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HOUSING POVERTY HORROR STORIES ADD TO PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT

A major new housing report which shows that one in five New Zealand families is facing housing-related problems was launched today at an emotional meeting at the Mangere People's Centre hall.

Community worker Joanna Fuimaono cried at the end of her passionate speech calling on the Government to take notice of the Child Poverty Action Group's report entitled *Room for Improvement: Current New Zealand housing policies and their implications for our children*.

"I feel emotional because I feel anger and frustration that we keep writing reports like this but people don't listen," said Mrs Fuimaono.
"Our housing is killing our children."

Another speaker, Sister Anne Hurley, told of one house she visited where five adults and four children were living. While she was there, a man was talking threateningly to a tenant because she had not paid her \$250 board that week, because her baby had been in hospital and she had not been able to go to work.

"The worst thing for me was the realization that there was little I could do about it," said Sister Anne.
"Sure I could write to Housing New Zealand about the situation. And I did just that, knowing full well that there would be countless others in equally depressing situations, and she would most likely not be housed for weeks or months."

Every year, the number of people needing government assistance to pay for housing grows by an estimated 2,500 households. But Housing New Zealand stock increased by fewer than 600 houses in the last financial year – a number even more modest than it sounds, as only 180 of those houses are new.

The majority of Housing New Zealand's acquisitions are bought, not built.

The launch MC, Dr Nikki Turner, compared life for her own 9-year-old daughter and for another girl of the same age, who lives in a garage with her family and has missed out on nearly half of her schooling in the last three months due to a poverty-related skin infection.

“You can’t tell me these two children are going to turn out the same way,” said Dr Turner.

“It’s a national disgrace, and it’s not fair on our children.”

Speaker Rev. Mua Strickson-Pua reiterated the theme of the need for social justice, in a hip hop poem set to music.

Report author Alan Johnson said that the extent of the housing crisis means it will take time to fix the problem so it was vital to start changing policy immediately.

“This problem is 15 years in the making – a solution is not going to happen overnight but it has got to start now.”

In the report, he writes: “The Government is arguing that setting aside public money to fund the retirement incomes of the baby boomers is an investment while funding adequate housing for the baby boomers’ grandchildren is relatively unimportant.”

Worrying statistics highlighted in the report are:

- About 50,000 children in New Zealand – including one out of every three Pacific children in New Zealand – are living in overcrowded conditions.
- Every year, one third of all pupils at decile one primary schools in south Auckland are likely to change schools, mostly because stable accommodation is beyond the reach of their families.
- The cost of the Accommodation Supplement to the taxpayer has grown rapidly and is set to double in the next 20 years, but the subsidy is not effective in solving the housing problems of the poorest families.

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