

Media release

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Poverty report: A fair go for all children is essential

The report released today by the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Barnardos New Zealand makes it clear that the enormous social and economic impacts of child poverty in New Zealand are unsustainable. The report also identifies a range of initiatives and policies that would go some way towards addressing this issue.

"A Fair Go for all Children: Actions to address child poverty in New Zealand highlights a profound concern for New Zealand society - that we cannot afford to sacrifice the healthy development of our children and therefore our productive human capital. Poverty leads to developmental delay, lower educational attainment and ill health. It also puts children at higher risk of physical abuse and neglect, and even death," said Barnardos New Zealand Chief Executive, Murray Edridge.

"Along with the report, which was written by economists, youth have contributed to the work through a Photovoice project, providing images, poems, stories, and statements. According to young people in Dunedin, "Poverty is not getting proper opportunities, choices you can't make, choices taken away".

"This is precisely the impact of poverty: social and economic exclusion. It means missing out on many things considered to be basic to a good childhood, such as good nutrition, a warm home, stimulating experiences, family holidays, participation in sport and other pursuits, and school outings".

"In the longer term, child poverty is associated with worse employment and earnings outcomes, alcohol and drug dependence, and poor health. Further, it leads to higher welfare, remedial adult education and other community costs".

"When we look at the scale of the problem, and the potential solutions, it becomes apparent that this issue is surmountable as long as there is adequate political and public will".

"Progress is already being made through *Working for Families*. With an integrated package of both short and medium-term actions we can assist those hardest hit by poverty. Among the most urgent actions identified in the report are: raising core benefit rates; providing higher tax credits for young children; increasing the supply of early childhood care and education and out-of-school care; and passing on Child Support payments directly to sole parents" said Mr. Edridge.

"Barnardos and many other social service agencies see the impact of poverty on families daily. We know the pressures it places on families and on children, and we urge all New Zealanders to accept that this is a significant issue. It is the responsibility of all of us, and requires both political and community action".

"We want all MPs and political candidates to take a stand against child poverty and commit to the implementation of the key recommendations of this report. We want all New Zealanders to understand that child poverty is unsustainable and that we must work together to ensure the resources are available and directed to address the issue".

"There is an obvious self-interest argument for all New Zealanders to support policies that will address child poverty. In the future, we will depend on the ability and will of today's children to sustain our society and economy as the population ages. If we continue to allow a significant proportion of our children to live in poverty, we will create irreparable damage to them and to the future wellness of all of us", concluded Mr. Edridge.

ENDS

Background information and key statistics

According to the latest figures (2006/07), 230,000, or 22 percent of New Zealand children, live in poverty. This is more than the entire population of North Shore City (205,605) or the Manawatu-Wanganui region (222,423), and equates to one adult and one child living on \$305-\$430 a week before housing costs. The measures are based on households with incomes below the 60 percent of contemporary median income, after taking housing costs into account.

Child poverty is unevenly distributed across society. For children living in sole-parent families, the rate of poverty (49 percent) is over five times as high as that for children in two-parent households (nine percent).

Based on 2003/04 figures, poverty rates are also significantly higher among Maori (27 percent) and Pacifica and other children (40 percent) than rates of Pakeha children (16 percent). Disabled children are more likely to live in poverty than non-disabled children.

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