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Annual Report

April 2020 - March 2021



Our vision

An Aotearoa where all children flourish, free from poverty

Our mission

Child Poverty Action Group strives to help achieve the elimination of child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand. We provide research about the causes and effects of poverty on children and their families, to inform the public, policy makers, media and politicians of the policy changes needed to reduce the burden of poverty on children and their families.

We acknowledge Te Tiriti O Waitangi, and the rights of Māori as tangata whenua. We envisage an Aotearoa New Zealand where our society shows respect, generosity and care for all children.

Our pou

Mana: We acknowledge and uphold the mana of all children.

Manaakitanga: We believe that our society should show respect, generosity and care for all children as taonga.

Kotahitanga: We work collectively to uphold the mana of all children and to ensure they flourish.

Mātauranga: We believe that child-centred knowledge is essential to upholding their mana and enabling them to thrive.

Our team

Management Committee

Michael Quirke (Convenor)

Alan Johnson (Deputy Convenor)

Associate Professor Mike O'Brien ONZM

Emeritus Professor Innes Asher ONZM

Helen Bull (Treasurer)

Professor Nikki Turner

Dr Claire M. Dale

Frank Hogan

Janfrie Wakim (Deputy Convenor)

Talavao Ngata

Therese Luxton

Research Committee

Dr Gerry Cotterell (Chair)

Emeritus Professor Innes Asher ONZM

Associate Professor Susan St John CNZM

Alan Johnson

Janfrie Wakim

Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns

Associate Professor Mike O'Brien ONZM

Janet McAllister

Laura Bond

Staff

Laura Bond

Executive Director

Georgie Craw

Executive Officer (-Nov 2020)

Carmelite Müller

Administrative Assistant

Janet McAllister

Communications & Research Officer

Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns

Researcher

Justin Latif

Communications Officer (-Jul 2020)

Regional network leads and liaisons

Tim Howard

Whangarei

Charlotte Van Doorn

Western Bay of Plenty

Professor Nikki Turner

Wellington

Dr Jean Simpson

Nelson

Sara Epperson

Christchurch

Dr Jude Sligo

Dunedin

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A year in review

Convenor's report

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2020/2021 will be remembered as a year like no other. We know it has been tough for many of our CPAG whānau who have been juggling caring responsibilities, disrupted employment, and feeling the loss and separation from loved ones.

We also know it has been an even tougher year than usual for many of the children who were already living in disadvantage in Aotearoa. As the Prime Minister's own advisors told her when commencing her second term, children and their families are likely to face "significant and wide-ranging" negative effects from COVID-19, with "the most severe negative effects [are] likely to be felt by those who are already disadvantaged". We know that the economic impacts of COVID-19 haven't fallen evenly; our continued recovery must prioritise supporting children who are already disadvantaged.

The child poverty statistics released in February 2021 (collected pre-Covid) were of particular concern and demonstrate that incrementalism isn't working. For the first time, the statistics included data on children with a disability or living in a household where someone has a disability and show that these children are 2-3 times more likely to live in severe material hardship than other children. This isn't always the case in other countries and our research shows that things will likely be worse once the impact of Covid-19 shows up in the figures. The pandemic needs to be a reason for action, not an excuse for inaction.

CPAG plays a vital role reminding decision-makers of this urgency for child wellbeing. With that in mind, our Annual Report provides a snapshot of some of the work undertaken by the Child Poverty Action Group thanks to you, our dedicated researchers, volunteers, advocates and supporters who help drive this urgency, ensuring all children have the chance to live free from the constraints of poverty.

Our committed children's champions who make up the Management and Research Committees and Regional Networks have thrown countless hours into researching, writing, speaking to media, meeting with other organisations, politicians and decision-makers. They've been backed by team members including Georgie Crow (Executive Officer) and Justin Latif (Communications Officer) who shepherded us up through Covid-19. Post-lockdown we welcomed Laura Bond into the role of Executive Director and long-standing CPAG affiliate Janet McAllister into the fold as our multi-tool across media, communications and research. Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns also joined the CPAG whānau on a permanent part-time basis, enhancing our research capabilities and proving an excellent spokesperson. Carmelite Müller continued to keep things running with precision.

My heartfelt thanks to all those who have contributed their time, expertise and funding to support this kaupapa. We continue to be amazed by the generosity of so many who give so faithfully to help turn the tide on child poverty in New Zealand. Over the past year, our collective hard work has helped to keep child poverty on the agenda.

We remain as committed to this work as ever. As poet Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) put it:
"Many things we need can wait. The child cannot.
Now is the time his bones are formed, his mind developed.
To him we cannot say tomorrow, his name is today."

Ngā mihi nui,



Michael Quirke
Convenor
Child Poverty Action Group

We focus on eliminating poverty for children because:

- **Overall effects of poverty are worse for children:** Child development is adversely affected by poverty, which can lead to detrimental effects for an entire life.
- **Children are more likely to experience poverty:** Children are over-represented among those in deprived households.
- **Children don't get to vote in parliamentary elections:** Decisions affecting children are made without their input.

Our impact: Some highlights

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With your support, through this first year of Covid-19, in collaboration with allies, Child Poverty Action Group sought to ensure the wellbeing of low-income children was front-and-centre in public discourse and political decision-making.

Helping to increase desperately-needed income support for children

We filled an important research gap and called into question the adequacy of Government responses to Covid-19 for low-income children, when our modelling in June showed core income support entitlements remained well below target poverty lines, even after the Government increased benefits by \$25 per household and doubled the Winter Energy Payment (see *The effects of 2020/21 income support changes on After Housing Costs (AHC) incomes for representative households receiving benefits* by Janet McAllister).

Impact: The paper was useful to other researchers, being cited by two articles in *Policy Quarterly* 16:3 *Focus on Covid-19*.

We helped demonstrate unanimous support for “liveable incomes” among frontline experts, when we collaborated with Action Station and Auckland Action Against Poverty on an open letter in November to PM Jacinda Ardern, Minister of Social Development & Employment Carmel Sepuloni, and Minister of Finance Grant Robertson, asking them to lift benefits before Christmas. Within a month, 70 organisations – social services, unions, churches and community groups from around Aotearoa – signed on to the letter, demonstrating the huge and growing consensus that income support needs to be increased to meet urgent family need.

Impact: Social and traditional media interest was high, we received requests to sign the letter from organisations we had not approached – and the open letter led to further collaboration.

We filled yet another important research gap by demonstrating progress on welfare reform was glacial, despite Government claims to the contrary, when we provided an independent review of progress on all 168 recommendations made by the Welfare Expert Advisory Group. We found that in November 2020, nearly two years after they were made, none of the 42 key recommendations, and only 4 of the 126 detailed recommendations, had been fully implemented (see *What happened to ‘welfare overhaul’? A stocktake of implementation of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group’s 2019 recommendations* by Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns and Innes Asher).

Impact: As part of the significant media coverage, the Prime Minister was directly questioned about our findings on the radio, in a Breakfast TV interview (pictured), and at her weekly press conference. Our stocktake is a useful resource that we and others continue to reference, in order to generate social licence for meaningful action on the WEAG’s recommendations, and we intend to update it later this year to ensure welfare reform is kept high on the agenda.



TVNZ Breakfast host John Campbell presents CPAG’s WEAG stocktake to the PM (Nov 2020).

We helped show that raising income support would be a popular move across the political spectrum - and we helped to increase its popularity further. After a ‘no’ to our Christmas request, we continued to campaign with other “Liveable Incomes” organisations in the pre-budget period, including supporting people with lived experience of the benefit system to speak to ministerial advisors at Parliament, and collectively commissioning a UMR poll that found 69% of New Zealanders in February supported increases to income support levels.

Impact: Continued advocacy through dozens of op-eds and media appearances by multiple organisations finally resulted in some promises in Budget 2021 (announced post 2020/21 year): moderate increases to core benefit levels, higher than any increase for some years, to be fully implemented by April 2022.

Watch this space. While we welcome the Budget 2021 income increases, they will not be enough to lift incomes to adequate levels. With your support, the work continues...

Helping to increase concerns about ‘two-tier welfare’ for children

Troubled by the discriminatory eligibility criteria of the relatively generous Covid-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP), we raised our voices alongside a number of others and made our concerns about two-tier welfare clear in the media. We also supported Associate Professor Louise Humpage in a two-part project examining the experiences of people accessing income support through the Covid-19 period. The first part was published in 2020/21 (see *Income support in the wake of Covid-19: survey*, co-authored by CPAG’s Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns). The project found that people

accessing welfare via main benefits were worse off than people accessing welfare via CIRP. In spite of inequitable access to the CIRP for Māori and Pacific people, the Government saw the payment as a forerunner for social unemployment insurance. We remain deeply concerned that any such scheme runs the serious risk of baking-in inequality and breaching te Tiriti o Waitangi obligation of oritetanga: that is, ensuring Māori can live as equal citizens in Aotearoa New Zealand.

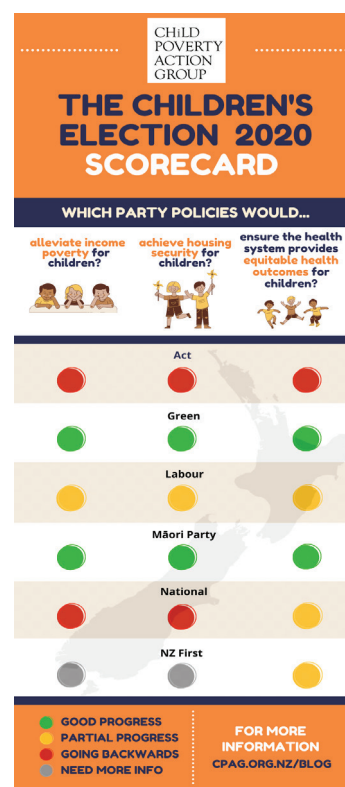
Impact: This work forms the basis for an ongoing campaign.

Helping to reduce hunger and increase school attendance for children

Along with others, we have long provided evidence that free nutritious school meals can play a useful role in assisting children to come to school and to focus on their learning, even though food insecurity is ultimately about inadequate incomes, (see *Filling the gap* (2009), *Our children, our choice* policy series (2014), and also our 2018 Submission on the proposed Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy). In 2019, the Government did indeed announce a school lunch programme as part of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, which we welcomed and applauded. **Impact:** In May 2020, the Government announced it was extending the programme Ka Ora, Ka Ako from a pilot project feeding around 8,000 students in primary and intermediate schools to a programme feeding roughly 200,000 students by the end of 2021, including in secondary schools. Funded through the Covid-19 Response and Recovery Fund, the programme has targeted schools with the highest level of disadvantage. This is a significant step towards ensuring all children have access to adequate and nutritious food. CPAG helped to create and support the context in which this was politically palatable.

In 2020, we continued to publish research and commentary about how to ensure Ka Ora, Ka Ako achieves its desired outcomes. We provided critical analysis of food security-related challenges posed by Covid-19 and the potential of Ka Ora Ka Ako in Parts 6 and 7 of our series *Aotearoa, land of the long wide bare cupboard*, published June 2020. Part 7, authored by Becky Little and Laurie Wharemate-Keung (*Eat Right Be Bright and Feed the Need*), made the case for adopting best-practice principles, and ensuring the lived experiences of children and whānau are heard.

CPAG’s 2020 election score card: Which party policies would alleviate income poverty for children? Achieve housing security for children? Ensure the health system provides equitable health outcomes for children?



Helping to increase votes for children

Reducing child poverty was big on the agenda during the election campaign period, with both child poverty reduction targets and responses to the WEAG recommendations under scrutiny. We published policy recommendations, hosted an election debate, and informed media about how to interpret and report child poverty statistics. **Impact:** After comparing party policies to our recommendations - we also published an election scorecard (right) on social media, which received record-breaking view and engagement, being shared or commented on over 500 times and reaching nearly 15,000 people. This both primed people to consider the needs and aspirations of children when making their vote, and also offered them useful information on which to base their vote for children.

Further research and policy

Reports

‘Living well?’ Children with disability need far greater income support in Aotearoa

In Aotearoa, there is a strong link between disability and poverty, confirmed in the Stats NZ child poverty data release in February 2021, which for the first time disaggregated child poverty rates by disability status. The results were damning; children who are disabled, or live in a household with a disabled member, are two to three times more likely to live in severe material hardship than children in a non-disabled household. But as our collaborative report published in September 2020 in anticipation of these statistics shows, this link between disability and poverty can be mitigated by adequate and accessible income support to compensate for both the direct and indirect costs of living with disability. At present, income support for disabled children is paid at too low a rate and is difficult to access. The report was co-authored by Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns (CPAG), Sam Murray (CCS Disability Action), Dr Jin Russell (developmental paediatric fellow at Starship Children’s Hospital) and Jane Lee (social worker and researcher).

Investing in children? Privatisation and early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand

In early 2020, witnessing ongoing media reports of concerns about the quality of care and treatment of pre-schoolers in early childhood education and care centres, CPAG initiated a research project co-authored by CPAG researcher Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns and Dr Jenny Ritchie. The report examined the current state of the early childhood education and care sector, discussing challenges of privatisation, funding models, and current regulation. It provided key policy recommendations for reform, in particular funding not-for-profit community-based services to provide fees-free early childhood education to all families. Academic articles were also published out of this work – one in *Early Education* and the other in *The First Years: Ngā Tau Tuatahi, New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education*.

Submissions

In February, CPAG made a Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Select Committee on the Reserve Bank of New Zealand Bill. While our submission supported changes to governance arrangements, we presented two key objections to the changes in the Bank’s objectives, relating to a lack of explicit reference to asset prices and the deletion of efficiency from expectations around how the Bank will regulate the banking sector.

Following a written submission on the Budget Policy Statement 2021, in March, CPAG’s economics spokesperson Susan St John made an oral submission to the Finance and Expenditure Select Committee, arguing the Budget Policy Statement 2021 was too fiscally conservative. A preoccupation with net debt projections overlooks the desperate need many families are facing today. We urged the Government to use its mandate in Budget 2021 to take meaningful action to reduce child poverty and operationalise its focus on wellbeing.

Briefing to Incoming Ministers

We also proactively submitted three Briefings to the Incoming Government on Income Support, Housing and Health over the summer. They clearly state CPAG’s principles, and current policy recommendations. As a result, we were invited to meetings with officials in the Prime Minister’s office, and with Associate Minister of Health, Ayesha Verrall. We were pleased to see much of the design of the Budget 2021 benefit changes aligned to our recommendations, for example, better matching of the level of a couple’s benefit to that of two single adults.

A full list of our publications is available at www.cpag.org.nz/publications

We offer evidence, and research-informed policy recommendations, to assist decision makers

- Eight reports
- Four submissions
- Three briefings to the incoming Government
- Meetings with PM Jacinda Ardern, Deputy PM Grant Robertson and Minister for Social Development Carmel Sepuloni

Our research informs and shapes public discourse

- ~300 articles - op-eds and interviews
- ~30 press releases and media advisories
- Two campaigns
- 365 social media posts
- 10 blog posts
- ~Seven live presentations
- An election scorecard

Our Supporters, Collaborations and Outreach

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini
Success is not the work of one, but the work of many.*

Our Supporters

We are so grateful to our supporters up and down Aotearoa; our members, financial givers, volunteers and advocates. We would particularly like to thank Lloyd Morris and the following organisations for their considerable support of this kaupapa:



juliette hogan

We are thankful to the Auckland City Mission not only for hosting us at their offices but also the whanaungatanga that provides.

The Child Poverty Action Group is funded entirely by donations from the public and grants from charitable trusts. It does not accept funding from the proceeds of gambling or alcohol.

Regional networks

We are thankful to our diverse and ever-passionate regional networks for their continued energy and efforts across Aotearoa. Our regional networks play a critical role in bringing local issues to the fore, through events and media engagement.

This year, we were pleased to welcome a committed group of child poverty advocates from the Western Bay of Plenty to the whānau.

Collaborations and Outreach

Over the past year we have continued to build on our relationships with other like-minded organisations and are grateful for the support, solidarity and opportunity to learn. We are proud to be part of:

Tick 4 Kids
Equality Network
Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga
Fairer Futures
Children's Rights Alliance



Members of the Fairer Futures collaboration on the steps of Parliament after meeting with Ministerial Advisors.

Child Poverty Action Group is committed to freely sharing our research and policy recommendations with a range of audiences to support a greater understanding of the causes and impacts of child poverty, and to stir public debate on effective solutions.

We work with students, both school and university level, to assist with research projects, the media to drive understanding, as well as disseminating materials through presentations and seminars, our website, social media and emails to supporters.

Kia Piki te Ake Mana Tangata - Kōrero with Matua Fred: To mark te Wiki o te Reo Māori, and to promote Māori thought leadership, discussion of WEAG recommendations, and a positive vision, we collaborated with reo speaker Matua Fred Andrews, pictured right, (Ngāti Mahuta, Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Rangimahora) from Auckland Action Against Poverty. The result: five short illuminating videos in which Matua Fred explains his take on some of WEAG's recommended principles, drawn from te ao Māori, which could be the foundations for the welfare system including manaakitanga, kotahitanga and whanaungatanga.



“He kai tahu me kikini, he kai tahu me tīhore, mā te tamaiti te iho”
“Pinch off a bit, peel off a bit, the inside is for the child” (said of the potted bird)

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