

## Reports of Meetings Attended

### What: Women and Children Summit

(sponsored by National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges)

When: 28 September 2011

Where: Circa Theatre, Wellington

Who: Judy Whitcombe (9 20 am – 1pm) and Wendy Zemanek (11 am – 3.30 pm)

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### Heather Henare, Women's Refuge Chief Executive opened the meeting.

Heather stressed the issues of child poverty, the widening gap, family violence and the continued struggle to get these key issues addressed.

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### Session 1. Health, Housing, Domestic Violence and women within the Criminal Justice System.

*The impact of health inequalities on women and children in 2011, the link between housing and good outcomes for women and children, exposure to violence and women within the criminal justice sector.*

(The power point presentations in this section gave excellent statistics. Judy has put her name down to receive copies)

#### 1) Gay Keating (National Exec Officer, Public Health Association) Health of Women and Children

Health begins at home. Tables of life expectancy show trends by ethnicity. Life expectancy has increased over the years, but it is still women and non-Maori who live longest. Tables of life expectancy by the NZDep index show the decline for the less wealthy. Together there is an overlap of ethnic and socioeconomic inequalities.

Childhood affects lifelong health – and brain development. The Brainwave Trust [provides information on brain development] states that environment creates 2/3 and genetics 1/3 of brain capacity.

NZ used to have the lowest child mortality – but no longer. We are now at the bottom end. We can do better – immunisation is making a difference, but a 'whole of population' approach is needed. With child injuries, NZ is at the bottom too. Few rich children get bronchitis, but with poor children the incidence is five times greater. Hospital admissions are greater for Maori and Pacific children.

The future projections for population pyramids show Europeans with smaller numbers living longer, whereas the Maori and Pacific pyramid has a broad base which tapers off after age 50. The key message is: health begins before sickness. The early years are most important.

#### 2) Bev James (Researcher) Good Housing for our children's future

Children have different needs from adults. Poor housing impacts on children more than adults. Though the population is getting older, there are still many children being born. Manukau and Papakura have growing populations. There is growing ethnic diversity, with Pacific, Asian and Maori children under 14 greatly outnumbering European children.

Children's housing needs are: warmth, safety, a home big enough for diverse ages, security of tenure, neighbourhood and community support, access to facilities.

What they get is: rental housing which is uncomfortable and overcrowded. NZ cheap housing is old and damp and this leads to allergies and injuries. The housing needs of extended and blended families with children of different ages require more rooms of different sizes.

Rates of home ownership are falling, with 30% of young people in unsafe housing. Adequate housing is **not** regarded as a fundamental right of children. The international responses to this problem have been to improve housing affordability, and to tackle child poverty.

There are five key priorities to improve the housing situation:

1. Treat children's needs seriously
2. Integrate policy and services
3. Improve the quality of rental housing
4. Improve the housing stock
5. Look at housing tenure.

### **3) Dr Janet Fanslow (Senior Lecturer, Mental Health Promotion, School of Population Health, University of Auckland) Violence against women and children**

Janet quoted from the *NZ Violence against Women* study, which looked at Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). There is physical, sexual, and psychological/emotional violence and abuse. In a lifetime experience violence is 33% physical, 17% sexual and 51% psychological. Her graphic diagrams showed the relationships. Violence affects 45% of women at some time in their life. Past experience can have a long term impact on those who have experienced violence.

Dr Fanslow asked whether conditions now are better or worse? That question cannot be answered - as there have been no recent studies. She presented a SWOT analysis – but she reversed Opportunities and Threats so she could conclude on a positive note.

- **Strengths:** Good legislation (Domestic Violence Act and repeal of S59), Te Rito, Task Force, MSD Family Violence Unit and programmes such as, "It's not OK".
  - **Weaknesses:** Lack of progress across the population, lack of sustainability, missing links, tendency to review and reinvent programmes.
  - **Threats:** Backlash – force against children, failure to consider results of actions in other areas, thinking that 'we are done'.
  - **Opportunities:** Recognising that our relationships affect all aspects of our lives, people thriving are the most economically productive, NZ has a chance to lead the world.
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## **Session 2. Political Panel**

Each member was asked to speak for 5-6 minutes and give their views on how things are for women and children in 2011, as well as their party's current and future policies for women, children and families. Four women representing National, Mana, Labour and Greens spoke. Speakers from Act and the Maori Party were advertised but did not show. Questions from the floor followed.

### **1) Dr Jackie Blue – National**

Jackie acknowledged the work of Women's Refuge, read figures on the economy, quoted Judge Sylvia Cartwright "family violence is our dark secret" and explained her interest in family violence. The Government will spend \$62.4 million in the current year on family and domestic violence. She mentioned that vulnerable children were a priority for the Government, and stressed the importance of the Green Paper which had been released.

### **2) Sue Bradford, Mana Party**

Sue said that it is essential to treat people with respect and dignity, but this does not happen at WINZ. There's a housing crisis: families in Auckland are living in cars and WINZ can't/doesn't help. The State should have a statutory obligation to house everybody. Thousands more houses are needed and there should be finance for the 'help organisations', that over-rides changes of political parties in Parliament. Women need to be able to access financial support for legal assistance.

### **3) Hon Annette King, Labour Party**

Annette noted that Women's Refuge had received less funding this year. It needs to be consistent. Her party will do that and will also restore the funding for child advocates. Women on average earn less than men and many do menial jobs. Labour is proud of their strong women's policy. [She acknowledged Carol Beaumont.] We don't have a Women's Policy in New Zealand; green papers and one-off events are the norm. There are growing clouds of uncertainty and no forward plan. Labour wants a fair tax system with no tax breaks for the wealthy; it's time for a capital gains tax. Labour will lift the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Huge numbers of people under 25 have no job, no training and no qualifications.

National stopped the \$13 million that Labour had allocated for 'second chance' education; Labour will reinstate this. Labour training and incentives allowance of \$2.2 million was also stopped by National.

Labour will prioritise children, especially those aged 1-5 years. "When you invest in children, you invest in women." There are 228,000 children living in poverty, according to a statement by the Prime Minister two weeks ago. You cannot separate social policy – it is health, housing, social policy and income.

#### 4) Metiria Turei, Greens Party

Women and children on benefits will be punished by National's policy. We all need to use our vote wisely. The Green Party priorities are:

- Bring 100,000 children out of poverty. The cost of child poverty is \$6 billion per annum. Children who die cot deaths are often malnourished.
- Make *Working for Families* fairer. This Labour policy is also supported by the Green Party.
- Change the rules regarding housing standards. 385,000 children live in sub-standard accommodation.
- Raise the minimum wage. Only two out of every five children in poverty have a waged parent. There are huge numbers of women in basic jobs, on the minimum wage.

Metiria noted that although the Greens haven't been in government, they have been very effective.

#### Questions and Comments

- The Tuhoë raids took place under Labour. Annette King said she was Minister of Police, but had no say – politicians cannot direct the police, justice or the parliamentary system.
- Working women have to pay for a protection order.
- 18% of the police budget goes to alcohol-related crime. Sue Bradford said that Sir Geoffrey Palmer's wonderful report on alcohol has been ignored. It is essential to stop alcohol sponsorship of sport. There should be a higher tax on alcohol.
- Annette King said alcohol policies should **not** be a conscience vote – It is New Zealand's biggest problem. Jackie Blue noted that 80% of crime is alcohol related and that the government has accepted 130 recommendations about alcohol.
- A member of the CTU said that people (women) cannot find out whether they are receiving equal pay for equal work. The Greens have supported legislation providing transparency of pay rates. Pay equity is part of the solution.

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### Session 3. An Economic Perspective

*Why economic investment in children will make a difference, the economic benefits of addressing inequality and the case for a universal basic income.*

#### 1) Liz Gibbs, Chief Executive, Save The Children

Liz described the report to the United Nations regarding violence against children. The UN has responded that the status quo in NZ is **not** acceptable. Save The Children is an active member of *Every Child Can*, which recently commissioned a report: *1000 Days To Get it Right*. This refers a) to the first three years of a child's life and b) to the three year parliamentary term.

This report says that there should be a 3% increase in spending on children under 6. There is no central collection and sharing of data and this needs to be addressed. Maori and Pacific children are over-represented in the 163,000 children who need help. Liz affirmed the *Green Paper on Children* and encouraged people to make a submission.

Poor child care results in costs of \$6 billion per annum – because we don't get it right. The UK and USA both spend over NZ \$50,000 per annum per child. Of the OECD countries, NZ ranks 29th in achievement for helping children.

The Netherlands spends \$10,000 more per child than we do in NZ, and ranks fourth in the OECD. It is "a shining example of achievement for children". There is a child and youth council so that young people can have a voice! (Refer to the *Every Child Counts* website.)

## 2) Susan Guthrie, Economist, Morgan Foundation

Susan said it is not a case of taking money from one place to use in another. Rising inequality has unpleasant bedfellows. She was positive about Labour's Capital Gains Tax Proposal. There is a need to close the loopholes, rather than raising the tax rates for the rich – ie: stop the very rich from hiding income. People have been doing this for 40 years and there have been protests for 40 years.

In 1988 the Royal Commission on Social Policy stated warnings about this problem. NZ has been pursuing the wrong course ever since. Some principles:

- Vertical equity (redistribution of income from the well-off)
- Horizontal equity (equal treatment for similar situations)
- Individual responsibility (align self and community interests)
- Efficiency and Adequacy (provide sufficient support where there is no other income)

Susan proposed a system that would replace all benefits with two simple ones: people over 20 would receive \$11,000 tax free and those aged 18-20 would receive \$8,500 tax free.

## 3) Paul Barber, Policy Advisor NZ Council of Christian Social Services

Paul described the 'Whakatata Mai' (Closer Together) concept and spoke of the economic benefits of reducing inequality.

- Our children bear the cost of the social/political choices made to restructure our economy.
- It is vital to reduce economic inequality.
- It's about putting morals and values into our economic system.
- Sir Paul Reeves said we should judge social policy on its impact on the poor.
- A wide range of policy areas are **not** child centred.

NZ has led the world in the growth of **economic inequality!** It hurts our children, so doing something about it will have an immediate positive effect on children. The highest incomes have risen far more than the lowest. Wealth is even more unequally shared. We have worked hard, but overall, life has not improved.

Inequality corrodes society. We have: poor housing, poor health, anxiety, depression, aggression, a very high rate of mental health problems. Inequality hurts us all. Our children will benefit if we make changes. People will be less likely to end up in prison. It costs an enormous amount "**Not** to do something about inequality, because we have to fund the poor and pay for the results of crime, the damage done and the cost of housing prisoners.

Government, business and community leaders need to use restraint. We need to regulate our tax system, increase the minimum wage and increase employment, but it must be in meaningful jobs, with fair rates of pay.

Paul suggested that people should write to their MPs and to election candidates about these matters. People could also join regional networks, look at Facebook, Twitter and [www.closetogether.org.nz](http://www.closetogether.org.nz)

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## Session 4. Women in Work and Life on the Breadline

*The glass ceiling, how the rising cost of living is impacting on NZ families, life on the minimum wage and how welfare reform will impact on NZ women, children and whānau.*

### 1) Johnny O'Donnell, Youth Advocate. Our Young People and Welfare Reform

Johnny described Alex, aged 17, on an Independent Youth Benefit. He was kicked out of his home and it took several weeks to get the benefit. It's enough to cover his rent, but not enough to eat a healthy diet. This is a common experience. Consider the London Riots this year – they were the result of the disengagement of young people.

**58,000 young New Zealanders are not in work, training or education.** This is a ticking time bomb. Many who **are** working, are flipping burgers, earning as little as \$160 per week. Young people get less than the adult benefit, but have exactly the same costs as adults for rent, food etc. Many have grown up in benefit families. We have failed them. We need a system that provides living costs and doesn't make them feel ashamed. They need education, training and self esteem!

## **2) Catherine Marks, Consultant, Russell McVeagh**

Fifty % of law graduates are women, but only 14% are partners in law firms. Her firm is positive about women employees; those she spoke to seemed accepting of the status quo.

Often women have very short maternity leave. Part-time work is not offered. They are motivated to stay because the work is so interesting. Systems are “just about set in concrete.” Parental leave is a problem. NZ is well behind world leaders: in England it's 26 weeks and in Denmark a year.

## **3) Raewyn Fox, Chief Executive, NZ Federation of Family Budgeting Services**

Raewyn began working in budgeting in 1987 in Porirua. It was possible then to help everyone manage. But in the 1990's there were budget cuts and it became difficult. Now, people are being offered loans at enormous rates of interest. Clients come from a much wider sector, often struggling on a reduced income, or after redundancy, which has a psychological effect. There's been a drop in part-time work and in overtime – both of which helped families to manage.

Budget advisors need new training to help them cope with things like separations and mortgagee sales. This year, there has been an increase in clients nationally from 31,000 to 39,000. Three years ago, 58% of clients were beneficiaries; now it's 73%. There are more Maori than Pakeha clients. 73% of clients are female – either a single parent or a woman taking responsibility. Often, all their money goes on rent, power and transport; leaving nothing for food. There has not been an increase in benefits to match the increased cost of food. They need to teach families “**how to live below the breadline.**”

## **4) Sheryl Cadman, Central Region Secretary, National Distribution Union (12,000 members)**

Many of the low paid members of her union are women and many of them work in retail, while others are in menial work, eg cleaning. A supermarket worker (predominantly female) starts on \$14-\$15 per hour and often is offered only 30 hours per week, while a distribution centre worker (predominantly male) starts on \$19 and is guaranteed 40 hours. WHY?

The most disadvantaged are women; in particular Pacifica, Maori and other Ethnic women. *Working for Families* is an admission that wages are so low that people cannot live on them.

## **5) Kay Brereton, Welfare Advocate and member of the Alternative Welfare Working Group.**

Respect and dignity are missing from our welfare system. Don't blame the beneficiaries – they are seen as very fertile - and bad parents. One report suggests there should be compulsory contraception. There is no incentive for people to take on part-time work as it reduces the benefit, even though the work may be casual and irregular.

People who apply for a benefit are required to attend seminars before they can get the benefit. The requirements to turn up on time and fulfil various conditions are often not met and so they are not eligible for a benefit. Landlords do not want to rent to beneficiaries.

One welfare worker said, “You get told to do things you don't agree with and are told to impose conditions that you know your client cannot fulfil. It's a toxic environment.”

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## **Session 5. Are things better for our children, our Maori women, our Ethnic women and women in rural/provincial NZ in 2011?**

*Challenges for Maori women and children in 2011, how our policies are failing our poorest children, life in rural NZ and a debate on whether NZ offers ethnic women a better life.*

### **1) Mary Mowbray, Child Poverty Action Group Spokeswoman**

Children in poverty are suffering from: being poor, living in insecure housing, being in low decile schools, drink, gambling and are of diverse ethnicities. Beneficiary households are in a far worse position than ‘worker’ households. Benefits have kept pace with inflation, but **not** with wages. So beneficiaries are much worse off than low waged families. For Child Poverty Action, the focus is on beneficiaries getting jobs, rather than getting adequate support. Children's needs should be the first priority in considering benefits,

because they are suffering. All children are entitled to the best possible support from their parents and the community.

## **2) Noeline Holt, Chief Executive, Rural Women NZ**

Rural Women was started in 1925 as a result of concern for isolated women. There were bush nurses on horses in the early days. Today, only 14% of members live on farms.

'Events' can have an upsetting effect on whole areas - rural Canterbury is full of refugees from the Christchurch earthquake. Renters whose homes were wrecked have difficulty finding accommodation. Farm workers' homes are often old, are not insulated and are cold.

Generally farmers find their wives from outside their area. Farms are often in trusts so the wife is at the mercy of the trust, even if the farmer is violent, or finds another partner and the wife has to leave. Rural family violence is under-reported. Mothers who live on farms generally don't have the finance to leave.

A male farm worker who loses his job has to leave to find another one. There may be a time in limbo with no job and children out of school.

## **3) Priyanca Radhakrishnan, Advisor Shakti Community Council**

Priyanca said that more than 10% of kiwis identify with groups other than European and Maori. The most vulnerable are those who have been subjected to domestic violence. This includes Asian, Middle Eastern and African women. However these are generic labels.

East, South and South East Asians are all very different. Often they fall into two groups:

- a) **Skilled migrants.** Women come with an expectation of getting work easily. But employers often require NZ work experience (a form of discrimination). They have difficulty finding jobs that match their qualifications, but none of them want to return to their home country. They see the struggle to find a job as a necessary (and therefore acceptable) part of the process of settling in NZ. The Ministry of Women's Affairs found that migrant women with Bachelors degrees or the equivalent, earned 6% less than males with similar qualifications. After 5-9 years, those women were earning \$20,000 less than their male counterparts.
- b) **Mail Order Brides.** Women who marry a kiwi overseas are included in this category. They have no relatives here and no support. They are fearful of reporting abuse, have poor English, have often been married very young, and do not know where to go for help. Many are not allowed to work; this is a matter of family honour. Their duty is to be a mother. It is modern day slavery, working 16 hours per day at home and never being given any money.

## **4) Mereama Pitman, Children's Advocate, DOVE Hawke's Bay**

Mereama delivered the 1998 Maori report to CEDAW. She has worked in violence for 28 years. She said that in all the statistics gathered nowadays, the *context* is missing.

We are a colonised people. This requires dehumanisation. Colonisation is alive and well. Maori didn't 'lose' their language – it was stolen, as were resources. She noted that Hekia Parata has just issued 11 permits for oil research – deep sea drilling.

Maori are at the bottom of the heap. Poverty is a creation of the State – not a creation of the mad, the sad and the bad! Capitalism cannot survive without poverty – there has to be a user.

Mereama works with 'the invisibles' - those in despair after five generations of invisibilities. Often the men are in prison. Some are the fourth generation of their family who have never had paid employment. These people have a poverty of soul and spirit! A ten week programme won't change that. She noted that WINZ got \$19 million to train case workers.

Whanau ora is a programme that works for Maori, because it has a Maori world view. She noted that the Maori Affairs Select Committee had just voted to investigate the status of Maori children.