



CPAG Newsletter August 2006

Kia ora koutou katoa and welcome....

...to the new CPAG newsletter - all the news you need, once a month, to keep up to date with what's going on at CPAG and around the world. OK, mostly just CPAG, but we reserve the right to poach interesting stuff from elsewhere.

Bad news for the poorest families in latest government reports

Those busy beavers at the Ministry of Social Development have just released two large reports confirming what those in the social services sector have suspected for some time – the poor are getting poorer. The Living Standards 2004 Report and the Social Report 2006 both showed that for New Zealand's poorest families incomes fell relative to others and in absolute terms.

Those missing out are mostly sole-parent families on benefits. Although there are plenty of working families struggling they should be assisted by the In Work Payment that commenced on 1st April. Sadly, those in greatest need – beneficiaries – will not get a penny from the IWP, and can only look forward to a further \$10 per week in Family Support from next April. With inflation currently running at 4% this will still leave a big gap in people's budgets.

Showing no obvious sense of irony, the Minister for Social Development, David Benson-Pope, said the [Social Report 2006] was proof New Zealand was recovering from the "dark days of the mid-1990s". "Over the next year, as Working For Families takes full effect, the news will get even better." (see article by Anna Chalmers, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3759517a11,00.html>). "Even better"? All we can say is that the government has used WFF to dismiss so much bad news that if it fails to deliver (as we predict it will) then they better have a Plan B up their sleeves.

The Ministry of Social Development's reports can be found on their homepage (www.msd.govt.nz). The links on the right-hand side will take you to the reports.

Details on who is falling behind, and CPAG's thoughts on the Living Standards Report can be found at:

<http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/articles/res1154518029.pdf>.

It's all in the stars...

MSD is a big organisation, and, having (again) decided the policy/service delivery split wasn't working, it recently remerged with the Department of Child Youth and

Family. David Benson-Pope told the Social Services Select Committee that the on-again relationship would bring together preventive and statutory services (with evidence-based support) to allow earlier intervention and better management in the areas of care and prevention and youth justice. To highlight his commitment to a rigorous evidence base for expensive policy decisions, the Minister told the Select Committee the “stars were in alignment” for the merger to go ahead. The report on the 2006/07 Estimates Vote Social Development can be found at: <http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/Content/SelectCommitteeReports/ssestd07.pdf>.

This gives the government’s view of Working for Families and signals what new help beneficiaries and their children can expect from the package in the foreseeable future (almost none).

Human Rights case

CPAG is taking a case to the Human Rights Review Tribunal alleging the Child Tax Credit and In Work Payment discriminate on the basis of employment status. In its efforts to avoid having to argue the substance of the case, Crown Law have now filed papers seeking a judicial review of the Human Rights Review Tribunal’s decision to allow CPAG to stand as a complainant – notwithstanding Justice Ronald Young’s “serious concerns” about the Crown bringing such proceedings (see http://www.cpag.org.nz/campaigns/Child_Tax_Credit_IWP.html).

The way around this impasse is to name someone actually affected by the legislation on the legal documents. Fortunately we have found just such a person who is prepared to take up the challenge. This avoids the expense and delay of judicial review proceedings. Unfortunately it still leaves outstanding the question of who can take a case to the Human Rights Review Tribunal. In future the Crown may well try again to subvert its own human rights legislation by shutting the process down to all but those least likely to have the resources available to take a case.

If you support the CPAG case, or you just think that governments should lead by example, write to your MP, and send a copy to David Benson-Pope, Minister of Social Development (dbenson-pope@ministers.govt.nz), Peter Dunne, Minister of Revenue (vicki.norman@parliament.govt.nz), the Prime Minister (pm@ministers.govt.nz), the Deputy Prime Minister (mcullen@ministers.govt.nz) and anyone else you would like to vent at. Several names spring to mind but I’m sure you have your own pets. Remember, you can also write snail mail for postage - free. C/- Parliament Buildings, Wellington.

Recent work

These are available on the website and can be downloaded for free. This list includes recent discussion papers, articles and presentations.

- We have a piece from Professor Jane Kelsey commenting on the to-ing and fro-ing between Susan St John and Charles Waldegrave in the New Zealand Herald. This is a nice summary of the issues:

<http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/articles/res1146635900.pdf>

- Two pieces by the attention-seeking Donna Wynd – a backgrounder on the cost of the IWP to Maori and Pasifika families, and a discussion document written in response to the death of the Kahui twins in South Auckland.

<http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/backgrounders/res1144551355.pdf>;

<http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/backgrounders/res1155110027.pdf>

• The talk given by the wonderful Martin Thrupp at the AGM is also available, as is the PowerPoint presentation for those of you wanting the lite version:

<http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/speeches/res1154516728.pdf>;

<http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/speeches/res1154517042.pdf>

CPAG in the Media

We've done quite a job of getting ourselves in the media recently. Newspaper interviews (Janfrie and Susan), radio (Donna) and TV. The star turn was Alan Johnson's appearance on Eye to Eye with Willie Jackson. Alan has three things in his favour: he believes absolutely that children have a right to a decent upbringing, he's articulate and he finds the humour in most improbable circumstances. The debate was vigorous and Alan obviously enjoyed the exchanges!

Thanks for your help

CPAG needs ongoing financial support to sustain its research and advocacy programme and to raise awareness of poverty in NZ. Many thanks to those who support us in this important work. Please send donations to Box 56-150 Mt Eden, Auckland or bank directly into our Kiwibank account 38-9003-0066858-00.

<http://www.cpag.org.nz>

You have been sent this Child Poverty Action Group newsletter because your details appear on a CPAG mailing list of interested people. If you no longer wish to receive information from us, you need only reply to this address with "unsubscribe" in the subject line, and your details will be removed.