



**COMMUNITY  
WAIKATO**

*“Supporting strong communities”*

Hei tautoko kia tuu pakari ai ngaa haapori

## **Community Waikato**

### **Submission on the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children**

Community Waikato is a regional capacity strengthening organisation working to build strong and able communities that are engaged, informed connected and enabled to thrive and care effectively for our children. Community Waikato works alongside over 600 tangata whenua, community and voluntary organisations in the Waikato region.

This submission has been influenced by our work with Waikato community organisations providing support and services to children, families and communities in our region.

Our submission doesn't focus specifically on the questions in the Green paper rather it is on the development of long term, collaborative, and strengths based strategies.

We would however like to express our strong endorsement of submissions made by Community Waitakere Charitable Trust, North Shore Community and Social Services which do address some of the questions posed by the Green Paper.

We submit that there is:

- an urgent need to take a long term, strengths based approach to the welfare and positive future of our children to make a real difference.
- a need for this to happen as a government – community collaboration
- a need to work alongside our communities to address the causes of abuse and damage to our children
- a need to support the strengthening of our community's capacity to work proactively on prevention not just reactively on rescue.

We strongly support Minister Bennett's call for a long term focus that transcends three year election cycles and party politics.

We need to be cognizant of the real human, social and economic impacts of failing to make any significant impact on child neglect and poverty in this country and *'If we only do more of what we have always done we will only get what we've always got.'*

There is already much written on the causal factors of child poverty, abuse and neglect:

- We know: that the chasm between rich and poor in this country is growing ever wider
- We know: that children's wellbeing is closely linked to that of their whanau and community
- We know: poverty plays a huge part in abuse and neglect – a staggering 22% of our children live in poverty and child poverty has grown by 20% in just the last 5 years
- We know: that New Zealand rates poorly internationally in its investment and outcomes for the wellbeing of our children
- We know: that child health statistics are getting worse
- We know: there are many and varied lifelong impacts on our children from poverty, neglect and abuse
- We know: there is a huge cost to society and the economy
- We know: that successive governments have made little impact on child poverty, abuse and neglect.
- We know: there is no single answer

We know that prevention and early intervention are more effective than dealing with crises or picking up the pieces when it may be too late. Yet too often we continue to focus on working reactively when we all know (government and community) what is needed is a strong pro-active stance to making the health and wellbeing of all of our children our number one priority.

### **We need:**

#### **Strategies that address the chasm between 'haves' and 'have nots' in our country**

All our children are vulnerable simply because they are children. We believe the focus of this paper is our children who are abused, damaged, hurt and who are without hope.

It is vital that we (government and community) work together to develop ways to build a more equal, child centred society that values our children and addresses the central causes of abuse and neglect. These include poverty, cultural alienation, lack of access to quality healthcare and unemployment.

We need to have prevention and intervention strategies that are not be based on punitive interventions to get the basics right for all our children and policies.

Our questions need to be reframed from "How can government encourage communities to take more responsibility for the wellbeing of their children?" (page 12 of Green Paper) to: "How can government work alongside communities to better support the infrastructure and the ability of communities to meet the needs of all their children and families in meaningful, collaborative ways?"

#### **Inclusive, strengths based approaches**

There have been many calls for a significant change of approach to child abuse, and effort needs to be put into development of a range of innovative responses that are reflective of different cultural world views and aspirations towards spiritual, environmental, social, cultural and economic wellbeing.

There needs to be an underpinning culture change from one that is premised on the good of the individual to one that operates on the basis of the wider good of the whanau and community. This includes the development of an over-arching policy and action plan that is based on a wellbeing approach for all our children. The cost of not doing this is huge – we've all seen the appalling human and social cost, and for those more attuned to economic considerations the economic cost is in the region of \$6 billion annually.

The Green paper has a focus on ramping up government powers of intervention and services directed at vulnerable children including increased monitoring, new legislation, evaluation of services, information sharing and setting minimum standards for those working with children. We acknowledge government for coming out to the community and asking for input, but without major change of the philosophical approach that informs policy we will end up with just another version of what we have now. Its time to ask the government to move out of its comfort zone and develop relationships with communities in meaningful, useful ways, supporting and resourcing rather than directing community led initiatives.

We need to start seeing community organisation as more than just cheap 'providers' to deliver services. Locally based organisations can be/are much more than just a provider... We know from our ongoing engagement with local communities that what works is developing the strength and capacity of our communities to respond to the needs and aspirations of their people. Community driven strategies work well given appropriate, stable support and resources needed to succeed because they are driven by the people with the passion for their own communities, who know their communities have a stake in those communities and are trusted by their communities.

A community led, devolved way of working should not be seen as too risky and too much of a long term investment. It is too risky not to change our approach. But we don't want change for its own sake or fast change that is not well supported as this will cause upheaval and harm. We need to accept that taking a child, family and community centred approach takes time. If we don't change our approach to a long-term child centred approach we will continue to see band-aid after band-aid put over the festering sore, report after report commissioned, heightened intervention after heightened intervention, reactive response after reactive response to crises after they happen and still our children will suffer.

### **Summary**

- We need to address causes as well as symptoms
- We need to focus on rebuilding a more equitable and child centred society
- To do those things we need to work together in meaningful ways – a shared responsibility for the wellbeing of our children which includes all of us sitting at the table as equal participants
- We need to strengthen the capacity of our communities to engage and be connected
- We need to have a long term action plan for the care and wellbeing all of our children that everyone signs up to
- We need to support a change of culture to one that values whanau and community
- We need a holistic, strengths based approach to our strategies
- We need to have innovative responses that are reflective of different cultural world views and aspirations including spiritual, environmental, social and cultural as well as economic wellbeing.

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in this consultation. We are willing to be contacted and to provide further information. Please contact:

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