

SUBMISSION

Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand

Whangarei Child Poverty Action Group (WCPAG)

Ngairae Rae, Alina Mancini, Sherry Carne

12th October 2012

Firstly we would like to acknowledge the Children's Commissioner for the leadership shown on this issue in drawing together the Expert Advisory Group and the resulting Solutions to Child Poverty report.

We were pleased to work with staff from the Office for Children's Commissioner in seeking community feedback on the report within Tai Tokerau. WCPAG held a community meeting held in Whangarei and facilitated workshops to seek comment from over 160 Whangarei school students.

We are finalizing this submission on the day the White Paper on Vulnerable Children was released and are again dismayed at the failure to address child poverty, and the missed opportunity to develop a Children's Action Plan within a Child Rights framework. We remain hopeful that this report will be given the just attention and requisite action required by Government, unlike the many other reports on child poverty produced over recent years, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner¹. Unfortunately initial responses from the Prime Minister have not been positive².

Overall we support the majority of recommendations contained within. Our submission provides a brief commentary of our thoughts on the entire document and then focuses on three key areas of the EAG report: school food programmes, housing and education. We have chosen these areas as this is where we have particular interest and expertise.

Whangarei CPAG is made up of members of the public as well as health professionals, students, community and social workers. We are closely aligned to the national charity CPAG however as a group we operate autonomously. The views expressed in this submission are entirely the views of the Whangarei CPAG collective.

Whangarei is the largest town within the region of Tai Tokerau / Northland. We have some of the worst child health and social statistics in the country due to the poverty, deprivation and ongoing hardship experienced by our communities.

¹, Fletcher, M & Dwyer, M. (2008) *A Fair Go for all Children*

² Universal child payment dismissed as 'dopey' by John Key as quoted in New Zealand Herald Saturday 22nd September, 2012. Article 'Expert backs generous child payment for all' by Simon Collins

To provide some context for our submission the following are a selection of health and wellbeing indicators for Tai Tokerau³.

In 2010 63.5% of our babies were born into the three most deprived deciles (21.5% born into decile 10, 20% decile 9, and 22% in decile 8). Only 3.9% were born in decile 2 and 3. No babies were born in decile 1. In 2010 60% of all babies born in Northland were Maori. *The overwhelming majority of Maori babies are born into poverty.* At the end of April 2011, there were 13,986 children aged 0–18 years who were reliant on a benefit or a benefit recipient. While the majority of these children were reliant on DPB recipients, a large increase in the number reliant on unemployment benefit recipients was evident between April 2008 and April 2011.

During 2004–2008 SUDI rates in Northland were significantly higher than the New Zealand rate.

During 2006–2010, ambulatory sensitive hospitalizations (ASH) were significantly higher in Northland than the New Zealand rate, 69.8 vs 64.4 per 100,000. In Northland, rates were higher for Māori than for European children. ASH were also higher in winter and spring.

In Northland, during 2006–2010, hospital admissions for: bronchiolitis, pneumonia, bronchiectasis, pertussis, meningococcal, tuberculosis and serious skin admissions were all significantly higher than the New Zealand rate. For all of these conditions tamariki Maori had much higher admission rates, in some instances up to 5x that of Pakeha children.

Perhaps the most striking inequality that faces our region is evidenced through our rates of rheumatic fever. Rheumatic fever and its consequence, rheumatic heart disease (ARF/RHD) are preventable, unfair and unnecessary. 98% of those affected in Northland are tamariki Māori. Tamariki Māori in Northland have about a 1 in 200 chance of a damaged heart by the end of school – even though this is an entirely preventable disease. The most recent data estimates the mean annual incidence for decile 10 Māori children as 108.3/100,000 (2003-9); and for decile 9 & 10 combined the rate is 99.7/100,000. Once diagnosed with rheumatic fever, around 130 tamariki in Northland each year receive a very painful injection every month for at least 10 years to prevent more heart damage⁴.

The statistics above should be enough to outrage us all to act to improve the health and the wellbeing of our children. We are pleased the EAG acknowledges that child poverty is neither inevitable nor acceptable. There are a range of policies that if implemented can make a significant difference to children now. We do not believe that child poverty is a wicked problem. This report identifies several solutions that if acted upon will make a difference. What we need is political will.

We are concerned with the overriding focus within the report on paid employment. Poverty is largely caused by lack of income. Meaningful, adequately paid employment is a pathway out of poverty but not all employment is meaningful nor adequately paid, nor is all employment suitable (working conditions,

³ Unless otherwise stated all statistics in this section are from the 2011 The Health Status of Children and Young People in the Northern District Health Boards, Craig et al, NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service.

⁴ Ref: Northland DHB Rheumatic Fever Action Plan, 2012

work hours, travel times) when caring for children. We need to value and acknowledge the vital role of parenting and count it as work.

Sole parents already do the work of two – to dismiss that contribution is insulting. Paid employment cannot be the sole focus or solution to child poverty. As your report states 35 percent of children living in poverty are from families where at least one adult is working. The solution must be two-fold: meaningful, adequately paid employment AND state support for all families to ensure a minimum standard of living that enables all children to have adequate resources and support for a healthy life.

We believe a child rights framework that places children at the centre of all decision making is the way forward.

As well as the focus on work as the main route out of poverty we are also concerned at the differential, discriminatory approach to the children of beneficiaries. We could understand and accept this if the differential treatment was based on equity however it seems to be more about the level of state control and possibilities for coercion. The suggestion that children whose parents are on a sole benefit should be automatically enrolled in ECE is discriminatory and judgemental. If ECE is so important for children then why should this not be applied to all children? This discriminatory approach to the children of beneficiaries has become prevalent in the recent wave of welfare reform and is also significant with the Vulnerable Children White Paper. We are disappointed to see it within this document.

Our response, in brief, to the document overall is contained below:

Which proposals will be effective in reducing child poverty?

We strongly support the development of a Child Poverty Act and further suggest that we have a Minister for Children. It seems odd that we have a Minister for Racing in this country but not one for our most 'vulnerable' – our children.

We support the amendment of the Child Support Act to require child support to be passed-on to custodial parents who receive a sole-parent benefit; and enable the government to guarantee child support payments. We further suggest that this recommendation is time framed and be implemented in the next financial year July 2013.

We strongly support the universal Child Payment and also suggest that the introduction of this be time framed. We endorse the concept of proportionate universalism raised in the document and believe this approach ensures that all children, including those that need it most, will be provided with the support they require. We currently provide universal superannuation for all people aged over 65. This is a model we are proud of as a country. Our children deserve and require the same regard as our older people.

Although we support the universal Child Payment we do not support the Young Child Carer Benefit as we do not believe that we should expect parents to enter full time work when their child is six. Sole parents are already working the job of two people. Jobs aren't always child-friendly and there is associated costs of employment also e.g. travel, clothing, child care.

We support the proposal for the provision of high-quality ECE and out-of-school care services for children living in poverty to support parental employment. We would prefer if the wording of this recommendation was changed to “provide high-quality *culturally appropriate* ECE and care and out-of-school care services *for all children*”. This is an example of the work focused tone of the report – do we only value ECE and out of school care services for their support of parental employment? A child development focus also values quality ECE.

Although we acknowledge the high support needs of our babies and children we are also concerned that there is not enough support or focus on young people up to the age of 18. It is too simple to say that parents with children aged 14, should work full time because young people can legally be left on their own. Young people also require and want quality time with their parents. Growing bodies have growing needs – physical and emotional, and as any parent will tell you teenagers are costly.

The recommendation to ‘independently review all child-related benefit rates, including the In-Work Tax Credit’ does not go far enough. We suggest that the EAG supports the immediate expansion of the In-Work Tax Credit to all children – regardless of the employment status of their parents. This would provide an additional \$60 per child for the most impoverished families.

Maori

We fully support all the proposals that prioritise the elimination of poverty among tamariki Maori. However we believe these proposals need to be strengthened with the inclusion of timeframes that are regularly monitored for progress.

Health

We support all the proposals in relation to health but would like to have several expanded. Establishing free primary health care for children aged zero to six years. This is already supposed to be in place (indeed in Whangarei it is free). We suggest this recommendation be extended and time framed to “all children aged zero to eighteen 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by 2013”. Our experience within the community and indeed with our own families and children is that cost is a significant barrier to accessing primary health care for all children, not just those aged under six. Another issue for poor families that isn’t addressed in this paper is the level of debt at general practices which can also prevent parents from taking their children to the GP. Ideally all primary health care would be free or at significantly reduced cost.

Education

We support all the proposals for education. For detailed comment on food in schools please see attached. We do support the idea of schools as community hubs but believe that this needs to be led by the school and the community rather than being driven by a top down agenda.

We also caution a focus solely on low-decile schools. The decile rating of a school is a blunt instrument in the measurement of whether a school has children living in poverty. Mid to high decile schools are also likely to have children living in poverty. A proportionate universalism approach to education is supported – that is a minimum level of service for all schools with increased resourcing and focusing on poorer schools.

Which proposals are less likely to be effective?

We believe the targets for the reduction of child poverty are too conservative. We propose a 10% reduction of child poverty each year for the next five years. We should be focused on an end to child poverty by 2022, as any child living in poverty is too many. A reduction of 40% is too little, too late. Our children are hurting now – they cannot wait.

We fully support the recommendation that child poverty rates for Maori and Pasifika children are reduced to a rate similar to that of Pakeha children. This would mean that Maori rates need to reduce by 12% per year and Pasifika rates need to reduce by 15% per year for the next five years.

We also need to agree on monitoring and publicly recording our child poverty targets. Cross party support is crucial.

Community

Whangarei CPAG is made up of community members who are all working in various ways to end child poverty. We strongly believe in the role of communities and community based services to support children and families. We also believe in and support community development. However our support for community development is tempered with the knowledge that the overarching social, economic and political environment shapes much of the day-to-day reality within communities. Communities need supportive public policy that enables and strengthens family and community wellbeing e.g. healthy affordable housing, sustainable employment, minimum family incomes, quality, culturally appropriate and accessible education and health services, clean air and water, a sustainable environment. It is the responsibility of good government to ensure these building blocks are in place – then communities can flourish. A focus on community may come at the detriment of ensuring good public policy which we caution against. There is also the concern that a focus on community will promote a ‘charitable’ response to child poverty. There is a place for charities to address child poverty but not to replace what should be considered essential government services.

What are the most important proposals to reduce child poverty? What needs to be done first and why?

The most important proposals to reduce child poverty and those which need to be done first, are those which provide more income to families. Income is the major determinant of child poverty and therefore this must be prioritized. As already discussed, paid employment for parents will not be the solution for all children. All our children have a right to an adequate standard of living for their wellbeing. Children are being damaged by poverty now and the effects of poverty cannot be undone – they are lifelong.

The next most important set of proposals are those in relation to tamariki Maori. If we get it right for tamariki Maori then we will get it right for all children. Next on the list is housing, education and health. The key building blocks for wellbeing.

What is missing from the package?

A major gap is the provision of support for parents to undertake training. The removing of the Training Incentive Allowance in recent years was misguided cost savings. There is a strong correlation between the education level of mothers and outcomes for children. We should do all we can to improve maternal education levels.

The report discusses problem debt and proposes three initiatives to address this for low income families. What is missing from this discussion is the impact of the loan shark industry and 'sale trucks' within low income communities. We need more robust regulation of this industry and mechanisms that limit their ability to 'prey on the poor'.

There seems to be a contradiction in the report in that there is no support for an increase to the minimum wage however a possible policy to reduce labour supply barriers for parents include: making work pay: ensuring that work pays parents enough to encourage them to take up paid employment. Surely an increase in the minimum wage would contribute to this?

We believe the EAG should call for the Government to immediately revoke the proposal to reduce the minimum wage for youth.

In relation to problem gambling there is an opportunity right now for the Government to support The Gambling Amendment Bill which aims to enable local authorities to reduce the number of, or even eliminate, pokies from areas where they are doing harm. The Bill also requires that 80 percent of the gambling proceeds be returned to community groups in the same geographic area where the gambling venues operate. In Tai Tokerau this would help address what we see as the reverse of Robin Hood: the money spent on pokie machines that comes from poor communities where most of the pokie machines are located e.g. Kaikohe, goes to the more affluent communities like Kerikeri. The affluent communities have the capacity and capability to apply to the grant makers and usually the relationship as well.

Feedback on Child Poverty Solutions

Working paper 16: Education Solutions to Mitigate Child Poverty

Alina Mancini

School Food Programmes- sections 39 to 56

What's happening in Whangarei

On the whole Whangarei schools have a lower decile rating than the national average, reflecting the relatively disadvantaged socio-economic situation of many Whangarei families. It is evident from our involvement with decile 1-4 schools in Whangarei and Kaipara and from the information we collected last year as part of our research of food poverty in Whangarei⁵ that food poverty is an issue for children in our community and their families. Over 30% of children enrolled in these schools receive food assistance weekly from their schools through a number of programmes, all but one supported and run by charitable organisations or funded through the school's budget. Namely these are: Fonterra Milk for Schools (all schools, will go nationwide next year), Fruit in Schools, sandwiches delivered from St Vincent de Paul, Kids Can, (some schools still on the waiting list), Sanitarium and Fonterra Kickstart Breakfast Club.

The issue of lack of volunteers or staff to manage and run the food programmes and the long term sustainability of the existing programmes remain the key issues identified by schools. When asked, principals agreed and supported the idea of a Government assisted food programme. Some principals believe a school lunch programme would help reduce truancy, as those parents without the means to provide lunch for their children would have confidence to send their child to school, knowing they would be fed during the day.

Which proposals will be effective in reducing child poverty?

The Whangarei Child Poverty Action Group welcomes the recommendation put forward in the paper that "the Government should investigate options for the funding, distribution and cost of food in schools programmes" (Recommendation 2, page 13). This recommendation aligns with our responsibility as a society to uphold the intrinsic rights of children, which include adequate nutrition. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child New Zealand has an obligation to fulfil this responsibility. There are a range of other nutritional, educational, health and social reasons why children

⁵Carne, S. & Mancini, A. (2012). *Empty food baskets : Food poverty in Whangarei*. Whangarei: Whangarei Child Poverty Action Group

also need to be fed adequately. While family responsibility is a fundamental dimension of ensuring this happens, all children should be fed regardless of their parents' income or status.

We consider that since its public release this recommendation alone has already contributed very positively to raise awareness on the issue of food poverty in New Zealand and on the value of school food programmes in addressing it. It has also instigated some positive actions such as the public response to the fundraising media appeals to support KidsCan Charity (TV3 Campbell Live and More FM radio station). It has also sparked some political interest with both the Mana and Labour Party now coming forward with policy proposals.

The current National Government hasn't committed to any specific programme but, since the release of the EAG report, it has indicated that it is open to consider ideas about food in schools programmes. On the same take, however, there continue to be a stigmatisation of parents lacking sense of responsibility, parenting skills and making poor choices as the primary cause of children not being fed appropriately. Furthermore the future of the only Government funded school food programme "Fruit in Schools" remains uncertain. In March this year the Government backed down from a previous decision to extend "Fruit in Schools" to decile 3 schools, from being already available to decile 1 and 2 primary schools across the country⁶. It has to be noted that this decision was made regardless of the fact that the programme has been evaluated as being successful and making a real positive difference to children.

The Aupouri Maori Trust Board was recently required to cease its provision of daily free lunches to five Kaitia schools as this provision was not the purpose of the funding it received as part of the Social Workers in Schools programme. We consider this as another example not only of the lack of commitment to address this problem so far showed by the central Government but also of a lack of understanding of the real impact of food poverty on the lives of real children. Furthermore it shows a very worrisome lack of will to think outside the square and to utilise a flexible approach and the resources already available within each community for the benefits of its members.

Within this discussion we would like to rectify that stated on page 12 of working paper 16, in regards to the Fruit in School programme: that the "Ministry of Health discontinued funds for this national initiative in 2009...". According to the information the Whangarei Child Poverty Action Group collected in 2011 for the report on food insecurity in Whangarei "Empty Food Baskets", last year Fruit in Schools reached over 95,000 primary age (years 0-8) students in nearly all decile 1 and 2 schools across the country. In the Whangarei area 11 schools are involved with the programme. As recommended in the

⁶ Green Party. (2012, October 8). *Government back down on fruit in schools* [Press Release]. Retrieved from <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA1210/S00124/government-back-down-on-fruit-in-schools.htm>

report our group would like the provision of this programme to continue or for it to be incorporated in a wider food programme for low decile schools.

We agree that an online survey of schools could be an effective method to carry out a stocktake of existing approaches in a timely manner.

Which proposals are less likely to be effective?

We have some concerns about the length of time that the subsequent stages of piloting and evaluating the range of approaches emerging from the stocktake may take. Although we consider it necessary to choose a strategy that is the most appropriate to the New Zealand situation, we would like to stress the importance of implementing a comprehensive food in school strategy sooner rather than later. We suggest that the experiences of other countries (for example England, Italy and Sweden) and available comparative analysis of the different approaches adopted elsewhere could usefully inform this decision making process and speed up the process⁷.

We would also like to stress that a number of pragmatic initiatives are already in place around the country and in Northland. These could usefully be taken into account as pilot projects. Examples include: Food for Life at Manaia View School hot lunch programme, which will be launched in Whangarei in October 2012; Te Wharekura O Te Kaokaoroa O Putaruru School breakfast and hot lunch \$1 meals programme; the numerous schools across the country which have found creative ways to provide pupils with sandwiches at lunch times, with funds from their already stretched budgets or by seeking external charitable support.

There is a wealth of evidence about the high and increasing level of need for nutritious food to be distributed to children in school in New Zealand because of the alarming numbers of pupils turning up every day without having had any breakfast and/or without any food for lunch. At the same time it is quite obvious that the current reliance on private philanthropy is not only uncertain and risky but inadequate to match the scale of the need, with only a minority of the children in need of food assistance receiving food in school on a regular basis. In summary this approach has a number of substantial limitations, as identified by Claire Walters in her Public Policy analysis⁷; namely:

- Potential inability to meet excess demand
- Episodic provision (for example when food surplus is available or only for some days of the week)

⁷ Walters, C. (2012). *The case for government-funded lunch provision in New Zealand primary schools*. University of Auckland, New Zealand.

- Unreliability of funding and sponsorship, as business priorities might change
- Poor volunteer retention
- Arbitrary methods of food distribution
- Lack of standards or guidelines, systematic collection of data and evaluation about programme's effectiveness
- Potential stigmatisation of children who are identified as having a need for food (targeted approach)
- Inability to reach those children who are really in need, for instance because they might be kept at home when lunch food cannot be provided or because they might not come forward to take part in programmes

Because of that outlined above, the Whangarei Child Poverty Action Group has concerns about the focus of the paper on the Food for Kids programme, run by the KidsCan Charity, as the most likely initiative to be further developed and funded by the Government to become the national free food in school programme to be rolled out. While we appreciate the attractiveness of a low cost model offered by a partnership between the private and public sector we wouldn't like to see this as the preferred option on the table for a number of reasons.

Firstly by its very nature the Food for Kids programme is designed as a crisis intervention programme providing snack food to children who are identified by teachers as being hungry. With the exception of toast and spreads, all food items - snack bars, raisins, 'fruit in jelly' pottles and baked beans- have a long shelf life and have been selected because they are quick and easy to store and distribute as well as for their nutritional value. We know that, at least in Whangarei, there is no built-in system within the programme to collect data on the food distributed. Furthermore food is distributed to pupils by teachers according to their subjective identification of need. Unless the programme is entirely re-designed we can't really see how it could be utilised for the delivery of a national school food programme, as proposed in the abovementioned recommendation contained in the paper.

A number of other proposals have already developed cost analysis and identified options that we consider more attractive in terms of value for money, type/variety of food on offer and universal provision within the schools selected. An example can be found in the Child Poverty Action Group's

Report “Hunger for Learning”, released in 2011. The Report estimates the costs of the provision of a nutritious breakfast to primary and intermediate schools deciles 1-3⁸.

What are the most important proposals to reduce child poverty? & What needs to be done first and why?

In order to address the limitations of existing programmes as highlighted above, we propose the introduction of:

A fully State funded breakfast and lunch programme, provided on a universal basis to all children attending decile 1-4 schools in New Zealand.

Making meals available to all children in these decile 1-4 school should reach the children with the greatest need. Such programme should improve schools attendance and the health and learning achievements of students and contribute to reduce children’s likelihood of being overweight or obese by providing them with daily healthy and nutritious meals.

All meals provided should be required to comply with nutritional guidelines set by the Ministry of Health, to ensure a minimum nutritional standard.

The programme will need to be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness, to ensure objectives are being met.

The food programme will need to be resourced properly through regular and secure grants from central Government (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education) to each school’s Board of Trustees

Within this broad framework each school should have the ability to develop and implement programmes in ways that suit their particular needs and situation (for example meals prepared within the school versus the service being contracted from the outside), that build on relationships with their local communities, and help build capacity and acceptance within communities. School food

⁸ Wynd, D. (2011). *Hunger for learning: Nutritional barriers to children’s education*. Auckland: Child Poverty Action Group.

programmes developed and implemented this way have the potential to extend both educational and broader social outcomes for the school community. These should include the development of partnerships with local businesses, parents and NGOs and the involvements of parents and organisations with the provision of the new nutritious meals programmes. Subsidies and assistance should be designed to promote these relationships. For example, if at present schools get food through donations, this should continue to be the case. If businesses are willing and able to donate food to their local schools then they should be encouraged to do so, within accepted nutritional guidelines.

The ability to rely on secure funds should also allow schools to focus on other important aspects of food provision, such as the social aspect of children eating together at breakfast and lunch time at school. This has been consistently identified in the interviews we conducted during our research and in the available literature as being a very important element for children accessing food at school.

Housing

Sherry Carne

The Whangarei Child Poverty Action Group (WCPAG) response to the Expert Advisory Group's recommendations for housing are grouped under the following headings:

- Which proposals will be effective in reducing child poverty?
- Which proposals are less likely to be effective?
- What are the most important proposals to reduce child poverty?
- What needs to be done first and why?
- What is missing from the package?

The recommendations included in Working Paper no.18: Housing Policy: Recommendations to Address Child Poverty, and summarised in the following chart are referred to.

Expert Advisory group on Solutions to child poverty – summary of proposed options

Priority issues for children in poverty	Short term actions	Long term actions
<p>Many children live in poor quality and overcrowded houses (particularly Māori and Pasifika children) and suffer serious health conditions because of this</p> <p>Options provide opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>reduce over-crowding</i> • <i>improve the quality of housing, particularly rental</i> 	<p><i>Warrant of fitness for rental properties</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a basic standard for rental properties (such as houses must have heating and insulation, sanitation, and be safe). Help landlords to meet the standards by introducing tax breaks for renovations and repairs. <p><i>Accommodation Supplement (AS) and Income Related Rents</i></p>	<p><i>Social and community housing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number and quality of subsidised houses for low-income families and whānau <p><i>Better assess housing need</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of expecting families to go between government agencies, establish a one-stop-shop assessment for housing needs

<p><i>properties</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>increase the number of social houses and other affordable housing</i> 	<p><i>(IRR)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AS and IRR are housing subsidies – about \$2 billion paid out each year. They need to be reviewed and refocused to work better for low-income families and whānau <p><i>Housing and critical infrastructure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include Housing as a priority in the <i>National Infrastructure Plan</i> and make finding solutions to the poor quality, and severe undersupply of affordable housing, a priority 	<p><i>Low-income home ownership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of low-income families and whānau who own their own homes. The ways to do this include increasing home deposit schemes, while also encouraging investors to sell by introducing capital gains tax and land tax for rental properties, addressing challenges of building on Māori land <p><i>Insulation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the <i>Heat Smart</i> insulation subsidy programme and encourage landlords to insulate their rental properties by giving them tax breaks
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The following responses are made specifically in regard to the housing environs of Whangarei and Northland. We have not commented on either Christchurch or Auckland, or what may work in that environment.

1) Which proposals will be effective in reducing child poverty

From a Northland perspective the only proposal which could be effective in reducing child poverty would be an increase in quality affordable rental housing for families. Reducing the number of families who have to share their housing, either as the host or the guest family, because they are unable to afford the weekly costs of housing food and living is the only viable way of improving the outcomes for many Northland children.

The paper discusses 'crowding' but omits any discussion of 'sharing' households, or the impact of split families having to share housing with a host family or of having to leave their children with other family members because of their housing situation.

The impact of poor quality housing on children's health is recognised. What the paper skates over is the growing body of evidence that relates children's poor educational and future well-being outcomes to poor housing. For many children home is not a haven. Many children move between houses occupied by other families (living in shared situations with no tenancy rights or privacy, and potentially open to abuse from host family members) or overcrowded houses. Other children only know of living in damp, substandard houses.

The proposals in the paper appear to be a long way from the lived experience of many of our children in Northland.

2) Which proposals are less likely to be effective?

Changing the policy settings will not alter the living experience of Northland children. On this basis, WCPAG, considers the following recommendations to be ineffective for the reasons given.

Strengthen the investment in planning for New Zealand's housing through including housing in the National Infrastructure Plan

Northland has consistently been highlighted in reports indicating the need for improved infrastructure and housing and nothing has occurred. The situation continues to deteriorate.

Support home ownership for low-income families, Māori whānau and Pasifika families

The current programmes do not work in Northland because of the high compliance and infrastructural requirement costs; tinkering with them will not improve the outcomes for Northland children. Maori continue to have lower home ownership rates. Housing quality does not always improve with owner occupier ownership.

Address the serious undersupply and poor quality of affordable and social housing by:

- taking action to immediately increase the number of units of affordable and social houses
- substantially increase the Social Housing Fund and extend it beyond 2015
- register all social housing providers (state, local government and community) to standardise provision and extend rental subsidies to all registered providers

From a Northland perspective the SHU process has been slow. The funds that may be allocated are meagre.

		2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15		
SHF Capital Grants		\$m	\$m	\$m	\$m	
Markets	Auckland	Growth provider	5.5	5.0	4.5	21.0
		Niche provider	2.5	2.0	1.5	
	Canterbury	Growth provider	5.5	5.0	4.5	21.0
		Niche provider	2.5	2.0	1.5	
	Other NZ Markets	Growth provider (inc about 35% rural)	4.5 (1.6)	4.0 (1.4)	3.5 (1.2)	21.0 (7.2)
		Niche provider (inc about 35% rural)	3.5 (1.2)	3.0 (1.0)	2.5 (0.8)	
	Pūtea Māori	Māori providers/ organisations	4.6	4.6	4.6	13.8
Total		28.6	25.6	22.6	76.8	

*“As guidance, we expect that proposals in the following locations **will be able to better demonstrate a focus on identified need given supply and demand** information: rban \$13.8m*

Rural/Regional \$7.2m

Hamilton Northland

Tauranga Bay of Plenty

Wellington East Cape

Lower Hutt Hawkes Bay

*Dunedin Nelson/Marlborough*⁹

The poor housing situation in Northland has long been recognised, but once again the housing situation has to be ‘proved’. Spreading \$21 million across New Zealand will not improve the housing situations for New Zealand children. Nothing will improve for the children in Northland with these recommendations.

The introduction of pre-qualification processes for the next three years has done nothing to alleviate the situation. Another layer of bureaucracy has been added.

Establish a single housing needs assessment

Setting up an independent, assessment process is only adding a further layer of bureaucracy. There are so few housing ‘products’ available that it is a stupid waste of money to base a whole approach on assessing need when there are no **houses** available for families with children to occupy.

People in Northland are reliant on ‘contact centres’ and welfare offices. These forms of communication have been found to be unsympathetic to the people of Northland.¹⁰

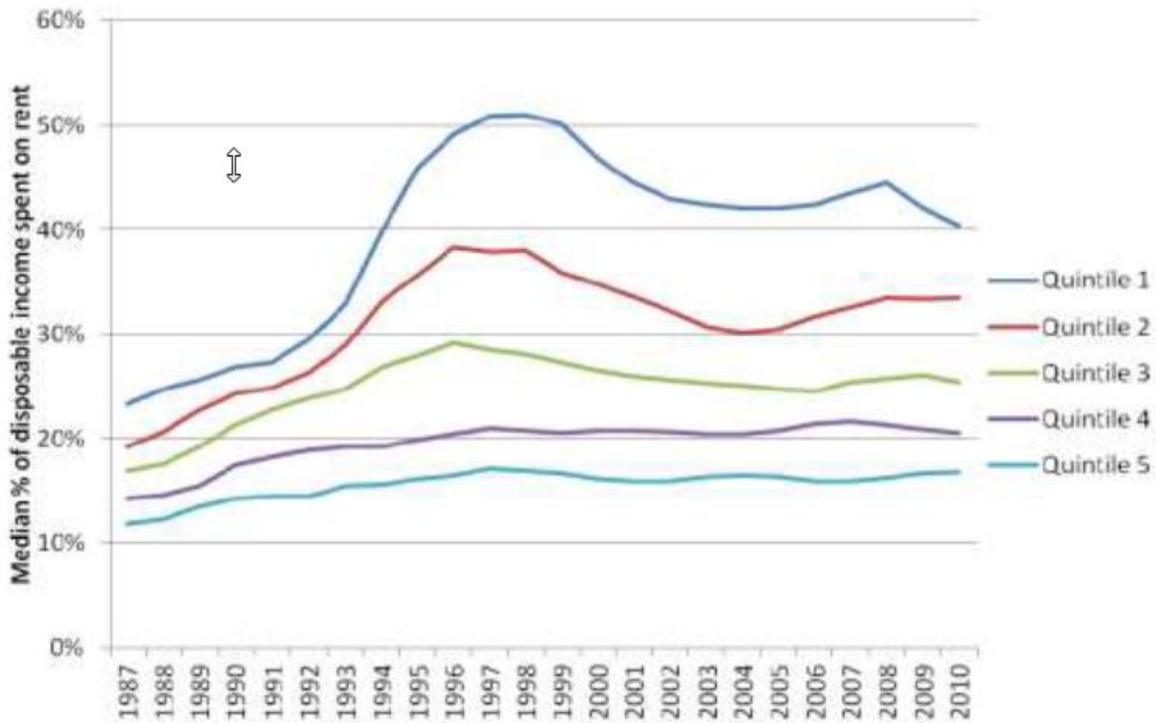
WCAP do not consider this as a solution to the housing issues in Northland.

Refocus housing subsidies provided through the AS and IRR

⁹ SOCIAL HOUSING FUND ALLOCATION PLAN - 28 September 2012, Page 3

¹⁰ There is currently one man on a hunger strike because of his dealings with the ‘one’ office in his area. Northern Advocate

The paper indicates that (para 108) almost \$2 billion annually is spent on AS and IRR. Obviously this huge expenditure has done absolutely nothing to improve housing quality, or the lives of children, so why adjust this policy in the mistaken belief that after twenty years of achieving nothing tinkering will make a drastic difference. The policy has done nothing to improve housing quality, so why do the recommendations perpetuate the idea that this huge expenditure is increasing the number of affordable rental houses available for families, or improving the quality for the homes the families have to live in.



Source: Statistics New Zealand (HES) data

Figure 2 P 9

The chart indicates, since the introduction of the AS in 1992/93 how much the median percentage of disposable income spent on rent by disposable income has increased for those families in the lower quintiles. These are the families with children and the AS expenditure has not assisted them. Note that the dip in 2000 coincides with the return to IRR for HNZN tenants. The increase in 2008 for Quintile 2 is not explained within the paper nor the drop in Quintile 1? The reader must assume that this is because of an association between the cost of the house and an alteration in the income of the recipient?

The diagram does indicate the difference in the percentage of median income spent on rent prior to (1993) and with the introduction of AS for families in New Zealand

The paper does touch briefly on the structural impediments of the AS. The AS regime 'assumes' that:

- One and two bedroom rental homes cost the same amount as the amount of AS for two adults (a couple requiring one bedroom) is the same as that received by a single parent and one child (requiring two bedrooms)
- that two and three bedrooms cost the same: as the amount of AS for two adults and one child, (requiring two bedrooms) is the same as that received by a single parent and two children of the opposite sex (requiring three bedrooms)
- No recipients are likely to require a four bedroom home

Refocusing the housing subsidies provided through the AS and IRR has not worked, the chart shows that, so this is unlikely to change anything for the children in Northland.

Regulate the quality of rental accommodation using a mandatory Warrant of Fitness

The quality of housing in New Zealand is poor. Regulating the quality of homes that are available for rental is likely to increase the cost of that housing. This is unlikely to improve the housing situation for children who are growing up in poor quality housing now. Regulation also involves another layer of administration – the cost of which will likely be pushed onto the renter.

Extend and target home insulation and heating subsidies

This has not been taken up by landlords. Extending the subsidies may help improve the quality of existing houses, but does nothing to increase the supply of affordably good quality housing in the short term.

Invest in housing data and research

Why? The poor quality of housing in Northland is recognised. The health impacts on Northland children are already known, such as the rheumatic fever prevention programmes.

3) What are the most important proposals to reduce child poverty?

Policies that are filtered through a child focus lens. Most of the recommendations are about changes to existing policies that have not worked for children.

Reducing child poverty requires changes to the benefit system. The current proposals discriminate against low income mothers and their children

Increase the number of houses that are affordable for families through new building, not through assuming that old houses can be re-developed into modern, warm quality affordable housing.

Children need to live in quality warm affordable housing where the parent/s can also afford to feed their children.

☒☒extend and target home insulation and heating subsidies

We strongly support the Healthy Homes Tai Tokerau insulation retrofitting programme and want to see this programme continued and expanded. Recent developments in this programme are prioritising children and older people with high health needs regardless of their home ownership status. This programme has long lasting health benefits and is a win win for housing, health and employment outcomes.

4) What needs to be done first and why?

Increase the number of affordable houses available for rent or ownership for families living on low incomes.. Neither the homeownership programmes (recommendation 2) nor making housing a priority in the National Infrastructure Plan (recommendation 1) will do anything to immediately increase the number of houses.

Treat all children equally – whether their parents are in work or not. Ensure that all families have sufficient income to feed their children adequately, and can live in quality, affordable, warm housing. Measures which limit housing supply prevent any change.

Extend and target home insulation and heating subsidies: We strongly support the Healthy Homes Tai Tokerau insulation retrofitting programme and want to see this programme continued and expanded. Recent developments in this programme are prioritising children and older people with high health needs regardless of their home ownership status. This programme has long lasting health benefits and is a win win for housing, health and employment outcomes.

5) What is missing from the package?

The recommendations do not focus on the needs of children. The recommendations focus on adjusting the existing policy mechanisms. Monitoring or recommending 'assessments' does nothing to increase the supply of houses; neither does including housing in an investment plan. Until policies are implemented that will increase the number of affordable homes available for families to either rent or own occurs nothing will change for children in Northland

Child Poverty and Education: No. 16

Chris Read

Introduction

Education is both a part of the problem and part of the solution for the underachievement of children in the education system in New Zealand. The EAG report on education notes that success in education plays a powerful role in mitigating the long term effects of poverty in the lives of individual children and yet, socio-economic status tends to mirror academic achievement in a seemingly intractable cycle of mutual reinforcement. This is not to say that all who experience poverty are doomed to low educational achievement, but on a wider scale, the odds appear stacked against children experiencing social deprivation.

This report examines the ways in which children experience deprivation in situations of poverty and then attempts to identify the ways in which these deprivations might be successfully redressed. Issues of equity are framed in terms of identifying the practices and resources that are required for children from poorer families to attain the educational status benchmarked by more affluent middleclass families. Unquestionably deficits exist and should be addressed, but such an approach tends to accept the dominance of middleclass values in education on the basis of the success of middleclass children within the educational system. The debate therefore easily slides into redressing the differences in parenting practices that result in educational deficits in ECE, and in programmes designed to socialize children to successful learning in the later stages of their education. These deficit stances tend to obscure the capabilities, strengths and gifts of both children and their families in conditions of poverty and deprivation. At the same time, the interconnections between the social conditions experienced by families in poverty and those who are more successful in terms of material resources remain unexamined, and middleclass successes in determining educational agenda, as in other spheres of collective social life, are determined as being due to particular characteristics and behaviours practiced by virtuous individuals, rather than as having at least some basis in material advantages built upon economic practices entrenching poverty.

Early Childhood education

Participation in formal Early Childhood Education is acknowledged as a key component to facilitating school preparedness and is presented as a predictor of ongoing academic achievement. The report notes that the benefits of participation are extended to parents in providing networks of social interaction and support, which in turn assist in successful parenting. Non-participation in ECE is noted to be prompted by issues of access, cost, and to some degree, a concern about the early separation of mothers and young children. The authors note that these barriers are overcome in ECE centres that are more inclusive of families in their operations and which offer a range of services and educational opportunities on-site, not only for children but also for parents. It is likely that these practices of inclusion are helpful for both parents and children in the much longer term.

However, the inclusiveness facilitated by participation in ECE in particular locales may also serve to exclude a number of families who differ in socioeconomic status and/or culture from that of the majority of families who use a particular facility. It cannot be assumed that supportive relationships will arise from contacts between parents on the basis of attendance of children at an ECE and neither can it be assumed that ECE providers will be able to make all equally welcome. The stratification of society is well established and ECE institutions are no different from other social institutions.

The report notes that working parents find it difficult to access quality ECE and they also have substantive needs for child care. The sole parents of pre-school children, who work non-standard or irregular hours find it especially difficult to access ECE that is responsive to the demands of their working lives. The ECE component of childcare becomes secondary to issues of availability, accessibility and cost of child care in such situations. The recommendations that ECE and child care facilities address such issues can only be positive in supporting parents in employment, although the disruptive nature of the demands of the workplace on family life is not explored. Childcare, while vital for many to take up employment to assist families out of poverty, does not necessarily promote a healthy family life for either parents or children where hours of work make it difficult to sustain family routines that meet the needs of family members including children. The wider issue of the value that New Zealand society places on the care of small children remains unaddressed while the relationship between the demands of employers on parents is not considered to be part of the equation. Better paid work enables parents to employ more options to deal with the conflicts between the needs of children and those of employers, but for parents in low paid work, the conflicts are difficult to reconcile. For parents not in work, the precarious nature of their existence creates many deficits across all facets of social life that impact on the education of children, but equally families in work where it is low paid may face similar deficits, in addition to time and energy deficits with their own impacts on family life.

Insecure housing and transience makes it difficult for families and children to develop relationships with ECE providers, a situation that is replicated at every level in the educational sector as children progress through their educational life. Under such conditions of uncertainty and contingency, it is not surprising that accessing ECE can be difficult for parents. ECE providers often require commitments in terms of attendance and hours that are difficult to sustain for families living in contingent and uncertain housing tenancies. These difficulties are compounded by shortages of facilities in particular locales in any case.

Negotiating these barriers in conditions which are punitive for parents without requiring the redress of difficulties by government agencies takes on the appearance of a double standard. If attendance at ECE is demanded by the state as a requirement of parents and is also used as a measure of the adequacy of parenting, then the state must also ensure that responsive, accessible, affordable and effective ECE is freely available to all parents. Deeper consideration of conditions of employment and the obligations of employers to ensure that work and care commitments are able to better be reconciled would also be useful, and this could only take place in a society that values work done at home as much as paid work.

However the work/care of children interface is managed it seems manifestly unfair to implement a policy with sanctions on a sector of the population without first ensuring that it is universally available. This would appear to constitute a misuse of state power, no matter how advantageous the aims of the

policy appear to be. It is unfair for the state to advance ECE as a necessary component of education without ensuring that all have access to it.

Aside from the availability issues of ECE, it should be considered that conceptually ECE is a construct which is not universally understood across all social sectors of New Zealand society. While ECE institutions have been a factor in educational life for many years, the ubiquity of ECE as a first step in the educational ladder of achievement has been a more recent phenomenon. Acceptance of the necessity of ECE cannot be presupposed to be universally understood, at least on the terms argued as a necessary precursor to primary school. ECE virtually extends schooling to an ever younger age of children, which, in terms of New Zealand society, also extends notions of success and failure to an even younger group of children. It would appear that aspects of middleclass competitiveness and anxiety about demonstrating advanced development have impacted on the need to drive a formal educational agenda into an increasingly younger age group of children. It seems likely that standardized testing will only further increase these pressures on younger children and families and detract somewhat from the aim of making literacy a fun and desirable condition. It is somewhat dismaying that five year olds can be categorized by their failures.

Schools and Education

The difficulties created by a lack of material resources and the issues of ECE continue to exert effects throughout a child's education accompanied by perceptions of failure on the part of students, parents, educators and communities. A success/failure paradigm has become the dominant feature of schooling in New Zealand generally and prompts a great deal of angst on the part of middle-class parents anxious to secure a competitive advantage in life for their children. It is fundamentally located in a social view which values education as a means of acquiring status, academically, socially and materially. In a self-reinforcing cycle, academic and material successes are equated with social success in New Zealand society. Middleclass families, with aspirations for their children, are reluctant to participate in communities perceived to be unsuccessful on these terms, contributing to the ongoing stratification of schools and communities.

The standards for educational achievement are determined by the anxieties of a dominant sector of society in New Zealand, who also seek to maintain their competitive advantage in the systems which they dominate. This culture of education, where some of the participants create the rules, understand the game and able to work the system to their advantage in conditions of stratified inequality maintains and perpetuates unequal educational outcomes. Those who live outside the gates struggle to find their way in. Untangling this complex web of disadvantage requires a rebalancing of social values - away from hierarchical, individualistic and competitive models of education, which look to create winners, and therefore losers (both schools and individuals), to values which respect diversity and equality of opportunity, and above all learning as the principle constituent value of education. Once these values are asserted, the priority becomes to enable children at any level to learn and to reach their potential. The factors which prevent this learning, such as hunger, ill health and social deprivation become the automatic focus of redress in an educational system collectively seeking the best for children. Likewise,

it is without contest that the development of the teaching profession and the promotion of conditions to support innovative, skilled and creative teaching practice are intrinsic to learning.

The report notes that a focus on addressing deficits in education can be problematic. However, it is also evident in the recommendations that the areas of deficit comprise the substance of the report. The arguments made are, in my view, incontestable on an equity basis, but it is likely that the underlying structures of an education system, based in measuring success and failure and characterised by winners and losers, will be unchanged by this focus. Competitive models of education are supported by structures of power and dominance. In an effort to maintain advantage, it is necessary to propose that education systems are value free conceptually, and that universal measures and standards can be applied in uniform ways. In such discourses, success on these terms becomes a self-validating construct, which enables those who do well under such systems to maintain that they are fair and equitable. Equally, those who do well in the system are absolved from the task of examining the ways in which they are privileged in education and life circumstances. A rationale which seeks to address educational change without changing the way in social values inform the educational system is likely to fail to achieve substantive change for those who are outside the gate. Efforts to mitigate disadvantage become an ongoing battle for some schools and individuals to 'close the gaps', rather than it being viewed as a collective failure on the part of all New Zealanders that opportunities are not equally shared across all sectors of society for all children.

A human rights framework, allied to the right for each individual child to reach their potential through the activation of their capacity to learn and for knowledge to be seen as a common resource for all, is vital to achieve the shifts required in education. Viewing education in these terms also provides support for an attitude of lifelong learning, as the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills is understood to be a part of capability development throughout the life course. A competitive educational model does not promote these aims as collectively important and cannot create the conditions under which all children will flourish. Competition, by its very nature in a market economy, assumes and is tolerant of conditions of inequality. Those, with the capacity to ensure advantages for their children, are not required as citizens to consider the needs of others disadvantaged by the conditions of their lives; rather their task is to ensure that they and their children make the best of their opportunities and protect those opportunities from erosion. Education becomes a commodity, purchased through social advantage which, in turn, ensures the ongoing basis of that advantage. Entitlement becomes unevenly distributed within society and the collective basis for asserting the right to educational opportunity becomes contingent on the efforts of some, rather than the responsibility of all.

The recommendations of the EAG are entirely consistent with efforts to breach the gaps between the educational advantage enjoyed by many and those families experiencing poverty. As such they cannot be contested and represent many of the best efforts of informed people and groups to address educational disadvantage. The report itself explicates the links between the multiple effects and interlinking nature of disadvantage across a spectrum of life experiences: health, housing, education, employment and so on. Achieving changes in one area can support change in another, and addressing inequalities in education is pivotal in enabling many to move out of poverty. Equally, the EAG recognizes that there are social problems which impact upon the ability of children to learn and the

recommendation to support programmes to address specific issues is well founded. However, it is real indictment that New Zealand as a collective views many such programmes as discretionary, and relies on the charitable sector to ensure a basic level of equality is attained and maintained. This reinforces the understanding of the poor as different and deficient. In that difference, the suspicion is always present that it is a result of their personal deficiencies that they are in need. Aid is therefore discretionary based on an individual impetus to act, and contingent on ensuring that individuals in need of aid recognize their deficient status and conform to the behavioural expectations demanded of them.

In the meantime, the state, as an expression of our collective will is able to continue to represent the views of those who most benefit from its institutions, while framing those who are struggling as lacking positive personal attributes and qualities of character. This contributes to the defacing of those in poverty as unrepresentative New Zealanders, as being outside the bounds of “New Zealandness” in character and behaviour. We cannot project our failings, our criminality, our darkneses in behavior onto a single sector of the population and expect to address the conditions in which problems arise in society with the clarity of vision and purpose required to achieve change.

It appears especially ironic that parents and children in poverty are attracting such opprobrium given the cupidity and poor decision-making of a number of the most advantaged in New Zealand society. It would seem that the state does not assign the substantial ethical and moral failings of some influential and wealthy individuals to the whole sector of materially advantaged persons in New Zealand. It is able to frame citizens who have achieved financial success in positive terms despite the illegality of some, and the mismanagement of many. It would be equally good to see this generosity extended to those who face huge hurdles in managing their lives at the sharp end of New Zealand society. Their courage, resilience and generosity could and should also be acknowledged.