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How relevant is this election to young voters?

“The low level of young people under 24 years who have registered to vote is concerning and indicates that young people don’t yet feel engaged enough to participate in the election and vote. Young voters need to know that politicians are interested in the issues affecting them and will pursue policies that take account of young people’s interests”, says Murray Edridge, Chief Executive of Barnardos NZ.

Latest Electoral Enrolment Centre figures show that around 200,000 people are still not enrolled to vote at the upcoming general election on 8 November. Almost 89,000 or 22 per cent of those people are aged between 18 and 24 years.

“Low enrolment rates are not surprising when most political parties have failed to address children and young people in their campaign speeches and policies. While much is being made of policies to stimulate economic growth and survive the global economic crisis, little is being said about how the economic crisis will impact on the largest group of poor people in the country – children”, continues Mr Edridge.

“Similarly, we are hearing plenty of rhetoric about getting tough on criminals but little is said about investing in the lives of children and youth to develop their potential and offer them a positive future”.

“We can not afford to ignore the high number of young people not enrolled to vote yet. The parties need to release specific policies for children and young people. They must facilitate youth participation within their parties and in political processes to build a vibrant democracy, society and economy. There are significant issues negatively impacting the lives of children and youth. Parties need to be prepared to invest in policies that will address these and work together to make progress on important child-related issues such as the reduction of child poverty in New Zealand. Poverty and inequalities in wealth leave children and youth on the margins of society, increasing the likelihood of violent crimes”.

“It is clear that by not enrolling to vote, young people are putting decisions about theirs and New Zealand’s future into the hands of others. That means adults will have even more responsibility to ensure they vote in the interests of children and youth”, concludes Mr Edridge.

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