

Press Release

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The gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' will become even wider under the new wave of 'welfare reform'. This is the view of the President of Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), Jane Maidment. Current 'welfare reform' or the Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Act 2013 that took effect on 15 July makes it very difficult to achieve any sense of progressive social or economic equality, at a time when this is relevant and critical according to ANZASW. This welfare 'reform' will widen the economic gap in society but more importantly it will encourage and justify the current social inequalities. By highlighting the negative small percentage of cases, in which the benefit has been misused or misappropriated it is sending the message to society that they need not care or should not need to help beneficiaries. The misrepresentation of all beneficiaries not only serves as the reasoning for the welfare reform but as a catalyst for division within communities.

Instead of using positive encouragement to highlight beneficiary skills and potential, the government is now sending the message that beneficiaries should take any job in any workplace and put aside aspirations of furthering their education and workplace skills. This approach will not only undermine personal aspirations and goals but ultimately discourage beneficiaries from entering education and training. Ironic, it seems, as the involvement in education and training would be a step in the right direction to creating a society that has social and economic equality.

These latest moves risk further marginalizing all beneficiaries by fuelling an existing negative stereotype that all beneficiaries want to stay on benefit, thus wasting taxpayers' money with no intention of getting back to work. This, quite obviously, is not the case. While we acknowledge that there are some cases of people misusing the benefit it seems that the entire range and scope of beneficiaries are being punished for a small percentage of exceptions.

Considering the growing costs of food, accommodation and other essentials in our current society, decreasing the amount of money beneficiaries receive will increase financial stress and will mean some families and individuals will not have the means to provide the bare essentials. Ample evidence of the effects of child poverty exists in New Zealand and these 'reforms' will simply exacerbate an already intolerable living situation for many families. With the focus of getting beneficiaries into work parental time with children will be compromised. Even more concerning are the cases where grandparents raising their grandchildren have now been asked to visit Work and Income to seek employment.

We would hope and expect that New Zealand could be a society where grandparents needing to raise their grandchildren could be financially supported in doing so, not badgered by the state to stay in employment.

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