



Te Ope Whakaora

Public Sphere

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News & Updates from The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit | March 2014

EDITORIAL

This editorial for *Public Sphere* is from **Michael O'Brien**, Associate Professor in the School of Counselling, Human Services & Social Work at the University of Auckland.

GOSPEL MANIFESTO

Priority 1: Every Child Counts



Matthew's Gospel records Jesus saying the children should be allowed to come to him and not be hindered from doing so. In this, and other contexts, children were to be given a special and promoted place in the society in which they lived. Here then lies the genesis for reflecting on how well we provide (or fail to provide) for children and their needs in contemporary society. While New Zealand does well in providing for many of its children, there are far too many for whom our care and provision is woefully inadequate.

This is most clearly illustrated in ensuring all children have the basics they need in such fundamental areas as food, clothing, educational opportunity, health care access and the opportunity to participate in the recreational activities that their peers enjoy. Irrespective of how we measure it, around one in five (20%) of New Zealand's children live below the poverty line. While for a very small amount of these children this may be the result of not spending money appropriately or wisely, the vast majority of these children live in families which do not receive enough money. The majority are also families receiving a benefit of some kind. However, there is also a very significant group (around 40%) who are in households where there is somebody in paid work. Maori and Pacific children are significantly over-represented among children living in households below the poverty line.

By themselves, children are unable to change their own circumstances – they depend on what their parents do and what we do as a society do to ensure that all children are adequately provided for. Concretely, this means that if we are to improve the income of families with children so that poverty levels are reduced, we will need to do three things.

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- First, benefit levels will have to be increased.
- Second, wages for those in low paid work need to be improved.
- Third, we will need to remove the discrimination faced by children in benefit households whose parents are denied the Work Tax Credit simply because their carer is not in paid work.

What we do to improve the lives of these children and what we demand of our political leaders to put in place policies which reduce child poverty will be the most important test for this year's election.

Children have only one opportunity to enjoy and learn from the experience of being a child. As a society, we can do a great deal to make that experience the best possible for all children, supporting and encouraging parents or carers to provide for children, and what we demand from politicians. Phrases such as 'every child counts' and 'no child left behind' have been expressed frequently in recent years. This is an opportunity to demand that these phrases are given some real and concrete meaning for all children. The critical place to begin is with policies and programmes which reduce child poverty. These policies and programmes are important for the children now and important for us as a society, both currently and looking ahead.

So, the Gospel message about the special place of children in New Zealand society in 2014 contains two closely related elements.

- First, ALL children matter and policies need to reflect this.
- Second, reducing child poverty must be treated as a critical priority.

The question we all need to ask of all policies is: how do these policies treat children and reduce child poverty?

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RESOURCES

Election 2014

The Prime Minister has announced the date of the General Election as Saturday 20 September. The Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit is producing a set of resources exploring critical issues for this election. Please contact us if you would wish to access this resource.

EVENTS

Just Action: In Our Backyard

We are pleased to announce the keynote speaker for this year's 'Just Action: In Our Backyard' conference is Russell Rook. Russell is CEO of Chapel St, an organisation that partners with communities to address social need, especially for youth.

Our intent is to add local content specific to each location and to inspire attendees to grapple with issues of justice in our own backyards.

This year, the conference heads to Dunedin on Thursday 21 August; Christchurch on Saturday 23 August; Wellington on Tuesday 26 August and Auckland on Thursday 28 August.

Registrations will open in April. Follow Just Action on Facebook to keep up to date.

A poster and Powerpoint promotion can be downloaded at www.salvationarmy.org.nz/justaction

Prevent People Trafficking Conference

Exploitation: A Fair Go for Everyone, is the conference theme this year. Working together to prevent people trafficking and labour exploitation in New Zealand is the aim.

The keynote speaker is Detective Inspector Kevin Hyland of the London Metropolitan Police Special Crime Directorate on Human Exploitation and Organised Crime. This reflects the planning group's intention to bring the 'global' into the 'local'.

The conference takes place on 5 and 6 June at the Police College in Porirua. Registrations will open soon.

ACTIVITIES

Submissions

SPPU makes submissions on behalf of The Salvation Army to Parliamentary Select Committees throughout the year.

- **Local Government Amendment Bill**
Ronji Tanielu presented an oral submission to this Bill, focusing particularly on development contributions & ensuring community consultation remains a mandatory requirement for local councils
- **Land Transport Amendment Bill**
Major Sue Hay and Ronji Tanielu presented an oral submission to this Bill, basically supporting the Bill's call for a lower breath alcohol limit for drivers in NZ

Check out all our submissions at www.salvationarmy.org.nz/research-media/social-policy-and-parliamentary-unit/submissions

Out & About

- **Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE):** Ronji Tanielu met with Mene Setefano, Policy & Pacific Advisor for MBIE, talking about better tools for people who are renting, whether privately or from Housing NZ.
- **Labour Housing Spokesperson:** Major Campbell Roberts met with Labour MP Phil Twyford.
- **National Housing Providers:** Major Campbell Roberts attended a meeting of national housing providers.
- **Housing Assessment Transfer Group:** Major Campbell Roberts attended a meeting of this group.
- **Good Shepherd Microfinance Australia:** The New Zealand branch of Good Shepherd Microfinance, along with Kiwibank and BNZ held a workshop in Wellington. Campbell Roberts represented the SPPU at this discussion and planning event. To learn more check out www.goodshepherdmicrofinance.org.au

Coming & Going

We farewelled **Justin Latif**, administrator, as he headed off to new beginnings of parenthood, mission and study.

We welcomed **Vanessa Kingi** as our new administrator.

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