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### **Any DPB Sanctions cannot apply to Domestic Violence Survivors**

How many women on the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), who could meet the proposed criteria for sanctions, are survivors of domestic violence, questions the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ).

“Recovery from domestic violence does not happen overnight,” says Elizabeth Bang, NCWNZ National President. “These women and their children need time to rebuild themselves as well as their lives, and while employment will eventually play a role in that, you cannot put a timeframe to it. Everyone is different, and everyone responds differently to trauma.”

Women freeing themselves and their children from the aggression of their partners, is only the first stage. As reported in “Protecting Victims, Rebuilding Lives, Sending the Right Message”, a discussion paper written by the Survivors of Domestic Violence:

*“Our concern is that too many women and children are suffering further after they leave and the abusive power and control continues.”*

Economic pressures are known to have forced women back into their former abusive relationships.

“The proposed Social Assistance (Future Focus) Bill could too easily capture these most vulnerable families”, says Elizabeth Bang. “It will require survivors to front up to interviews for jobs that will place their kids in care, and require them to meet a level of engagement that they are not yet fit for.”

Currently, there is little evidence to suggest that Work and Income, or Inland Revenue, recognise when they are dealing with a family that has survived domestic violence. They are not the same as other families that may need financial support as a result of the recession or unplanned pregnancies for example.

NCWNZ questions why there needs be a ‘stand-down’ period for DV survivors applying for the DPB, unemployment, or sickness benefits.

“Women, and indeed men, should have entitlement from the very day they escape,” says Elizabeth Bang. “A stand-down period simply creates extra stress, isolation and vulnerability.”

Of the many amendments needed to the Welfare reforms, the legislative arm of which being the Social Assistance (Future Focus) Bill, Government needs to ensure the following:

That survivors of DV shall not be subject to work requirements until they indicate that they are ready to be assisted into the workforce, survivors and their families shall not be subject to stand-down periods but instead should have entitlements backdated to the day of escape, and Work and Income and Inland Revenue will put in place identifier codes on case files, so they know some history of the families they are administering to.

“The last thing DV survivors need is a ‘kick in the pants’,” concludes Elizabeth Bang.

Further Information:

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*"Women Influencing Policy"*