



Te Ope Whakaora

# Public Sphere

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News & Updates from The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit | December 2012

**'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity.'** Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

## EDITORIAL

### The New Zealand Social Policy year in review

This year we have experienced some of the best and worst of times in the developing and acting out of Social Policy in New Zealand. Just as Dickens' characters lived in an age of foolishness as well as wisdom, we have witnessed smart policy as well as petty and populist decisions from our country's leaders.

### Some of the best aspects of social policy during 2012

One of the best aspects has been the work of the Children's Commissioner in gathering an Expert Advisory Group this year to come up with evidence-based solutions to the increasingly problem of child poverty in New Zealand. In the last few weeks the final report 'Solutions to Child Poverty', containing 78 solutions, was presented by the Children's Commissioner to the Government. The Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit strongly endorse the recommendations made. Our Director, Major Campbell Roberts, was one of the members of the Expert Advisory Group working on this report. It is pleasing to us that the media and public have started to really engage on finding solutions for child poverty. It is also encouraging that the initial reception of the report by Government ministers has been to consider it seriously for action. The Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit will continue to monitor and speak up for the Children's Commissioner's recommendations.

The Productivity Commission report on Housing was another highlight of the year. In a comprehensive report,

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the Commission outlined the challenges and blocks to supplying adequate housing in New Zealand. The Unit welcomed the response made by the Minister of Finance on the report but is concerned that Government response is happening too slowly and without the comprehensive action required.

Corrections policy has moved forward this year, firstly with a new allocation in the budget toward more innovative and effective punishment policy, and secondly a new approach in more effective corrections practices, both under the leadership of Chief Executive Ray Smith. The new approach has seen more emphasis on tackling alcohol and drug abuse, reducing re-offending, education, job skills, work in prisons plus real efforts to achieve better offender re-integration on release. There are still large gains to be made, but after years where the only answer was more and longer imprisonment, we welcome these changes.

Whanau Ora is a programme that attempts to take a more whole-of-community approach to social problem and this initiative is warmly welcomed by SPPU. Results will become more obvious in years to come but the initiative is welcome. Teen parenting units have been developed in various places in New Zealand and their expansion is a service we feel is needed and welcome.

### Some of the worst aspects of social policy during 2012

One particular policy lowlight has been the inability to convince law-makers to add more 'teeth' to the Alcohol Law Reform Bill. New Zealand was given a superb pattern for the future with the recommendations of the Law Commission on alcohol. But despite strong urging from the community and overwhelming scientific evidence, no change has been made to the purchasing age of liquor, no increases were made in excise duty, no minimum pricing regulations were agreed and there were no increased

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restrictions on how alcohol companies can promote their products. This was an extremely disappointing result for those who made the case for reform. And it was an even more disappointing result for the majority of New Zealanders who had expected the politicians would be braver in their reform. What has become obvious is the strength and influence of the liquor lobby in the 'halls of power'.

The availability of affordable and social housing reached crisis level in 2012. More than any other social problem, the lack of affordable and social housing is likely to be a future cause of increased social distress and tension. Changes to Housing New Zealand, the Social Housing Unit, the rationalising of housing departments, increased emphasis on Community Housing and the inter departmental working parties on Accommodation Supplement all gave signs of increased government awareness and activity. Sadly the result has been very disappointing, and productive change resulting in more housing has been painfully slow. There are no signs that this will turn around quickly. This is an extremely disappointing situation because as a Unit we believe that some of these areas of change done well can make a real difference. In our view Government needs more effective governance of social and affordable housing, more allocation of the budget into increasing supply, definitive targets of house building and a great deal more urgency.

Welfare reforms of various types have been introduced in 2012. Government claims improvement in a number of areas but in The Salvation Army we see increased child poverty, increases in people seeking assistance, continuing levels of domestic violence and young people who are feeling abandoned by their country and communities. A wider approach and targets that tackle poverty are needed, rather than an approach that targets reform of welfare.

## 2012 highlights

### Publications

First among our highlights was the release of two major publications. The State of the Nation report 'The Growing Divide' focused on the widening gaps in our society, giving readers a snapshot of social progress in our nation. Extensive research into our children, crime

and punishment, work and incomes, social hazards and housing, provided an insight into the growing marginalisation of many New Zealanders. We launched this report across three events in Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin and we have continued to receive encouraging feedback throughout the year from politicians, community organisations and Government departments who have found the report to be a valuable resource in their work.

Our second publication, Adding It All Up, was a diversion from our usual approach as it took an in-depth look into the ideological and historical context contributing to Auckland's dearth of affordable and decent quality housing. This report has led to some very useful robust discussion with council and Government officials and it has helped frame the current discourse occurring around this issue.

### Submissions

We have submitted on over sixteen Government legislative Bills with an aim to ensure there is a focus on the needs of the poor.

Submissions include:

- Green Paper for Vulnerable Children (Ministry of Social Development)
- Inquiry into the determinants of wellbeing for Maori children (Maori Affairs select committee)
- Social Security (Youth Support) Amendment Bill
- Corrections Amendment Bill
- Inquiry into preventing child abuse and improving children's health outcomes (Health select committee)
- Immigration Amendment Bill
- Gambling Amendment Bill
- Bail Amendment Bill
- Child Support Amendment Bill
- Community Sentences Amendment Bill
- Credit Contracts and Consumer Finance Act
- Local Government Act Amendment Bill
- Corrections Amendment Bill – SOP
- Lobbying Disclosures Bill
- Paid Parental Leave Bill
- Prohibition of Gang Insignia Bill
- Welfare Amendment Bill
- Social Security Amendment Bill
- The Minimum Wage Amendment Bill

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Despite the fact that many of our submissions bring a contrary position, we are often invited to give oral submissions to select committees—who have a lot of submitters to choose to hear from—but they choose to hear our perspective. While we can't point out big policy victories we can see that our views are well respected by MPs even if they hold diverging opinions.

### STOP THE TRAFFIK

Another great partnership that was formalised this year was with The Salvation Army (New Zealand Fiji and Tonga Territory) and STOP THE TRAFFIK, a well-known global anti-slavery network. The New Zealand branch, STOP THE TRAFFIK Aotearoa, was launched at Parliament on June 22 and is being co-ordinated by Unit Social Justice Advocate Chris Frazer. Mrs Frazer has already been able to institute anti-trafficking training workshops with Government departments and this will be coupled with online training resources and an extensive advertising campaigning.

### Prevent People Trafficking Conference, 11–12 April 2013

Ms Frazer is also working alongside the United States Embassy and ECPAT Child Alert as The Salvation Army's representative in the jointly-organised Prevent People Trafficking Conference, 11-12 April 2013. IF you're interested in halting human trafficking and exploitative labour in the Pacific, mark the date in your diaries today.. This event will be crucial for increasing the profile of problems like human trafficking and worker exploitation, both here and overseas.

### Just Action, 18–19 September 2013

Another highlight has been securing leading international social justice campaigner Shane Claiborne and civil rights activist Dr John Perkins to speak at our conference Just Action in September 2013. We have also arranged with Habitat for Humanity to help build a house next to the conference venue, which will then be moved to a nearby suburb for a deserving family to move into.

## Looking ahead in the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit

We will once again produce a State of the Nation report in early February. But we also plan to produce at least two more publications. One will offer our policy recommendations for action on the housing challenges. The second will provide a snapshot of social progress for one of our largest demographic groups: Pasifika peoples.

Our staff will also be kept very busy with preparations for the Prevent People Trafficking Conference in April and the Just Action conference in September.

Please check out our [Facebook page](#) for updates and news on our activities.

Another Charles Dickens' quote, but this time from A Christmas Carol.

**'It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour.'**

Despite all our efforts to ensure policies which work towards the eradication of poverty, it's nice to consider Dickens' words just days before we head away for our holidays. The simple joy found in human relationship can occur anywhere and create the changes we all aim for. So from all of us here at the Unit we'd like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and may the cheer of the season infect you all and those whom you celebrate with.

**Major Campbell Roberts and the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit team**

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