose not to. Children living in poverty are denied the opportunity, income and resources to make choices.

The next year holds opportunities for decision makers to choose to prioritise children and particularly those children living in poverty. We now have a White Paper on Vulnerable Children and the Children's Commissioner has an expert group on poverty. We hope that these opportunities will not be wasted. The lives of New Zealand's children and the future of our society are too important. Children's wellbeing depends on the sound decisions made by concerned adults using the abundant evidence we have. We need to activate all our resources to eliminate the poverty that blights the lives of too many children in Aotearoa New Zealand today.

# Our work in 2011-2012

## Research

Producing high quality, independent research on the causes and consequences of poverty is an integral part of our work. The last year saw the launch of two major monograph publications:



*Left Further Behind: How policies damage New Zealand's poorest children.* CPAG's flagship publication has been extremely important in bringing together a wide range of material on the needs and position of children in this country. It identifies concrete and specific actions that government can take in order to reduce child poverty and improve the position of our tamariki and rangatahi. It has been downloaded in excess of 6,000 times from the CPAG website and there are 200 hardcopies in circulation – a testament to its success. We are deeply indebted to the report's many contributors.

*Hunger for Learning: nutritional barriers to children's education.* This research focused on lack of food, a fundamental dimension of poverty. Its powerful story created considerable media interest and helped to bring about a change in the public perception and discourse of child poverty. Although it was ignored by government, it contributed to Fonterra's decision to expand its KickStart programme and other community organisations considered starting programmes in their local schools. It has prompted other organisations to conduct their own research so we are now gradually obtaining a far richer catalogue of knowledge about hunger and poverty in New Zealand. We hope that over time that data will become harder to ignore. With over 2000 downloads of the report to date it is clearly influential.



In addition to these major monograph publications, CPAG also produced smaller pieces of research:

- Three background papers covering: the Welfare Working Group recommendations; Changes to Working for Families; and a comment on economic data going into the election.
- Four submissions on: the Auckland draft plan; the family court review; the Green Paper on Vulnerable Children; and the Inquiry into the determinants of wellbeing for Maori children.
- A variety of shorter articles, covering topical issues.

## Media

Developing high quality, independent research is one thing. Getting it out into the public arena in order to build awareness and influence public debate is another.

Over the last year, CPAG released over thirty-five press releases covering a multitude of issues around the need for child-centred policy; putting their needs first, not last. These include: child health, breakfast in schools, the 2011 election, the 2012 budget, gambling, loan sharks, Working for Families, welfare reform and commentary on reports of other organisations and government.

CPAG has also become the 'go to' organisation in media circles when it comes to issues relating to children, particularly those in poverty. Coverage of our work and commentary from our spokespeople in health, social policy, economics and housing is a regular feature in mainstream media – including TVNZ, TV3, Maori Television, The New Zealand Herald, The Dominion Post, National Radio, Radio Live and NewsTalkZB.

We are delighted that Jazmine Heka, a teenage student from Whangarei, was inspired by the Bryan Bruce *Inside Child Poverty* documentary to take action. Bryan put her in touch with CPAG and through our Whangarei branch, we have been actively supporting Jazmine and her children's movement: Children against Poverty. Not only has Jazmine organised nationwide petitions which led to much media publicity but her group has also gone nationwide. What a powerful testimony that is to Bryan's inspirational documentary.

## Education

Alongside the research activities, CPAG holds a variety of events which form an important education and awareness function.

CPAG's Annual Post-Budget Breakfast (or lunch in some cases) continued to be a key feature of the CPAG year with events held in four centres – Whangarei, Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington. The analysis and commentary which panelists bring to the event offers an examination of the Budget beyond a narrow economic appraisal. After all, budgets are as much a social document as an economic one in that they indicate where a government's priorities lie. We plan on building on this annual event next year and have started to explore how we can strengthen it.

Also in May 2011, CPAG also joined with The University of Auckland to host a trans-Tasman seminar: *New Zealand and Australia - growing together or apart?* Dr Ben Spies-Butcher from Macquarie University, Australia.

In addition to holding specific events, CPAG is frequently called upon to present in a wide variety of forums. We provide educational talks to groups including conferences, universities, political parties, government departments, professional organisations, social service organisations, community groups and schools. Over the last financial year, thirty-five presentations were given by CPAG.

## Our long standing human rights case

The human rights case in relation to the discrimination contained in the Working for Families policy and legislation remains in the Courts. At the time of writing this report, we are awaiting leave to take the case to the Court of Appeal. We are very grateful to our legal counsel, Frances Joychild and Jenny Ryan for their expertise and to the Office of the Human Rights Proceedings for their firm support. We are equally grateful to all those who have contributed to the fund to support the current stage of the work.

The case continues to be a demanding, resource-intensive commitment and led to CPAG launching its first major fundraising campaign: “A fair go for all kiwi kids”. This was launched in Auckland with a cinema screening of Bryan Bruce’s ‘Inside Child Poverty’ Documentary which features our court case. The event was well attended by 80-100 people with talks by Bryan and Jazmine Heka from Children against Poverty being highlights. Cinema screenings have also taken place in other centres. Bryan has generously pledged his ongoing support for our campaign by allowing us to sell DVD copies of the documentary. His commitment to the issues so well presented in the documentary has been fantastic.

As part of the campaign, CPAG also distributed over a thousand ‘Dear John, Are you relaxed about child poverty?’ postcards to send to John Key in parliament - emphasising the unfairness of the Working for Families package when it comes to the children of beneficiaries. The question has not yet had a reply!

## Growing Support

The last year has seen a burgeoning of support and interest from the public.

- CPAG’s mailing list has increased from approximately 750 supporters to over 1,200 with no indications of this growth subsiding.
- One-off and regular donations have almost doubled from \$17,000 to \$31,000
- CPAG Facebook page followers or ‘likes’ have almost doubled from 800 to 1,500.
- CPAG’s website had 65,900 visits for the 2011-2012 period. Whilst comparable data for the 2010-2011 period is not available, visitor numbers have grown steadily over the last year.

Although our mailing list has clearly been growing, our formal membership has remained static over the last few years. With membership processes and benefits being revamped, we plan to hold a spring drive to encourage our supporters to take up membership—which includes a membership subscription. This will give us a more secure financial base to operate from.

In 2011 CPAG upgraded its database, mailout and receipting systems in order to be more responsive to our supporters whilst reducing administration costs and freeing staff to proactively further CPAG’s core objectives.

# Acknowledgments

The work reflected in this report and in the various activities summarised here only happens because of the qualities and commitment of a fantastic group of people. I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to work with them for a number of years.

I want to thank our supporters and those who have heartened us through their financial assistance over the course of the year. Some very significant donations and an increase in the number of donors contributing regularly has been very encouraging. We are uplifted by that support and by the spontaneous offers of assistance.

In this vein, I specifically want to acknowledge the contribution of the Auckland City Mission who provide us with an office to work from and a range of assistance in making the work possible. Also the Edmund Rice Centre who have allowed us to use their room for meetings. We would like too to acknowledge the Deloitte's decision to name us as the recipients of their annual donation; the ongoing contribution from the JR McKenzie Trust which provides invaluable support for our work; and the assistance from Terry Levenberg at Apropos with the website.

In particular, I want to conclude by publically acknowledging three groups. First, the Management Committee has a group of people who have given an enormous amount to the child poverty issues this year, as they have done for a number of years. We have widened the network in 2011-12, with corresponding members in Wellington, Hamilton, Christchurch and Whangarei and this has augmented our work considerably. All of them have given a tremendous amount of time, care and effort.

Second, their work has been greatly enhanced by a large number of volunteers who have assisted in various ways. In particular I want to acknowledge Gillian Roach for her work on Facebook and with communications; Gwen Shaw for her assistance in the office; and Mary Mowbray who has done so much in Wellington.

Finally, I want to end by acknowledging the work of the staff. I leave them until last because I want all of us to take this away as one of our strongest memories. We have been very greatly supported, assisted and encouraged by the tremendously thorough, careful and committed work of Marianna Munting, our coordinator, her predecessor Julie Timmins who returns in September from study overseas, and Donna Wynd, our researcher. We have done a lot in the last twelve months. We haven't achieved all that we would like to, but we would have achieved very much less without the contribution of our staff.



Mike O'Brien, Co-convenor

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