

Media Release

30 January 2008

Barnardos NZ assesses the Leader's speeches

'I welcome the focus of both leaders on young people in their state of the nation speeches,' said Murray Edridge, Chief Executive of Barnardos NZ.

'On Monday, I called for them to focus on the needs of children by delivering policies that ensure we hand on to our children a world worth living in, eradicating child poverty and child abuse and neglect,' he said.

'Both leaders have chosen to focus on the problems associated with some of our youth. Youth crime is undoubtedly high profile stuff and politically sensitive. However, early intervention in the lives of at risk children is the most effective means of ensuring their development into worthwhile citizens contributing to society.'

'Unfortunately John Key's speech failed to make any acknowledgement of that point and focused entirely on youth problems after they have developed. The Prime Minister did acknowledge the importance of early intervention and indicated a range of initiatives in the early years.'

'Neither acknowledged or commented on either our internationally high rates of child poverty and child abuse — both of which are far more serious problems than that of youth crime. Interestingly the Prime Minister made the point that today's disaffected youth are the babies of the late 1980s — early 1990s when our child poverty rates peaked. She at least understands the long term corrosive effect of child poverty. There has been some improvement since the 1990s but child poverty is still unacceptably high.'

'She also devoted a section of her speech to environmental sustainability and acknowledged that the present generation holds the world in trust for our children,' he noted.

'While I welcome the focus of the leaders on young people I was disappointed in the content and the priorities reflected in those speeches. It is time for all of the evidence about the importance of a child's early years to finally be incorporated into the policies of all political parties. We need all parties to shift investment to where we will get the best return — ensuring children are well nurtured in those vital early years,' concluded Mr Edridge.

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