



CPAG Post-Budget Breakfast speech - May 17th 2013
Knox Centre, Bealey Ave, Christchurch
Christchurch Branch President P.A.C.I.F.I.C.A
– Danielle O’Halloran

Tena koutou katoa, Talofa lava. Thank you so much for inviting me here this morning to speak with you, Madam Chair, distinguished guests, and fellow ...grown up children and family members.

I stand with you here today as first and foremost a mum, as just one pacific woman, one voice at the table, standing here for others who could not be here to speak with you today. I am here with other members of our PACIFICA branch and Pacific community, and of course, unavoidably, as representative of my family & our ancestors. I would like to meet you here, primarily as members of families who share concern for our kids and in acknowledgement of all those that you bring with you to the table today also, who cannot be physically with us this morning. I acknowledge our leaders who spent many hours developing this budget we are here to comment on this morning and those who will bear the reality of its effects. And I offer a prayer for this gathering and what may come of it, that our conversation today might in some way contribute to the fulfillment of those unmet dreams of our ancestors for a better future for their kids, build understanding, confidence and pathways to action that can continue the can-do, will-do, “There is always another way,” legacy of the best of us woven together. We ask their blessing for this conversation and their support, again woven with the most meaningful fabric of the universe, alofa, aroha, love – and not only love for those close to us, but for all around us near or far and particularly those most vulnerable.

I have been invited here today as local branch president of PACIFICA women. One of our key objectives in PACIFICA is to give Pacific Islands women opportunities to plan and work together for the stability and development of themselves, their families, their communities and so contribute to the development of the country – so we are grateful to be invited to contribute to this conversation about child poverty.

I really want to continue as I've begun, with positioning this conversation about our kids as being largely about Maori and Pacific kids - our kids, our families - and really express thanks to you all here today for looking out for our kids, our relatives, particularly our Pasifika kids who we know are a significant number of those affected by child poverty in NZ.

I have to be honest about my less sincere thanks for National's budget yesterday, for responding to the housing crisis by threatening state house tenants with eviction. As Minister Bill English confirmed in yesterday's budget announcement, about 3000 out of 70,000 tenants could be shifted out of state housing within 3-4 yrs.

Moving families out of housing NZ homes to make room for other families deemed more in need of housing, is surely only likely to add to the housing crisis – potentially only moving families around in the statistics rather than addressing underlying lack of adequate housing & affordable rents.

In conjunction with welfare reforms and lack of progress on other solutions to child poverty, the emphasis in the budget does seem to be on keeping things calm while we carry on with the status quo, aiming towards budget surplus by 2014/15 at the cost of continued "social deficit" as the Greens are framing it.

Our interest though, as the local Christchurch branch of PACIFICA women, is less about political party preference and more about supporting the development of Pacific women and their families.

So another budget, and what will be the combined effect with the likes of a review of state housing tenants and the work readiness requirements and social obligations for beneficiaries on our children's health – the govts own ministry of health officials have warned against tying well-child checks to punitive financial consequences (up to 50% cuts to benefits if a mum fails to take her child to a well-child check, after 3 warnings). Will a food in schools programme yet to be fleshed out, increased access to budget advice and more partnerships with govt for providers of small low interest loans – make a significant difference to creating the social equity we so desperately need, will it make a significant difference to our kids in need?

What about the solutions to child poverty that have been proposed that don't seem to have gained traction like – improved collection and reporting on the numbers of individuals, families and young people not accessing their full welfare entitlements.

How often have we heard stories of parents who aren't getting their full accommodation supplement or mum's who didn't know that their kids eczema could be seen as a disability for which they might be able to access more financial support from WINZ. As we know, an extra \$80 dollars a week makes a big difference, particularly if the only reason you're not getting it is some unreported barrier to your access to full entitlements.

How many working parent families do we know who still don't have enough money left after rent/power/ph/debt etc. to spend more than \$100 a week on food for a family of 4 or more, let alone shoes for the kids.

As we know, it is not just beneficiaries and their children who are struggling, it is working people. In kind payments to vulnerable families like free doctor visits or improved white-ware allowances for beneficiaries announced yesterday, do make some difference, but when these minor offerings go hand in hand with other welfare reforms and inaction on other recommended solutions – how effective will that be?

I would like to know for instance - who is going to be at the gate to welcome the children of Pasifika beneficiaries forced to enrol their 3 yr old kids in 15 hrs a week ECE ...in their own Pasifika languages? Who is going to provide Pasifika language resources to these centres to meet our growing young populations - to provide education that reflects who they are and what they value, particularly in the most at risk languages like Niuean, Tokelauan and Cook Is Maori, who is going to entrench Pasifika languages as official languages of NZ, who is going to ensure that teachers are fully qualified and culturally aware of how to engage from the heart with Pasifika families – and where is the budget for that?

We can't yet answer what the combined effect of this year's budget announcement will be - we still need to see how these budget allocations will be implemented on the ground and on the ground, where we are, where our children and families are, is where I have the most confidence that the greatest differences can still be made. Budgets come and go, but the work in our communities for our children keeps going no matter what the political climate.

It is still worth repeating though, like we are used to hearing in Christchurch, Nothing about us, without us, no solutions for our kids without our families. We can be child centred and we can be aiga / whanau / family centred, Whanau Ora centred, Fanau Ola centred, all at the same time by

working collaboratively, being down to earth, having conversations about poverty in environments that are comfortable for those we are talking about to attend with us, so we are not just talking about, but talking with each other. Fanau Ola initiatives are a great example of the direction we need to go, and we are still waiting to see the true impact of this system shift in years to come, long may it continue.

It's great to be eating with you all today, because sharing food, face to face, feeling invited, is what Pasifika need to get a sense of being allowed to participate in the conversation. For Pasifika, we like to talanoa, to talk without expectation of defined outcomes before we begin the conversation, we like to talk respectfully, to build consensus. We are collectively learning to embrace our diversity and celebrate it when we are asked to consult on Pasifika. Pasifika is not one voice, it is many different voices and many different communities under an umbrella not exactly of our making, so we have learnt to listen to each other and now, we are learning how to navigate the need to include different voices of Pasifika at the table, even when the consultations are time-bound and those we are communicating with are needing to be quickly brought up to speed on our changing dynamics of our largely youthful NZ born, sole & mixed ethnicity population – and to pass on this learning to others.

The voice of a young Pasifika person hasn't always been "traditionally" valued or consulted, but with our NZ born population, there is a growing engagement also with our young people around key issues of importance. We have long known that it is our youth, even our under 17 yr olds, who are often burdened with helping their families deal with doctors or with WINZ, and now too with Insurance companies and CERA.

It is our young people who are burdened with negotiating these different contexts of home, church, school etc. and tasked with responsibilities beyond the expectations for most other kiwi kids, - but this is also our strength. Our successful youth have what Dr Kalo Mila calls "poly-cultural capital" sourced from their ability to function successfully in multiple contexts. It would be great to see more strengths based analysis and a looking towards the positive outcomes already achieved within the Pacific population, to develop solutions for issues like child poverty.

I have a lot of faith in our children and young people to be resourceful, despite their lack of resources, to grow from natural talent into ethical leadership that will take us through the next 20 years where Pasifika are predicted to become 1 in 5.

A strengths based analysis of the richness of our peoples must be part of any respectful engagement with our struggles – who is to say whose budget priorities will save us from climate change or natural disaster. In Post-quake Chch, is 3 families living together in one house a blessing or a curse? It depends what sort of values your family holds dear and what sort of housing stock NZ invests in for sustainable development as to how we can answer that question in the future.

Thanks for breakfast today, PACIFICA Christchurch branch would like to offer again our thanks to you who are working tirelessly for our kids, for our children and for our families. Thankyou, it makes a difference to us to know that pressure is maintained to seek real commitment to solutions to child poverty in Aotearoa NZ, solutions to poverty for our Maori and Pacific kids.

Thankyou.

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