



CHiLD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP

Annual Report 2012-2013

*Future of New Zealand depends
on the wellbeing of every child*

www.cpag.org.nz

One in five New Zealand children lives in poverty

About Us

Child Poverty Action Group is an independent charity working to eliminate child poverty in New Zealand through research, education and advocacy.

In a country like New Zealand, with ample resources, child poverty could be eliminated completely. It's all about choice.

Everyone agrees children need the right conditions to grow into strong healthy adults. Children thrive when they have the basic: nutritious food; a warm, safe home; medical attention of they are sick and a good education. Sadly too many children in New Zealand don't have the basics.

We speak out on behalf on tens of thousands of children in New Zealand whose meager standard of living compromises their health, education and well-being. Our members include leading academics, paediatricians, health workers, community workers, teachers and many other people concerned about the poorest children in New Zealand society.

CPAG has branches in Whangarei, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch and we work closely with other child-focused organisations.

- CPAG undertakes high quality, independent, up-to-date research on the underlying causes of child poverty and its effects.
- CPAG advocates for better social policy for all New Zealand children.
- CPAG supports other organisations working to improve the situation of children and young people in New Zealand by providing clear, independent, reliable information.

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Our guiding principle is
the right of every child in New Zealand to
security, food, shelter, education and healthcare.

From the Chair

It's well within our power as a nation to ensure that every child has their basic needs met – as we do for the elderly. In a country like New Zealand, with ample resources, child poverty could be eliminated completely. It's all about choice.

The year has been full of events, activities, reports and information about the nature, extent, causes and responses to child poverty in this country. CPAG's contribution along with many other organisations has resonated with a growing public demand for change.

Despite all we know and despite all the efforts of committed New Zealanders from all walks of life, government policy continues to be piecemeal and lacking in broad vision. Rheumatic fever is a disease associated with poverty, household overcrowding and poor access to health care. Rather than tackling these underlying causes the government response has been throat swabbing and the development of a future vaccine.

The government focus to move people off welfare and into paid employment may work for some but 40 per cent of children in poverty live in households with at least one parent in work. This strategy to decrease the number of beneficiaries is no solution to improving the wellbeing of these children. More attention needs to be paid to ensure there are secure well paid jobs for all parents when they are able to take up paid work. These examples highlight the importance of dealing broadly with the underlying causes of poverty.

A genuine and comprehensive strategy to reduce child poverty would begin with children at the centre of social policy. A lot of CPAG work analyses the nature of policies that affect children and shows that if children's needs were the focus, policies would be very different. If this were the case CPAG would not have spent the last decade challenging successive governments over the In Work Tax Credit (a child related family assistance payment) which is denied to 230,000 living in the poorest families in New Zealand

The path away from child poverty toward a better future requires access to adequate resources and opportunities for all children. Achieving this requires valuing children in their own right combined with a commitment to provide for all children irrespective of parental work status, where families live or their cultural backgrounds.

As a country this is a notion I'm sure we all agree on but the response from us as a society and from government is to fall back on simplistic stereotyping. CPAG through its high quality and independent research plays a crucial role to illustrate the complex multi-faceted nature of child poverty. From this evidence base CPAG can be a strong, effective, independent voice for all children especially those whose meagre standard of living compromises their health, education and well-being.

Policies do not usually change on evidence alone. Changing public opinion is vital meaning each and every one of us can play a part. Poverty is complex. It requires multifaceted action. It needs many, many voices for many, many years. It needs your voice.

We can do better.



Associate Professor Mike O'Brien, CPAG Convenor

Our work 2012-2013

Much of the ground work undertaken by Child Poverty Action Group and many other organisations does not attract headlines or capture the interest of the public. Yet the significance of making submissions cannot be overlooked. CPAG along with many other organisations invested a huge amount of time, effort and expertise over the year making submissions toward the following.

- Social Assistance (Future Focus) Bill (April 2012)
- Inquiry into preventing child abuse and improving children's health outcomes (May 2012)
- Submission on Credit Law Exposure Draft - Credit Contracts and Consumer Finance Amendment Bill (May 2012)
- Child Support Amendment Bill (June 2012)
- Gambling (Gambling Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill (June 2012)
- Expert Advisory Group on Child Poverty - Whangarei submission (October 2012)
- Expert Advisory Group on Child Poverty (October 2012)
- Social Security Amendment Bill (Benefit Categories & Work Focus) Submission (Nov 2012)
- Charter Schools Submission: Education Amendment Bill (no.4) (Jan 2013)

This investment and commitment from CPAG to eliminate Child Poverty illustrates that most if not all of the work undertaken is on-going and continuous.

High quality independent research

Hungry children and food in schools has been the subject of considerable attention over the course of the year. CPAG produces high quality independent research that is also utilised by other organisations and individuals. This research contributes toward the development of initiatives and policies that address the issues of Child Poverty such as those above.

The CPAG background document *Myths and Facts: Sole Parents and the DPB* debunked the half-truths concerning single parents receiving welfare and attracted great attention. That the document was downloaded over 300 times in three days of March this year illustrates the amount of public interest given that the welfare reforms were then on the horizon.

Empty Food Baskets, undertaken by Whangarei members, clearly demonstrated the needs and issues which children and families face as they grapple with issues around child hunger. Decile funding in schools, welfare sanctions, child poverty numbers and updating *Left Further Behind*, will be important contributions to the debates and policy directions in the next 12 months.

Alongside these, there is a continuous – and growing demand for presentations and information on child poverty and associated issues. CPAG is now presenting to organisations and community groups across the board at least every week. CPAG is fortuitous to have members who are well informed, highly knowledgeable and professional delivering these all important talks.

Child Poverty Action Group Budget Breakfast

It would be incomplete to identify the various activities without again noting the Budget Breakfast, an event which we have undertaken now for 12 years. It continues to be the most effective analysis of the broader budget issues and for the first time was held nationally in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Whangarei with full attendance. This national programme requires considerable careful work in coordinating the various components but demonstrates the levels of interest and support and it has been very encouraging to see the interest across the country.

Child Poverty Action Group Court of Appeal - In Work Tax Credit

I would also like to acknowledge the enormous amount of effort, commitment and energy that has gone into the court case challenging the In Work Tax Credit. The creativity, the sustained efforts, the preparation of material for the Appeal Court hearing represent a monumental commitment. There can be little doubt that the discrimination is well known and well understood. However, in acknowledging the range of individual efforts I especially want to record Susan St John's persistence and unyielding contribution – when the discrimination disappears and the story is finally written her efforts will need to be centre stage.

I want too to acknowledge the work put in by Frances Joychild and Jenny Ryan as the solicitors in preparing and supporting the legal documentation and Janfrie Wakim's work in driving the fund-raising to support the case to the Appeal Court. It is a testimony to all of them – and to the others involved – that CPAG raised \$55,000 in such a comparatively short period of time. As a result of the efforts of all those involved and although the formal outcome is unknown, it is reassuring to see encouraging signs the tide appears to be turning. We are all deeply in their gratitude.

Growing support for Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group continues to attract support from all quarters and we gratefully acknowledge this generosity of goodwill and philanthropy. In particular the continuing support from the JR McKenzie Trust has been instrumental in CPAG operating with greater efficiency at staffing and research levels, and in turn have greater impact and reach with the work undertaken.

There has been a noted increase in supporters who now contribute 45% of all donations received. CPAG is grateful to supporters who show such dedication in rallying behind CPAG in the form of moral support and active participation at our events and campaigns. We are also indebted to those supporters who are committed to donating on a regular basis. Every action and every dollar counts – thank you.

Child Poverty Action Group online

The last year has seen a burgeoning of support and interest from the public and this is reflected in the use of online technology and social media.

The CPAG website www.cpag.org.nz has become an invaluable resource for supporters and the public with up to date information and articles on CPAG matters and issues. The website has become a first port of call, recording up to 7,000 hits some months from individuals and organisations. The downloading of reports and the public contact records (including media interviews following press releases) are reflected in the statistics in the Quarterly Reports and demonstrate the value of CPAG's research and policy work.

Allowing for more personal interaction Facebook has proved popular with CPAG page followers or 'likes' having grown 100 per cent in the last year to 3,170 followers. Almost 8,000 people, both nationally and globally each week view CPAG posts and from this number up to 1000 are actively engaged – trawling through posts, taking time to read articles and comments, responding and in some instances sharing and forwarding information to their FB page or that of another organisation. Direct requests for extensive information are directed across to the website.

Organisation and Management

CPAG's work is coordinated and directed through the energy and commitment of a 12 person Management Committee, supported by co-opted members in other parts of the country. The sustained energy and interest and engagement of the group is one of the key factors in developing and progressing the key issues which we are working with. It is a very active group in which everybody maintains a strong presence and commitment. One of the great strengths has been the shared directions and the ability to work towards the common and collective objectives. We are all indebted to the voluntary efforts of a group of people who are themselves very busy in their own academic, professional and personal lives. It is their contributions and commitment which make the work happen and contribute to the enormously positive and generous spirit which is so evident in what we do and how we work.

The Management Committee's work, however, would not happen without the considerable energy, creativity, commitment and capacity of CPAG's staff. We have been very fortunate to have been so well supported, encouraged and stimulated by our team.

Donna Wynd is our most loyal serving staff member; as CPAG's chief researcher and analyst her wealth of knowledge has helped to produce world class research. The extraordinary efforts and capacity of our Executive Officer, Marianna Munting also requires special mention. Marianna's commitment and wide expertise underpins the foundation of CPAG's work.

More recently our communications officer, Kim Meredith-Melhuish joined CPAG this year and is passionate about developing this critical side of our work. A special mention to Gillian Roach for managing our FB page and in doing so increasing the CPAG profile and creating further awareness to the work undertaken and the dilemma of Child Poverty.

There is absolutely no doubt that we would not be in the position we are in today without their work, and that is a gross under-statement of what they have brought to this organisation, and continue to bring every day. I would like to acknowledge here too Julie Timmins work while she was with us – unfortunately Julie resigned in December; we are all very much in her debt as she contributed so much in the earlier formative stages of appointing and supporting our own staff and we are delighted that she has continued to work with us.

I would like to acknowledge the Ted and Molly Carr endowment fund. This support was crucial for CPAG research and partially funded research for the two part series project *Child Abuse: what role does poverty play?*

The contribution from Terry Levenberg and his team at Apropos has been instrumental in delivering CPAG's message. We are both grateful and appreciative to have the voluntary services of a communications firm genuinely concerned about Child Poverty. I want too to acknowledge all the volunteers who have helped with various activities over the course of the year, the members who have supported the activities and functions. Without that financial, practical and emotional support the organisation would be an empty shell – and that we are certainly not. Marianna's work bringing together our Young Persons Group is one example of how we might see this work develop over the next 12 months.

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