



Child Poverty Action Group Wellington Summary of Cross Party Consensus Discussion

Points drawn from group discussions collated by Gay Keating

*The views and opinions presented here are part of a public discussion and may not necessarily represent
Child Poverty Action Group official policy stances or recommendations.*

Discussion points:

How do we get political commitment to an overall plan to eliminate child poverty?

What work do we need to do along with our network partners to make this happen?

- Building up to election
- In the next 6 months (pressure on the new government for a realistic plan for kids)

Who's the audience?

Who does CPAG work with? Politically/stakeholders/media? - Focus on engaging the general public – then the politicians will follow

What's the focus of the discussion?

- Move from a Child Poverty discourse to a more holistic approach - family, not just the child
- How do 'we' shift the perspective that there is no poverty?
- IT'S ABOUT THE CHILDREN - not just about beneficiaries
- Use the Children's Rights approach to focus on the child, irrespective of their circumstances. Then you can cover the issue from many fronts but still consider the child holistically
- We have created a common consensus that child poverty is an issue – we now need to broaden to a consensus on action. Look at where poverty was in the public mind ten years ago and where it is now. That should be celebrated – there is progress on that front. Now we need to turn the recognition into action.
- Maintain the momentum of public recognition of the problem of poverty for children and emphasise the three dimensions – a moral issue; the impact today on the child; but also that poverty in childhood is a failure to invest wisely for the future.

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Particular political policies and approaches

- If the incoming government plans to decrease taxation, advocate for it to be a decrease in GST, which would have greater benefit for those on lowest incomes
- Children are a long term investment - in the same sense that other infrastructure e.g. roads. Supporting children is investing in social infrastructure – if you don't, poverty WILL affect you in your lifetime, 'even if you don't live in Porirua.'
- Be clear that the purpose of the benefit system is to provide for people in need. A better benefit system is to be measured by the way it meets the needs of people; a better benefit system is not to be measured by a reduction in payments.
- Find the common ground across parties, not their differences. 'All politicians are committed', we just need to tap into it. Investing in children should not be a left-wing issue so we should really push for common ground.
- "Tax the rich." A slightly divisive statement, but the point was made that the Greens 40% top marginal tax rate is only 7c more in the dollar than people currently pay. They can afford it.
- The sound bites coming from politicians' mouth sound very authoritative and compelling. How about CPAG members provide a sound bite back to turn it on its head?

Challenge misconceptions

Poor people have enough money if they budget wisely

- Get politicians to try "undercover beneficiary" (cf "Undercover boss") to experience the reality (Remember National MP Katherine O'Regan who had been Associate Minister of Health, Associate Minister of Social Welfare and Associate Minister of Women's Affairs was going to live on benefit for a period; she decided to not do this as she was unwell and so she did not think that it was good for her health to live on such a restricted income.)

People in poverty are somehow different from ordinary people

- Publicise the 'ordinary' people who are struggling/poor, can't pay the rent, etc (rather than seen as "other") – CPAG could promote the stories of the people in the subject papers/stories described by tonight's speakers – these would be direct/compelling/emotional. Humanising the experiences could help remove the separation between 'them' and 'us.'
- Suggestion: A beneficiary streaking across the Cake Tin with a sign "I am poor."

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Universal tax funded policies are effective with few social disadvantages

- Discuss options chosen by other countries (e.g. European countries) of universal child payments – and this does not result in a flood of people having additional children just to get the cash from having a baby. It should not seem such a shocking idea to New Zealanders.
- When people say “I grew up in a state house, and look how well I did with my life – there’s no problem with being a poor child” remind them and others that those people grew up receiving a universal child benefit, low cost education – including low cost tertiary education, low cost health care, readily available income-related rents in state housing and tax support for single parents including while they undertake tertiary study.

Getting people into jobs is the only way to tackle poverty

- Is simply getting people into jobs really the answer? This ignores the fact that many children living in poverty are in working households. A broader response is needed.

A successful benefit system is one that pays out the least

- The government spent a lot of money on an actuarial report on the benefit system. The report labelled the success of the system as reducing the amount paid out. This forgets that slashing payments has a huge human cost. It also begs the question ‘what is the benefit system for?’ The welfare system fulfils a function of supporting those in need – so minimising payouts does have a converse effect.

Become part of the CPAG Movement

For great ideas on how you can make a difference, visit the [Take Action](#) section of our website, sign up to our [Mailing List](#) or [Become a Member](#)! If you are interested in a more informal, interactive way to engage with child poverty issues please join us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) where we post relevant news stories and comments regularly.

CPAG warmly thanks all who participated in our 2014 Public Discussion Series. For the notes from other events, please visit:
<http://www.cpag.org.nz/in-focus/election-discussion-series/>

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