

# **Child Poverty**

**has profound and lasting effects on the lives of children. It shapes not just their immediate lives, but also casts a long shadow over their future**

**By Dr. Cindy Kiro**



There are too many poor children in New Zealand and ignoring them threatens our future economic prosperity and social wellbeing. Latest figures show us between 170,000 and 230,000 of our children are living in unacceptable poverty. That is a huge number of children whose lives are affected by something we can fix. This is a priority issue for my office and in August we reported on the situation. We split reporting on child poverty into a written report, *A Fair Go for all Children, Actions to address child poverty in New Zealand*, and a photovoice project from children, young people and young parents, *This is how I see it: children and young people's views and experiences of child poverty*.

The written report, co-sponsored by Barnardos, is an analytical look at the extent and characteristics of child poverty in New Zealand and what can be done about it. It proposes actions to further reduce the number of children living in poverty including extra support for benefit dependent and low-income families, reform to the benefit system, and expansion of health, housing and education services. We used the photovoice work to create an online gallery, which shares children and young people's descriptions of poverty and how it impacts on their lives and communities ([www.occ.org.nz/childpoverty](http://www.occ.org.nz/childpoverty)).

This is powerful work and really goes to the heart of the effects of poverty on our young. Over the past few years there has been considerable improvement for children from a number of initiatives such as improved primary health funding, educational initiatives,

Working for Families and income-related housing. However, firm commitments and targets for further reduction are needed. There are two main arguments for addressing child poverty as a public priority.

As New Zealand's demographic profile changes and the number of older people increases, we become more dependent on the success of a decreasing pool of children and young people. We cannot afford to have our young not reach their potential and be healthy, productive citizens. Not only are there huge opportunity costs for failing to achieve their potential as our future tradespeople, professionals and labourers, but we also bear the negative costs of failure through our health and criminal justice system.

The other argument is about the quality of life for each child now. Children rely on adults to nurture and develop them. Children cannot be blamed for the decisions adults make. We have a moral obligation to make sure that children have what they need to live with dignity and hope. The best chance to do this is through supporting their parents or caregivers, to provide the necessities of life, consistent with what we would expect as New Zealanders for all our children. As one young person told my office when asked about poverty, "Poverty is...not getting proper opportunities, choices you can't make, choices taken away." It is an important time in our history. We have the opportunity to ensure that we give our children real choices and chances for their future by making sure that they have a fair go. Our actions will speak volumes about our real values as a society and how much we truly value our children.

**Volume 7 Issue 3  
September 2008**

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## **FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE OFFICER.....**

Tena Koutou, Talofa Lava, Kia Orana, Fakaalofa Lahi Atu, Malo e Lelei, Bula Vinaka, Taloha Ni Greetings

It hardly seems 12 months since Social Service Providers Aotearoa held its last AGM. Trevor Batin, Chairperson of SSPA acknowledged at this year's AGM that it is a time to ensure we continue to focus on what is important - on whanau - children - young people and communities. We still have a way to go before death and abuse of children in New Zealand are significantly reduced. As a SSPA group, it remains essential that we continue to develop partnerships and relationships at all levels: between each other as NGO's, with local and national government, with statutory agencies and with our local communities.

SSPA consists of some 270 member organisations - an increase of some 4%, which in turn represent over 4000 workers and 6000 volunteers.

Some of the highlights for the past year include -

- The appointment of a Regional Executive Officer to help with the development of the organisation
- Strong representation on the steering group of the national Pathways to Partnership project
- 38 Regional Meetings held throughout the country
- 8 Best Practice Seminars
- Joint Pathways to Partnership forums held nationally with MSD and NZCOSS
- A well attended national conference
- The maintenance of a high level of membership
- Sound financial management and position
- The canvassing of our membership and advocacy on a variety of issues
- National Executive meetings with FACS and CYFS officials
- Pacific Island and Maori representation on the National Executive
- Regular emails and feedback from members on items of interest to our membership
- Quarterly Newsletters

We are pleased to advise that the following people will form the National Executive for 2008-2009

- Nicola Taylor, Anglican Family Care Centre, Dunedin
- Donna Ellen, Christchurch Methodist Mission
- Irene Te Koeti, Family Works, Presbyterian Support, Invercargill
- To'alepai Thomsen-Inder, Pacific Trust Canterbury
- Maggy Tai Rakena, Start Inc., Christchurch
- Stewart Love, Youth Horizons, Auckland
- Kirk Vette, Youthline, Auckland
- Mere Ruru, Te Ikaroa Rangatahi Social Services, Hastings
- Trevor Batin, Waipuna Youth and Community Trust, Christchurch
- Graeme Munford, ACROSS, Palmerston North

Finally, Social Service Providers Aotearoa would like to acknowledge the funding from Child Youth and Family and the Ministry of Social Development that makes our organisation possible and the ongoing support of Minister Ruth Dyson.

Jocelyn Wilson  
National Executive Officer

## **NOTICES**

A new handbook by Skylight for parents, caregivers, family/whanau of young people who have a mental illness. By Wendy Lyons and Tricia Irving Hendry. This handbook is a practical, supportive and informative NZ handbook for parents, carers and other family members who are looking after and supporting a teenager or young adult with a serious mental illness.

Price is \$14.00 and available from Skylight [www.skylight.org.nz](http://www.skylight.org.nz) or Phone 0800 299 100

### ***"Flat Out" DVD Launch:***

Child Youth and Family and the Dingwall Trust have joined forces and developed a DVD titled "Flat Out" aimed at giving young people the life skills necessary for independence. The DVD is interactive and offers over two hours of advice and practical tips on topics ranging from - choosing a flat, budgeting, keeping safe and interpersonal relationships. For more information please contact the Dingwall Trust Office on 09 2783699

Key Assets is hosting a one day Conference in Auckland on Friday the 7th November 2008 This event will critically examine the critical challenges currently facing foster care in New Zealand. Cost is \$30 per head. To reserve your place and for more information contact Sam on Phone 09 2635151 or e mail at [sam@keyassets.co.nz](mailto:sam@keyassets.co.nz)

## **'Soar With the Dream' Conference Highlights.....**

SSPA's 2009 annual conference 'Soar with the Dream - resilient families - healthy communities' opened on September 17 and was held this year in the Otago Museum, Dunedin. The theme was derived from the migratory habits of the albatross, which on the same day the conference opened, arrived at Taiaroa Head for the new breeding season. After 10 months at sea, a twelve year old female known by her band colours of black-yellow-orange returned to the exact spot where she was seen spending some time with a male friend last season. Church bells tolled round Dunedin to welcome the albatross back for the 2008 season.

Dr. Khyla Russell's opening speech about the messenger birds set the scene at the powhiri held at Araiteuru Marae. This was a moving occasion as mana whenua told of the history of the marae. Kayla spoke about the roles of three birds, the kea (during the day) the morepork (at night) and the toroa the albatross (at sea). The significance and application of their individual and collective roles in their environment in receiving and sharing of messages. The intention being to increase connections through 'the sharing of many strands' Dr. Russell also spoke about the principles of Kaitiakitanga, Manaakitanga and Awhina which when applied in their context, iwi getting it right for Maori 'then we get it right for all'.

Hon Ruth Dyson, one of the keynote speakers confirmed her and the government's support for the sector. Minister Dyson spoke about the Pathways to Partnership initiative and the need to work together to reduce duplication.

The conference organisers introduced a new and brave format this year which allowed for increased access to guest speakers and to other participants in a focused facilitated session. The conference was experimental in the decision to go with a different format and the feedback has been mixed - some enjoyed it, others did not and for all of us it was a very intense and powerful time of focusing on our shared dreams and hopes for the sector. There was a very high energy and buzz throughout the conference and the highlight for many was the Friday morning interactive "On the Couch" session featuring three Dunedin women Dr. Khyla Russell, Pat Harrison and Nicola Atwool. It was amazing to feel the outstanding vision and passion conveyed in their speeches.

Undoubtedly, the presentation by Mick Naughton who was the architect in Victoria's major reform in community development was well received, although he noted how difficult it can be to work collaboratively. Hearing and seeing the results of a model that New Zealand is keen to adapt in our local communities was very timely. Perhaps even better and much appreciated as Mick was very engaging on a one to one basis and willing to discuss other ideas with the many who dared to 'bend his ear'.

The 2008 Conference received enormous support from Khyla Russell and Huata Holes representing Kai Tahu people from the Otago area and the time they gave was an exceptional mark of respect to the NGO sector and the significance of our work with some of the most vulnerable people in society. Staff from Otago University School of Social Work and Community Development joined the conference and Otago Polytechnic provided a senior student from the School of Art who filmed the conference throughout. The Conference had generous financial support from Child Youth and Family, Family and Community Services, the Community Trust of Otago, Social Workers' Registration Board, Christian Helping Agencies Group. Michael Gaffney from the Children's Issues Centre provided support throughout the planning and members of SSPA's national Executive provided encouragement throughout the conference planning process.

Many thanks to Nicola Taylor and her conference committee for a well organised and presented conference. The film of the conference is currently being edited and a DVD will be produced to capture the highlights for those who could not be there and as a record for the future. The National Executive Officer will advise you of the cost of the DVD and when it is available in due course.

**What was your experience of this year's conference? We would appreciate feedback, comments and suggestions from people who attended the 2008 'Soar with the Dream' conference to assist future conference planning.**

**The annual conference has become firmly established as an important part of SSPA's calendar - we would love to hear what you would like to see at next year's conference or if you would like to organise the 2009 conference.**

**Please contact Jocelyn Wilson on Ph 09 3640567 or e mail [jocwilson@theorganisation.org.nz](mailto:jocwilson@theorganisation.org.nz) with your ideas.**

## **Section 59 of the Crimes Act - The child discipline law**

### **What's really happening one year out?**

Opponents of the law change predicted mass criminalisation of good parents. It hasn't happened. Re-writing Section 59 of the Crimes Act in 2007 was intended to do two things - protect children and avoid needless prosecution of parents. At the time opponents of the law said it would result in wholesale 'criminalisation' of conscientious parents across the country.

Proponents of repeal of Section 59 have always had as their aim better outcomes for children - in their lives generally and in the courts specifically. Supporters of repeal have never seen an increase in punishment of parents who smacked children as an aim of law change. There are ways in which setting a positive standard in law about discipline can co-exist with sensible and sensitive handling of cases brought to the notice of authorities.

So what has happened since the law change took effect in June 2007? Two reports provide insights into the impact of the law change. On 24 June 2008 the Police issued the second of their quarterly reports on their investigation of complaints and prosecution decisions under the new law. The full Police Report can be viewed at [www.police.govt.nz/resources/2008/section-59-activity-review/table-stats.html](http://www.police.govt.nz/resources/2008/section-59-activity-review/table-stats.html). On 4 June 2008, the Ministry of Health published their health survey of the nation which included material on the safety and well-being of children. A summary of the Police Report evidence shows:

- Insignificant change in the number of parents being prosecuted
- There may already be a positive trend away from the use of physical discipline.

Two conclusions may be drawn from the data—

- There has been only minor increases in investigations of minor assaults on children (these may be random variations or seasonal being associated with the family stresses of the holiday period)
- Only four of the 69 'minor acts of physical discipline' were deemed by the police to merit prosecution while the others were considered to be inconsequential and not in the public interest to prosecute

While the Police report investigated their administration of the Act, the health survey looked at parental behaviours.

As part of the Ministry of Health survey primary caregivers were asked about their responses to child misbehaviour during the four weeks preceding a face to face interview with a researcher. Physical punishment was one of the least common forms of discipline to have been used with children aged from birth to 14 years. Children between 2 and 4 were the most likely to experience physical punishment with one in five having experienced physical punishment by their caregivers in the previous four weeks. One in 14 children aged under two years experienced physical punishment by their primary caregiver in the previous four weeks. To view the full report go to [www.moh.govt.nz/phi/surveys/NZHS](http://www.moh.govt.nz/phi/surveys/NZHS)

A petition for a citizen-initiated referendum on the question, 'Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in New Zealand?' is at present being checked by the Clerk of the House. The petition was launched in February 2007 two months before the bill's final wording assured the public that the Police have discretion in deciding whether or not to prosecute complaints. The petitioners hoped to quickly show enough public opposition to the bill to defeat it, but it has taken a year to gain enough signatures. Larry Baldock, now leader of the Kiwi Party was initially one of the petitioners, but more recently Family First alone has been the sponsor. An advertisement on 27 July made the claim that good parents were being prosecuted over trivial matters or unproven claims. The record says otherwise.

(Information obtained from M.Ps' briefing Sheet No. 3)

## ***From the Minister's Desk.....***

### ***Hon. Ruth Dyson***

Recently I attended the annual conference of Social Service Providers Aotearoa Annual, appropriately titled "*Soar with the Dream – resilient families, healthy communities*". This theme highlights the need for the government to establish clarity around what services are essential, and how they can be sustained. Over the past nine years 1999 there has been a concerted effort to ensure that government and the NGO sector work more closely together. The government recognises that both parties want the same things, namely that children and families are provided with the support they need to be happy, healthy and thrive.

The government is committed to finding ways to ensure the resources and expertise available within the sector make a bigger difference. The vehicle to ensure that difference is Pathway to Partnership. A huge investment in the community and voluntary sector that will cement the close working relationship between the government and the NGO sector. This will give us a framework to further expand that relationship and help to build strong families and communities. In the last decade, the government has shifted from a reactive position where we heavily focused resources into dealing with problems, to a more proactive approach, investing more in prevention and intervention. Often these services are best delivered by a strong NGO sector. Community-based services usually know where the gaps are, and what can be done to make sure families, children and young people are taken care of. More often than not, they are the people in the community that vulnerable families go to first for help.

In acknowledging this, the Prime Minister announced Pathway to Partnership and an increased investment in community based services by \$446 million over the next four years. Pathway to Partnership will fund NGOs for the full cost of providing essential services by 2012. Essential child, youth and family services will be shifted to full funding and will receive annual cost adjustment payments to reflect inflation. There is also funding to cover changes in volume where demand for services has changed, and there's financial support to assist organisations to work more closely together. The funding increases build on the work that has already started – such as making the funding and contracting processes simpler, moving some services from contracts to grants to reduce compliance costs, and providing

multi-year funding to give providers more security. By 2012, these increases will almost double the government's investment in services. This includes those that support parents, help them develop good parenting skills and succeed as a family. Those that help children get the best start in life, those that support at risk teenagers and those that help put a stop to family violence, child abuse and neglect.

Pathway to Partnership isn't just about making more money available. It's also about getting better results. Pathway to Partnership will demand that we all focus more on achieving outcomes and less on outputs or programmes. It will demand that organisations work together to reduce duplication, share ideas about what works, and get more resources into what really makes a difference. The sustainable funding model will provide providers with more certainty and that means more time focusing on the outcomes. It will also enable forward planning and make it easier to attract and retain qualified staff.

While additional investment is a key component, Pathway to Partnership is more importantly about changing the way we work together and work with families. The move to full funding will be a four year process. The first step involved a 3.4% inflation adjustment and the continuation of last year's one-off cost pressure payment. This has resulted in an additional \$9 million being offered to over 850 providers during July and August this year. 802 of our social service providers are delivering essential services that will move to full funding over the next four years. The current focus has been on stabilising the sector by targeting those groups funded at less than 60% of their costs. On average, providers going through this process are receiving increases of around \$30,000 and at least 100 providers have had their funding doubled.

**I do believe that we can work together to make a difference in the lives of all New Zealanders. Pathway to Partnership is the embodiment of both the government's trust, and our investment in our future.**

## ***Children in Care - A move toward Permanency***

Prompted by concerns about 'drift' - (kids who have been passed around foster homes like parcels, or simply left to languish in care without decisions being made about their long-term future, ) Child, Youth and Family in 2006 introduced a new permanency policy and user guidelines for social workers. Now permanency plans must be prepared for all children within three months of them entering CYFS care. Social Workers are expected to ensure that preschoolers are placed in permanent care within six months and school aged children within 18 months.

Foster parents agreeing to permanency take out court orders, usually under the Care of Children Act, making them legally responsible for the children's upbringing. They must also ensure that contact is maintained with birth families.

### ***How Permanency Works?***

At the end of June, 4522 children and young people were in the care of CYFS. The annual bill for looking after them runs to \$77.8 million and about three quarters of that is spent on children in foster care. According to the permanency policy, children's mental and psychological development can be damaged by multiple moves, and unsuccessful or temporary returns to the care of the family. The idea of permanency is that children form life-long attachments with nurturing caregivers, giving them a sense of emotional, cultural and personal belonging. CYFS policy says after six months away from home the chance of a successful return diminishes and the younger the child, the greater the chance of them bonding with foster parents.

Of the 343 youngsters who achieved their permanency goals in the year to May, 35% went home, 40% went to extended family, 18% to non-kin foster care and 8% were old enough to live independently. Caregivers who are prepared to take on legal responsibility for a child can apply to the Family Court for custody and additional guardianship orders under the Children Young Persons and their Families Act. Alternatively they can apply under the Care of Children Act for parenting orders and additional guardianship. Both options require birth parents' consent. The main difference is that orders under CYPF Act are reviewed by the court every six months for children under seven and annually for older children. There's no legislative requirement to review orders under the Care of Children Act, but birth parents or permanent caregivers can apply to vary them at any time.

CYFS policy shows a strong preference for permanency under the Care of Children Act because there is no requirement for on-going social worker involvement or court reviews. In theory, this makes life more normal for a child, but some take a more cynical view that it conveniently gets the children off CYFS books. Although

caregivers still receive reimbursement for board, they lose the clothing allowance - worth \$895 - \$1504 annually depending on the age of the child and ministry funding for extras.. On the other hand, supporters of permanency acknowledge that permanency is fantastic for many children and that without constant visits from social workers and court-appointed lawyers they lose the stigma of being a CYFS kid.

Chief Executive of the Open Home Foundation of New Zealand, Russell Martin, is supportive of permanency as the goal for any intervention into the life of a child/young person and their family. His organisation has 700 foster parents caring for about 280 children. He says permanency planning and working towards a permanency goal focuses social work practice on achieving best outcomes for children/young people from the beginning of any intervention. In this way those who come into care remain in the care system for as short a time as possible before being supported to permanency. Permanency could be a return home, being placed with whanau, being supported to independence or where necessary having a permanent placement with foster parents secured by Court orders.

Permanency is about belonging, attachment, acceptance and love. The CYF permanency policy and guidelines along with the Care of Children Act and changes to relevant benefit payment levels clearly provide more encouragement and support to Kin caregivers and foster parents providing a permanent home for a child/young person than has been afforded to them in the past. The quality of the social work undertaken in permanency planning is always central to its success.

Gaylene Lawrence, Executive Officer of the New Zealand Family and Foster Care Federation, says our system has a lot to recommend it compared with countries such as Canada, where children in care are quickly adopted out, severing any legal relationship with their birth parents.. In her view for permanency to succeed, caregivers must not be pressured into it too soon.

Training is important so caregivers are prepared for the particular difficulties involved in raising other people's children. From this month, induction training will be compulsory for CYF foster parents and the department is looking at setting up specialist permanency teams. CYFS try to return children to their parents or extended whanau if possible and as of May, only 20% of children and young people with permanency goals were scheduled for placement with non-family members. That's still 1319 children needing permanent homes with strangers and CYFS may try recruiting non-kin caregivers from the register of couples approved for adoption.

(Adapted from Nature or Nurture Dominion Post, September 2008)

## ***Pathways to Partnership - Update***

- Funding increases began in July this year, starting with the 3.4% inflation adjustment and the continuation of last year's one off cost pressure payment. This resulted in an additional \$9 million being offered to more than 850 providers
- 802 providers are delivering essential services that will move to full funding over the next four years. Over the last few weeks these providers and their funding advisors have been discussing and agreeing their 2008/09 increases as a first step to fully funding services by 2012. The process is expected to be completed by the end of September
- Half of these providers are receiving increases of between \$10,000 and \$50,000. \$30,000 is the average payment and 100 providers have had their funding doubled
- The total amount of funding going to essential family, child and youth focused services in 2007/2008 was \$185.38 million. This year's additional funding totals \$52 million, taking the total investment in the sector in 2008/2009 to \$237.38 million
- Understanding the real cost of services will be an important first step in moving providers to full funding. MSD has developed a service costing analysis tool which helps measure the full cost of service delivery. It sits on a simple excel spreadsheet and takes into account both direct and indirect overhead and operational costs
- In negotiating full funding increases response from providers have, on the whole, been very positive. Providers have advised that increases will enable them to align staff remuneration to industry standards, enhance service delivery and develop capability
- This financial year is a transition period. MSD has worked with the Steering Group to develop a first year model allowing MSD to get money flowing out to the sector at the same time as working with individual providers on their pathway to full funding
- While additional funding is a key component, Pathways to Partnership is more importantly about changing the way we work together and work with families
- MSD will work with providers to move to a results based accountability model. Evidence from other countries show that this is easy to use and promotes a collaborative approach to identifying needs, planning services and measuring results
- Over the next few months joint training opportunities will be developed on results based accountability between MSD and NGO staff
- There are already a number of collaborative initiatives in place that clearly demonstrate the benefits of working more closely together. For example the Strengthening Families and family violence networks bring various groups' expertise and resources together to wrap a range of services around vulnerable families. When looking at opportunities for greater collaboration under Pathways to Partnership, examples like those above will provide a framework to build on the work that has already been done.

***What is your experience of the move toward full funding? Do you have any questions or concerns? If so, please contact the National Executive Officer***



## Cholmondeley Children's Home

Cholmondeley Children's Home has been providing high quality residential care, including short-term and emergency respite care, for children for 83 years. Now one of the few remaining residential facilities for children in the country, we fulfil a vital role on the continuum of care for vulnerable children aged 3 – 12 in our city.

Situated on a peninsula overlooking the picturesque Governors Bay, we are more than just a Home. Cholmondeley is a wonderful group of passionate, committed Cantabrians providing child care, education, social work and psychological support to children and their families under stress. Every day our staff make a huge difference in the lives of children. In addition to the shelter, security, beautiful home-cooked food and wonderful fun activities we provide, we also give Canterbury children **love**, and **hope**.

If your organisation wishes to use our services, give us a call on (03) 3299832. We have an open referral policy, which means anyone can refer to us, and if necessary we can take referrals directly over the telephone. If needed, we pick children up ourselves as well as drop them back home afterwards. Intakes for respite care are every Monday and Friday. We have our own school on site providing high quality education by qualified teachers, and have a team of outreach social workers who support the families of our children. We also have registered psychologists able to provide a range of services, and these are available to agencies on a fee for service basis for assessments, consultation and interventions.

So give us a call, or even come over the hill and say hello! We are well known for our delicious morning teas for visitors, and you may be greeted at the front door by the aroma of freshly-baked scones! We work with a wide variety of agencies, both government and community, and are keen to build on those links. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of our children.

**For more information on  
Cholmondeley Children's Home  
please contact Mike Field**

**Phone 03 3299832 or**

**E mail: [mike@cholmondeley.org.nz](mailto:mike@cholmondeley.org.nz)**

