

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

**Submission to the Social Services Select
Committee**

On

The Child Poverty Reduction Bill



4 April 2018

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Submission on the Child Poverty Reduction Bill

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional body for a national collective of more than 3,200 social workers, who have day-to-day involvement with the most vulnerable people in our society. Our work is guided by a Code of Ethics that is aligned with the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Statement of Ethical Principles.

Our members are employed in a wide variety of organisations across the social services sector including health, education, welfare, justice and social advocacy.

Members work across government and non-government settings including community organisations, iwi agencies, youth justice, child protection, mental health, addictions, disability and private practice. We are involved in research, training, education, professional development, competency assessment, data gathering, risk assessment, structural analysis, interagency protocols and the improvement of social policy.

ANZASW members are responding to the consequences of poverty on an almost daily basis.

The international definition of social work mandates the profession to engage in advocacy for social justice and human rights:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”

Social work is founded on principles of human rights and social justice and, in Aotearoa New Zealand, is guided by the Treaty of Waitangi and respects the equality, worth and dignity of all people. In accordance with the March 2012 IFSW Global Agenda¹ “we commit ourselves to supporting influencing and enabling structures and systems that positively address the root causes of oppression and inequality.

¹ International Federation of Social Workers, International Association of Schools of Social Work and International Council on Social Welfare (2012). ‘The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Commitment to Action’. Available at isw.sagepub.com (accessed 13 June 2012)

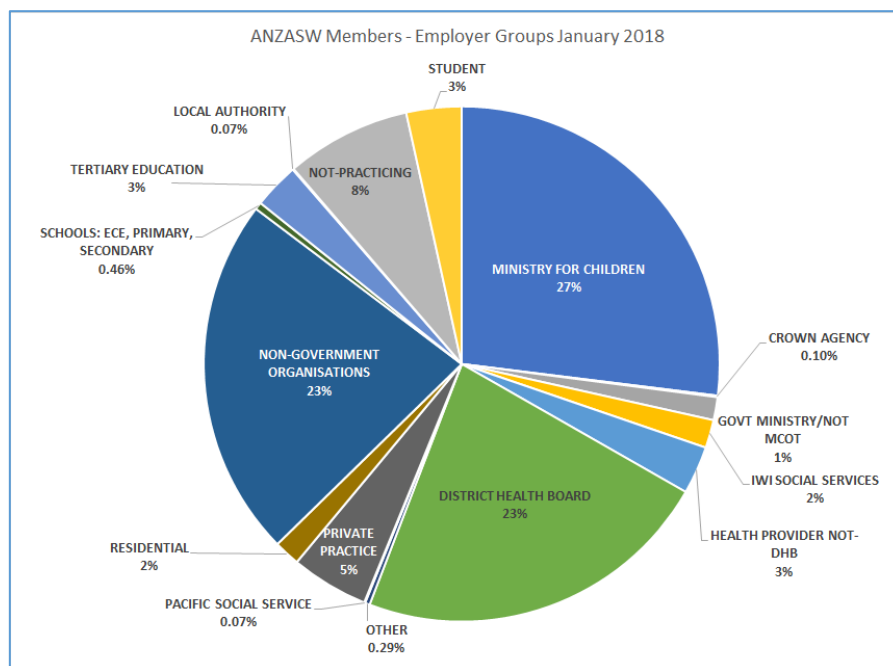
“We commit ourselves wholeheartedly and urgently to work together with people who use services and with others who share our objectives and aspirations, to create a more socially-just and fair world. We believe the overarching principles of social work are respect for the inherent worth and dignity of human beings, doing no harm, respect for diversity and upholding human rights and social justice.”

Our mission is to enable people to develop their full potential; our skill-set is problem solving and facilitation of positive change in individuals, organisations, whānau and communities. We recognise people in our society can be both agents of change and victims of factors beyond their control. As a profession, we strive to alleviate poverty, foster social inclusion and liberate those who are vulnerable or oppressed. Our interventions involve the development of coping strategies, one-on-one counselling and therapy, family and group work, agency administration, community organisation, social action and social change and helping people to access services, resources and support systems within their community.

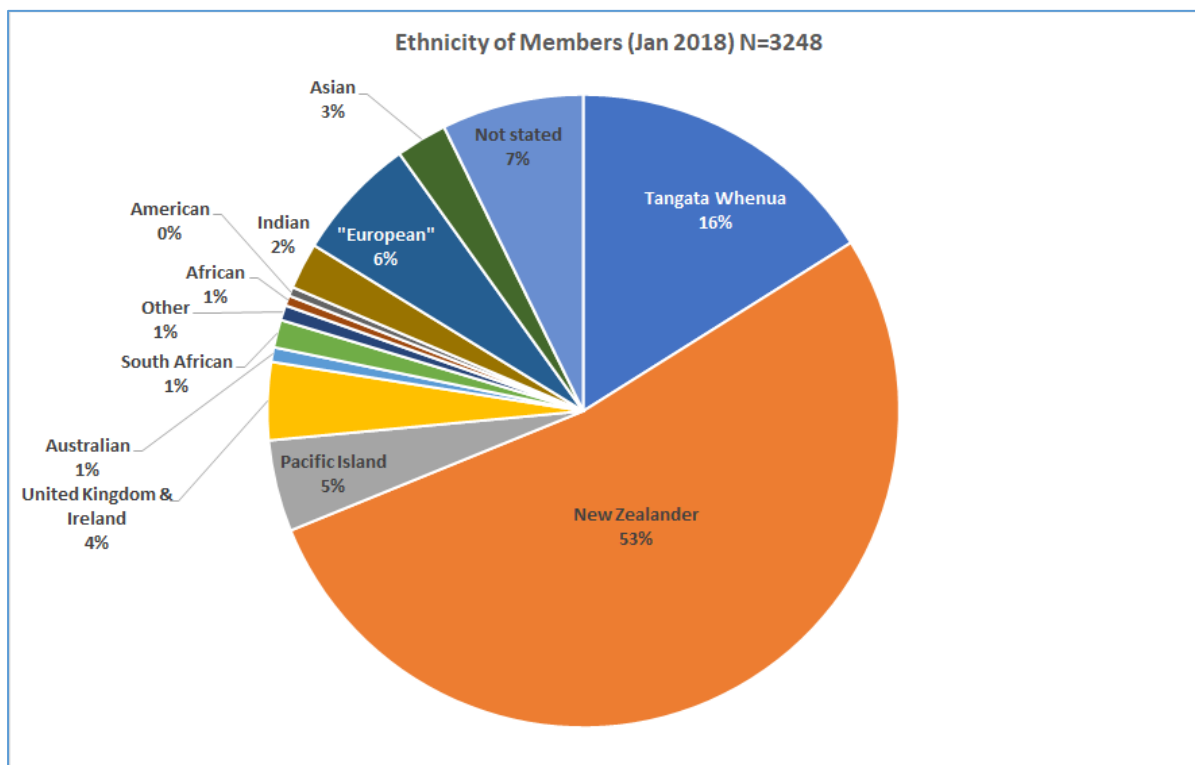
Social workers respond to crises and emergencies along with the personal or social problems that arise from experience of barriers, inequities and injustices within our society. We are also involved in statutory intervention when vulnerable children and adults are at risk of harm.

Social Workers in Employment

The following graph illustrates the range of organisation where ANZASW members are employed.



ANZASW membership is made up of a wide range of different ethnic groups which reflect the increasing diversity of New Zealand society.



The Child Poverty Reduction Bill

ANZASW supports the Child Poverty Reduction Bill. The introduction of poverty reduction targets, the ability to facilitate accountability along with the requirement of “the government of the day to adopt, publish, and review a Government strategy for improving the well-being of all children, and that includes a particular focus on child poverty and the needs of children at greater risk” is seen as a positive beginning.

ANZASW is of the view that while setting targets, accountability, collaboration and the adoption of a strategy are important real progress can only be made with fiscal measures that will reduce inequality and ensure that all New Zealanders have access to sufficient income and physical resources to participate in society.

Poverty in general and child poverty specifically child poverty are issues faced by our members on a daily basis. Being able to work with families to address life challenges and

enhance wellbeing becomes increasingly challenging when lack of housing or adequate housing and insufficient income, poverty, are the overarching factors.

For me poverty and trauma seem to be significant factors in all my work with children and youth. I think if both these areas are central to Government planning it would be a healthier and happy community that we all live in. I am pleased that the government has recognised poverty as a key area.

Member

Members have regularly discussed the impacts of child poverty on their work and on the outcomes for children.

"In our discussions at the executive meeting on Friday we discussed the link between child poverty and our concern about risk thresholds at Oranga Tamariki. For social workers poverty can become normalised, and it is hard to distinguish between neglect and poverty at the best of times. Poverty related stress impacts on parenting and increases risk of child maltreatment. Given our discussions about the risk thresholds at Oranga Tamariki being so high 'unless there is blood on the floor' it would be good to link practice experiences around the difficulties of supporting parents in poverty, and the impact of instances of lack of support increasing the risk of child maltreatment. "

From a Branch Meeting

The Statistics New Zealand survey of household wealth 2015 showed that the richest 10% of New Zealanders held 50% of the wealth while the poorest 40% held 3% of the wealth. There is little to indicate that much has changed over the subsequent years. If anything, the situation appears to have worsened for those in the bottom 40%. This is in part evidenced by the growth in demand on services such as food banks, Kids Can, Milk in Schools and the need for social work interventions.

In a country with the wealth that New Zealand has it is disgraceful that so many citizens are dependant on support services to meet the most basic needs. ANZASW therefore calls on the Government to develop practical strategies aimed at reducing poverty and inequality.

It is good and wise to investigate the root cause of child poverty (there should not be such an issue in this country with beauty, fertile soil and freedom to express).

If the root cause is identified, then resources should be channelled towards these so that this issue can be addressed.

Member

United Nations – Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

ANZASW fully supports the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and believe that this must underpin any strategy to address child poverty and inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

The Global Agenda for Social Work

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) developed the Global Agenda for Social Work in recognition that the past and present political, economic, cultural and social orders, shaped in specific contexts, have unequal

consequences for global, national and local communities and have negative impacts on people.

The four Pillars of the Agenda are:

1. Promoting social and economic equalities
2. Ensuring the dignity and worth of the person
3. Promoting sustainable communities and environmentally sensitive development
4. Promoting wellbeing through sustainable human relationships

ANZASW is therefore committed to working within the Association to promote education and practice standards in social work and social development that enable workers to facilitate sustainable social development outcomes.

Promoting social and economic equalities underpins ANZASW's support for the Child poverty reduction Bill and the call for practical steps to be included in any strategy developed to reduce inequality.

Recommendation

While ANZASW supports the Child Poverty Reduction Bill the Association also urges the Government to implement real and practical steps to reduce inequality and poverty in New Zealand.

A recommended first step would be to replace the minimum wage with an inflation adjected living wage.