

CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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Work-Life balance important for all families.

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) welcomes the independently-published study *Improving Work-Life Balance for Domestic Purposes Beneficiary Sole Parent Families* researched by the Rotorua People's Advocacy Centre.

Questions must be asked as to why this piece of highly relevant taxpayer-funded research had to be published independently, rather than by the Families Commission who sponsored it, the group says. "The report makes very valuable recommendations to inform constructive policy development and it is pleasing to see these now in the public domain," says CPAG Director Janfrie Wakim.

All sole parent beneficiaries must work with Work and Income case managers to produce a plan that sets goals for their personal development leading to employment. The new report examines the compulsory Personal Development and Employment Plan (PDEP) to see how the 'work-life balance' of DPB families could be improved.

CPAG endorses RPAC researcher Paul Blair's observation that "Sole parents have real difficulty getting a good work life balance whether they are in paid work or not. The parents in this study had the sole responsibility for meeting the needs of their children, they were living in relative poverty, and some were caring for children with special needs. Adding full-time paid employment to this mix for many of these people would simply worsen their work-life balance. Part time employment is a better option and it should be given statutory recognition through less punitive abatement rates of benefits."

Participants in the study felt that the Ministry of Social Development's emphasis on paid jobs as the source of wellbeing - paid work being the ultimate outcome of PDEPs and seemingly the only work that really matters to officialdom - ignores and devalues the work of parenting.

"The caring role of mothers (95% of sole parents) should not be subordinate to the earning role, especially when children are very young, when their health and wellbeing is most fragile and their development needs are so critical," says Ms Wakim. "It should be of concern to all New Zealanders that children in families on benefits have been left so far behind their peers. Working for Families has only served to entrench their disadvantage with its emphasis on paid work regardless of circumstance."

The report highlights two concerns faced by sole parents: stigmatisation by WINZ and lack of income. CPAG challenges politicians and policymakers to ensure that any consideration of work-life balance mediated by MSD improves the circumstances of sole parents and their children and does not increase hardship.

The full report is available at

<http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/articles/res1199747937.pdf>