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**Submission to The Ministry of Social Development on a Five Year Action Plan for Out of School Services**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 42 Nationally Organised Societies. It has 31 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies. The Council's functions are to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action. NCWNZ welcomes the opportunity to consider this Consultation Document. The response has been prepared by the Public Issues Standing Committee following circulation of the questions to NCW members.

This response to the five-year action plan for Out of School Services is based mainly on NCWNZ policy built up over more than 100 years. The Consultation Document was set out clearly using the headings of 'What we do now', 'What do we need?' and 'What are we going to do?' Such clarity was appreciated. The lengthy process of consultation prior to this document and during 2007 is also acknowledged. Those who discussed the Aims were largely in support of the Five-year Plan although some concerns were expressed.

Comments on the aims are as follows.

(1) To improve quality

**Comments on the quality aim**

NCWNZ is in complete agreement with the intention to establish high quality care through national, consistent standards regarding staff qualifications and training, supervision ratios of adults to children, policies covering adult and child behaviour, premises and equipment, and programme content. NCWNZ also applauds the careful establishment of the plan by consultation in year 1 with an experts' group. It is hoped that the stakeholders in the experts' group will include a strong representation of rural sector interests and ethnic groups from the most disadvantaged sectors of society.

(2) To improve affordability

**Comments on the affordability aim**

Members who discussed affordability felt strongly that option three would be the best option from the point of view of the funding being used as intended and for the good of the greatest number of children. Tax credits, while beneficial, are only of use for those who pay tax. Despite strong support for Option 3, flexibility will need to be built into the system, which means that grants and subsidies will be needed. A one-rule-fits-all is rarely effective. Also important will be communicating the system to parents and caregivers. Members thought that the age for OSS should be set at 14 as young people at that age need supervision. The document did not specify the payment rates for different aged children but this is a matter that will need careful attention.

(3) To improve availability

**Comments on the availability aim**

It was recognized that meeting all needs in this context would be a challenging. The best option was thought to be using the schools which are already set up for children and which could possibly more easily meet increased demand, thereby lessening waiting lists. It is appreciated that the Government will establish extended services at 12 urban low-decile schools for 5 – 14 yr olds and increase provider funding as a start. As a matter of equity, additional funding must be made for children with disabilities and to cater for all needs funding will have to be made for approved home-based and small-scale programmes.

(4) To improve accessibility

**Comments on the accessibility aim**

Accessibility for children from low waged or unemployed families and children with disabilities and special needs should be equal to the accessibility of the general cohort of young people and should be dealt with at the same time as provision for the general group. Scheduling the disabled to the roll-out years seems lacking in a sense of equity. This section of the OSS document seems to ensure that those who are hungriest will be served last. Should they not be served first, if not at the same time as the rest?

**Overall Feedback**

This is a strategy which NCWNZ supports overall. The Plan is there to support parents, caregivers and children at times which are periods of great stress for many. It is also a response to a need made obvious by the increase in uptake of the current system of OSS.

**What is your overall impression of the Five-year Action Plan for OSS?**

As above. It is a positive attempt to meet a need that has been identified clearly.

**Do you have any other comments (e.g. on the possible role of workplaces or the needs of young people over 13)?**

The system should be monitored carefully. First rate research should be carried out jointly by the New Zealand Association for Research in Education and a similar highly regarded research body on public health or social development, on the claims made for OSS in educational matters, and the consequences for work-life balance, family life and social equity. Some members were concerned that the initiative is an encouragement for both parents to work which could be to the detriment of child support and care. On the Sunday Programme, 22 July 2007, 'Too much like hard work' Pt 2, 7.30 p.m., TV One reported on research into family stress caused by long working hours. Will the OSS initiative increase work-related stress in more families?

NCWNZ thanks the Department of Social Development for the opportunity to respond to this consultation Document.

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