



## Public Questions Network News

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### **Resources for Public Questions – Sustainability as Responsibility for the Future**

We sent the new resources on sustainability to the August Synods. The title for the resource is 'Navigating with Respect and Responsibility for the Care of Creation'. The resource material for sustainability is focussed on the wellbeing of people and land in communities. At the Synods there were small group discussion on Public Questions and Sustainability.

We are responding to feedback from Synods and Parish groups and Betsan will be in touch for distribution of the finalised resources. Most Synods have sent us the names of PQ contact people so we will keep in touch through them.

### **Alcohol Reform**

The select committee on the Alcohol Reform Bill has reported back to Parliament with few changes to the direction of original bill. Minor limitations to access to alcohol are provided for in the Bill, with the minimum age of drinking in bars remaining at 18, and the age for buying alcohol rising to 20. There will be some curbs on outlets permitted to sell alcohol and local authorities will have more power over granting liquor licences. Many people in the Public Questions Network supported much stronger reform through restricting advertising, raising the costs of alcohol and restricting access, along the lines of the Law Commission's recommendations. Stopping smoking is a model for stopping the culture of binge drinking, but this Bill won't achieve significant change.

### **Welfare Reform**

This PQ news is focussing on the important news on Welfare Reform. PM Key's announcement of policies for teenagers and Minister Paula Bennett's paper on Vulnerable Children are from the Government.

A report called '1000 Days to Get it Right' comes from Every Child Counts, a coalition which advocates for the wellbeing of children. Every Child Counts commissioned Infometrics to do an economic analysis of the costs and benefits of investment in the wellbeing of children.

### **PQ News Clipping for Parish Bulletins**

**Several Parish Superintendents and Ministers have requested a short item that can be published in Parish bulletins. This item is on Welfare Reform. Further on in this review there is more information on the Welfare material, with references for sourcing the relevant documents.**

**Welfare Reform** is moving to the forefront of attention with PM John Key's announcement of stringent measures to manage the money paid to about 1600 16 and 17 year olds on benefits and 18 year olds on the DPB. Their money for food and clothing will be managed through a payment card, with cigarettes and alcohol disallowed. Might these changes be beneficial or are they too intrusive? The government will pay private providers to train these teenagers for work. More announcements on Welfare are expected.

Minister Paula Bennett is asking for public discussion on policies for child abuse and vulnerable children. The level in New Zealand are extremely high, with 15% children (163,000) vulnerable and in 2009-10 there were 21,000 cases of child abuse and neglect.

A report for the organisation Every Child Counts shows that New Zealand has one of the lowest ratings in the OECD on child welfare, and spends one of the lowest amounts (US\$14,000) compared to Denmark (US\$50,000). Early childhood is the time of optimum growth and brain development. It is much more effective to ensure a loving, language-rich, emotionally stable and secure family life in early childhood than to bring in remedial services later which are costly and relatively ineffective.

We can be involved in these important discussions by contributing to:

- **Green Paper for Vulnerable Children**, You can make a submission [online](#) before 28 February 2012, or comment on the [Facebook page](#), in person at hui or fono, by email to: [yourresponse@childrensactionplan.govt.nz](mailto:yourresponse@childrensactionplan.govt.nz)  
Or post your submission to: **Green Paper for Vulnerable Children**, PO Box 1556, Wellington
- The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services information programme '*Closer Together Whakatata Mai*' - reduce inequality in Aotearoa is building momentum. Over 1000 supporters have already signed a 'Choice Card'. You can take action now and get more information at the website [www.closetogether.org.nz](http://www.closetogether.org.nz)

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## PQ Resources

**John Howell's prayers for Spirit, Community and Sustainability** *'Longings for the Eternal'*. Also *'Sighs too Deep for Words'*. These small books of prayers and images are beautifully crafted and presented prayers to express personal, shared and prophetic spirituality. Contact St Paul's Union Church, Taupo. 07 378 6812, and John Howell: [howellja@clear.net.nz](mailto:howellja@clear.net.nz)

The long awaited **Waitangi Tribunal Report on Flora and Fauna** has been released. It is a larger three volume report **Wai262** available at <http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/news/media/wai262.asp>

### **Paula Bennett's Green Paper for Vulnerable Children**

<http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/policy-development/green-paper-vulnerable-children/green-paper-for-vulnerable-children.pdf>

**Every Child Counts** has published an important report '1000 Days to Get it Right' on the economic costs of New Zealand's poor investment in good outcomes for children.

<http://www.everychildcounts.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/ECCInfometricsInvestmentinchildrenAug11.pdf>

**Working Towards Higher Living Standards for New Zealanders** is a recent Treasury document describes the Treasury vision of "higher living standards for New Zealanders".

This paper is interesting because it goes beyond narrow definitions of living standards - that are measured by GDP (Gross Domestic Product) - to include a broad range of material and non-material factors such as trust, education, health and environmental quality. In taking a broad approach to understanding living standards, Treasury is lining up with other economic institutions internationally. This is a hopeful sign of movement towards reporting on non-economic activity and the different ways people contribute to society. This more inclusive form of measurement is promoted by the GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator). GPI is closer to sustainable development as it measures social, economic and environmental activity and the contributions of non-paid work and activity. <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-policy/tp/higherlivingstandards>

## Welfare Reform

**Welfare Reform** is at the centre of action with **PM John Key's announcements of plans to reduce the number of teens on benefits and to get those who are 'disengaged' into training and work.**

Government plans to bring in a managed system of payments to teenagers on benefits. A provider will pay their bills to help them manage their budget. Essential costs of rent and power would be paid directly on their behalf and money for food is to be put onto a payment card that will restrict payments to food and groceries. This means that alcohol and cigarettes will not be allowed. John Key noted there are about 1600 young people on special 16-17 year olds benefit, and 18 year olds on the DPB.

He expressed concerns about 13,000 young people who are not in education, training or work. The Prime Minister signalled plans for sharing of information between the Ministries of Education and Social Development to tighten up information on disengaged youth so they can be contacted and moved into training or work.

An announcement that was less noticed is that the government will pay private providers to work with teenagers. Some commentators have suggested this means the privatisation of welfare. Private organisations will have the job of tracking down teenagers not in education training or work and get them into job training. A third of the money will be paid as bonuses for meeting targets. Soon after these announcements a news article reported that funding to organisations that provide youth training has been cut. YMCA and The Salvation Army expressed concerns about finding cuts, despite the \$20 - \$25 million set aside for the youth package.

### Questions:

- Earlier on, Welfare discussions were about using the 'carrot or the stick' – using rewards or punishment to get people into work. Will these measures be effective pathways for moving young people into education, training and work?
- The number identified on the special benefits is not that large. From these announcements what is the National Party signalling about future directions for Welfare policy?

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**Minister Paula Bennett** has released the **Green paper for Vulnerable Children.**

Minister Bennett is asking for the public to be involved in deciding how to care for and protect vulnerable children. There are two main areas of particular vulnerability – when children are young and when they enter adolescence. Wellbeing in early childhood is vital to long term health, educational achievement, and work prospects. It is the foundation of healthy relationships. The Green Paper says 'children in contact with Child Youth and Family are five times more likely to have a prison sentence by age 19 or 20 than those with no contact with Child Youth and Family' (p. 3). 'The costs of not giving children the best start in life are high.

**The bare facts:** The Green Paper confirms that nearly 20% NZ children live in poverty. The negative impacts from poor nutrition and therefore ill health, the likelihood of low educational achievement, and the effects of not being able to participate in sport and other activities such as music or dance contribute their vulnerability. At any point in time 15% children (163,000) are vulnerable. In 2009-10 there were 21,000 cases of child abuse and neglect in New Zealand and there were 13,315 hospital admissions for children under five that could have been avoided. There were 47,374 children living with family violence. Also in this year 7,300 young people left school without qualifications.

## Risks and Vulnerability

Research shows that poverty is likely to limit learning, restrict behavioural development and impair brain development. Child poverty is greater for Māori, for Pasifika and for refugee communities.

Disabilities and health problems are further risk factors for the vulnerability of children. Caring for children with disabilities and major health problems increases stress in families and whānau. It is likely to involve a parent in full time care and limit their ability to work.

About 10% of children aged up to 15 years live with some sort of disability.

### Some questions that Minister Bennett asks:

- How can communities be encouraged to take more responsibility for the wellbeing of their children?
- What services could the government provide to support parents and caregivers?
- What should the government include in an **Action Plan for Vulnerable Children**?
- How can the government work as partners with Iwi and Māori organisations to deliver services for vulnerable tamariki and whānau?
- Should there be mandatory reporting? What information should professional be able to, or required to share about vulnerable children?

### How to get involved?

Read the paper at [Green Paper for Vulnerable Children website](#).

Make a submission before 28 February 2012. [online](#), on the [Facebook page](#), by email to: [yourresponse@childrensactionplan.govt.nz](mailto:yourresponse@childrensactionplan.govt.nz)

Or post your submission to: Green Paper for Vulnerable Children, PO Box 1556, Wellington

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Rhonda Swenson is a Methodist who has deep concerns



Rhonda Swenson is a Methodist who has deep concerns about the directions of Welfare Reform and she has brilliant insights into what would be beneficial. Rhonda has a brain function disability which prevents her from being able to take regular employment, yet she is employed in her church and she makes enormous contributions to the art and disability community. Rhonda has many questions about the direction of welfare reform and she is fearful about the likely impacts of the changes that have been proposed.

Rhonda said “I am worried about the myth that everyone can be fixed of their disabilities when that is not the case. Even though you might have brain processing issues Work and Income ask about work when you know that is not going to be the case. Referring to the wider government context, I was involved with ‘Temporary Solutions’ but they’ve had all their funding cut so I don’t get the odd contract which I used to. This was a way I could match my skills to my ability to work”. Rhonda asks “How are Work and Income going to support people who are not going to be able to work full time?”

Rhonda is involved with Vincent’s Art workshop which focuses on art and it a gathering place for people to support each other but without the pressure of performance. She created the ‘disproportionate’ crosses in the photo. Rhonda reflected on how it is to be in the positions of being helped or helping others, but she prefers the middle ground of interdependence. “This is a much healthier place to be and overcomes individualistic thinking of being the helper or the helped”.

Thinking about the election, Rhonda says people can ask the politicians how they are going to value people who are not working full time and how they’re going to structure Work and Income’s objectives so they’re not all about getting people to work no matter what? And what are their objectives about people’s quality of life and community participation?

“Over the last few years there has been a paradigm shift to more individualistic values and pressure on going to work without thinking about the contribution of volunteers and how they help communities to be sustainable’.

**Every Child Counts** commissioned Infometrics to do an economic study of New Zealand's low investment in child wellbeing. The report '**1000 Days to Get it Right for Every Child**' was released soon after the Green Paper. One thousand days refers to the first three years of a child's life. This is the time of the most rapid and important neurological development with the skills learned in those years being the basis for further development. A loving, language rich environment which is emotionally warm and supportive and economically secure is the environment needed for healthy development. The issue that the study raises is that poor investment in early childhood leads to much greater costs downstream from remedial services, court and justice costs, unemployment and poor health.

*1000 Days to Get it Right* demonstrates that New Zealand is one of the poorest performing countries in the OECD, ranking us 28 out of 30 countries. Denmark achieves the best outcomes from their highest amount invested in early childhood, which is over US \$50,000 per child in the first six years. New Zealand spends US\$14,000 and has twice as bad outcomes as Denmark.

New Zealand's low investment in child wellbeing means that about 20% of our young people have poor health, developmental delay, reduced education, teen pregnancies, and increased offending, poor mental health, reduced employment prospects and even reduced life expectancy. The fallout in terms of cost is \$6 billion per year.

The Netherlands spends US\$24,000 and has very good outcomes suggesting that the services they provide are highly effective. There will be much interest in further studies of the Netherlands early childhood welfare system. *1000 Days* notes

An accumulating body of knowledge shows that early childhood interventions for disadvantaged young children are more effective than interventions that come later in life. Because of the dynamic nature of the skill formation process, remediating the effects of early disadvantages at later ages is often prohibitively costly. .... Post school remediation programs like public job training and general educational development cannot compensate for a childhood of neglect for most people (p. 19).

### **Questions:**

How can we balance the need for the long term benefits of more funding for vulnerable children with the immediate pressure on funding remedial programmes for teens?

There is a clear message that investment in early childhood is the most effective. What can we do to bring about an increase in expenditure in early childhood, and in developing effective services for vulnerable families?

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### **PQ Comment**

**Closer study of the *1000 Days* report will be important for shaping decisions about welfare reform, and will be given more attention for the Public Questions network. At this stage the three propositions of PM Key's attention to 16 and 17 year olds on benefits, the shocking information about child abuse and vulnerability in New Zealand, and the low public funding in early childhood mean that it is imperative that welfare reform take shape at the preventative end of early childhood. This may mean shifting public spending to this area. How would you like to see this shift occur?**

**One of the major campaigns which we can support to address the issues of reducing vulnerability and ensuring both funds and services for early childhood is the 'Closer Together' campaign to reduce inequalities. What can you do to invite people to be involved and to sign up for reducing inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand?**

## ***Closer Together Whakatata Mai* – reducing inequality in Aotearoa**



Signing up to support the *Closer Together Whakatata Mai Choice* means joining thousands of others who wish to send a clear message to decision makers and politicians that we believe it is better for us all to reduce inequality and be closer together. The more who sign up the stronger the message.

Go to [www.closetogether.org.nz](http://www.closetogether.org.nz)

We note the riots in the UK which are being attributed to inequality and to large parts of society who are disengaged from communities, and from work and education.

### **Funds for Hardship**

The James and Martha Trouncing Benevolent Trust Fund is available for Presbyters, Deacons and Lay Leaders in parishes without a Presbyter, to apply to for assistance in cases of hardship. This assistance is available for members in Methodist and Cooperating parishes with a Methodist component. This fund is available throughout the year with no designated application date.

The application form is found on the Methodist web site under communications [http://www.methodist.org.nz/organisations/trousen\\_trust](http://www.methodist.org.nz/organisations/trousen_trust) or if it is easier from the Convener [maryw@west.net.nz](mailto:maryw@west.net.nz).