



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN
OF NEW ZEALAND
TE KAUNIHERA WAHINE
O AOTEAROA

*Affiliated to the International
Council of Women*

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Submission to the Ministry of Social Development on Updating of the Children Young Persons and their Families Act

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organization representing 37 Nationally Organized Societies and a number of National Members. NCWNZ has 31 branches throughout the country to which women from 150 societies are affiliated.

The underlying philosophy of this Act is the care and protection of children in New Zealand and the welfare of their families. The March 1989 proposed draft comments that "the bill has all the hallmarks of the current efforts to devolve both the provision of services and the cost of providing those services to the community at a time when all families are fully stretched to meet ordinary demands on their resources".

The same comment can still be made in 2007. While the Government has made a number of changes such as the introduction of the Working for Families package, the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act, the introduction of Care and Protection Court Orders, and appointed Children's Advocates, to name a few, children in New Zealand are still seen as second class citizens. There are many children being raised by their Grandparents/Kin/Whanau in sub poverty conditions as the Government hesitates in granting the Foster Parent Allowance to Grandparents/Kin/Whanau. The definition of fostering in the 1989 bill does not include Grandparents/Kin/Whanau raising grandchildren but does give credit for providing special resources to foster parents. That help is not available for Grandparents/Kin/Whanau today.

The welfare of the child is supposed to be paramount in this bill, but in 2007 New Zealand has one of the highest rates of child abuse in the world and children are dying from the hands of their caregivers at an increasing rate. The majority of these children has already come to the attention of Children and Young Persons Social workers but still appear to be falling through the cracks. There is still no one who takes accountability of the welfare of the child despite this issue having been raised in the 1974 and 1989 bills.

The Commissioner for Children noted recently that the 1989 bill was a positive step in ensuring children's rights and voices are heard, but is seen by many low income families as another layer of the bureaucratic authority and does little in improving children's lives. Family group conferences, Strengthening Families, Children's Advocates, Children's Lawyers, Child Protection teams, Police Youth Aid, all these and more have been developed since 1989 but despite large amounts of funding being given to these initiatives the numbers of reported child abuse still climbs and less available access to immediate services are found.

Mandatory reporting of child abuse often results in long waits before any action is taken. The heavy workload of Government agencies, such as CYPS, results in extra workloads for NGOs with little or no funding available to cope with this fallout.

With increasing ethnic diversity in New Zealand, particularly since 1989, the Act must take into account the educating of the ethnic population to children's rights and protection in New Zealand. While cultural sensitivity is paramount the welfare of children overrides this, and practices acceptable in their home country may not be acceptable in New Zealand. Education must be made mandatory to all immigrants to New Zealand to protect these children.

Increased financial assistance to low income families over the next five years was seen in 1989 as a must with resourcing going to children rather than adults on the basis of need rather than the care givers eligibility for funding. This has still not happened and needs to be addressed immediately.

The ability to access the services children need is being further hindered by:

- a. long waiting lists
- b. unavailability of trained professionals
- c. Unacceptable high levels of the seen need to access these services to even reach the assessment stage

The Working for Families package , free ECE, free doctors visits for under 5's, lack of dental nurses in schools and reduction in Plunket services are just a few of the results of recent alterations to aid low income families.

Repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act has only just been passed and only time will tell if this makes a difference to the reporting rate of Child Abuse.

There is still consultation with NGOS and Community Organisations as was pointed out in 1989 (resolution 1989) and seen as a must.

1. While Childcare subsidies are paid to early childhood centres, the suggestion that this same subsidy be paid to parents who choose to parent their children themselves is still not being addressed.
2. The 1989 document with the five year timeline still needs work to ensure the changes take place six years on and the National Council of Women supports the measures to see that these changes take place.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely

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Committee