

MADE POOR IN NEW ZEALAND ?

Over the years many reports have identified persistent income disparities in this country, and a widening gap between the rich and poor.

This persistent poverty is often linked to past economic restructuring and social policy decisions that have impacted negatively on generations of our families and whanau.

Even without an 'official' poverty line, the known levels of poverty-related hardship in this country have become extremely well documented. Our public servants have become expert at monitoring and reporting on levels of poverty - from the way we map our schools by their socioeconomic status through to the atlases of deprivation produced by our government agencies.

The prospect that low unemployment and a strong economy would somehow cancel out poverty at the margins of our society has not worked. To quote Nelson Mandela: *"Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings"*.

Now is the time to call for more action and to ask these questions: Who have we forgotten? Where is the justice or compassion in a society that fails to use its prosperity responsibly to work towards the elimination of the poverty in its midst?

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) believes that the voices of those most affected by poverty in this country have been forgotten and need to be listened to more thoroughly. Wherever and however possible we recognise it is our obligation to seek out those voices, to present what we find and to act as advocates for the poor and vulnerable.

POVERTY HURTS US ALL

positions of power to do better.

The fact is poverty hurts us all. There is a large

We also recognise a responsibility that we all have to challenge those who hold

body of evidence that points to both the economic and social cost of ignoring issues of poverty. This is borne out time and time again by statistics related to areas such as poor health and poor housing, lower educational achievement and a higher incidence of issues such as indebtedness and other long-term consequences of poverty.

The community-based non-government sector plays an important role in holding up a mirror to these issues and in providing policy critiques. We believe that by their complex nature social issues should not be dealt with in isolation from each other. Already this year we have seen a well researched focus on the causes of child poverty from the Child Poverty Action Group, and Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand has summarised the issues in its publication 'Look and look again - Poverty in an affluent society'.

Poverty is not some form of necessary evil. An increase in the level of a benefit or increasing the level of income for those who work in minimum pay jobs pay jobs is simply a way of ensuring that no one is left without the basic means to look after themselves and each other. *"Ka ora pea i a koe, ka ora koe i au"* - perhaps I survive because of you, and you survive because of me. In other words, each member of society is essential to the survival of all the others.

We believe that making different decisions about the level of an adequate income, and adjusting the tax system to be fairer for the low paid and those with children can make a difference to the statistics in the reports mentioned earlier. Otherwise poverty remains a signal of injustice. We should not settle for that when our society still aspires to the ideals of generosity, social inclusion, the right to human dignity and building a cycle of hope for a better future.

In 1998 NZCCSS released a series of leaflets titled "Myths

About Poverty" to help dismiss false perceptions of what it means to be poor in this country. In 2008 we have now published "The Facts About Poverty". **We call on you to become a champion of the poor in**

Aotearoa New Zealand by learning more about those facts. Learn more at:

www.justiceandcompassion.org.nz

A CALL FOR MORE ACTION

THE FACTS OF POVERTY