

THE NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICES

Overview

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) represents six denominations: the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Presbyterian social services agencies, as well as the Methodist and the Salvation Army churches.

Collectively, these six members are responsible for around 500 social service delivery sites in their networks throughout New Zealand.

Our members deliver a wide range of services that cover such areas as child and family services, services for older people, foodbank and emergency services, housing, budgeting, disability, addictions, community development and employment services.

The scale and diversity of services delivered by NZCCSS members is one of the main reasons for NZCCSS to celebrate its membership and we acknowledge the valuable and often invisible work that our members do every day to meet people's needs throughout New Zealand.

NZCCSS Mission and Role

NZCCSS works for a just and compassionate society in Aotearoa New Zealand. We see this as a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ. In seeking to fulfil this mission, we are committed to:

- giving priority to the poor and vulnerable members of our society
- giving priority to Te Tiriti O Waitangi

The key roles of NZCCSS are to represent the common interests and vision of our members at the national level; to supply information and networking opportunities to assist members to provide quality services; and to develop, critique and advocate for policies that will assist poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society.

A national Council, made up of two representatives from each denomination, governs NZCCSS.

A small Secretariat team carries out the day-to-day work of the Council. This includes gathering and distributing information, research on social policy issues and building relationships with government officials and others working in the community sector.

A Policy Group oversees the policy and research work that NZCCSS does in three key areas: child and family, housing and poverty and services for older people. Each Policy Group is made up of at least two Council representatives plus social services managers, academics or others with particular expertise in that area. This means that the work that NZCCSS does is well informed by what is happening at the 'coal face'.

Examples of NZCCSS' work under the three main policy areas are:

1. Housing and Poverty – the Poverty Indicator Project (PIP) that researched clients coming to foodbanks as the basis for developing a strategy to reduce the need for foodbanks in Aotearoa New Zealand.
2. Children and Families – writing briefing papers for Christian social service providers to alert them to changes in policy being introduced by government in relation to children at risk.
3. Services for Older People – contributed to the Working Party on Aged and Disability Support Sustainability.

Theology and the Links to Social Services in New Zealand

Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament show that those who follow God are called on to care for other people. In the Old Testament we see many examples of social compassion as an integral part of life, for example:

- We are made in God's image, therefore all people are of value and have to be treated accordingly;
- We are made for a relationship with God and with God's creatures and therefore caring for one another (social service) is part of the reconciliation that we are called to when those relationships go wrong;
- We are made for responsibility - we are our brother's / sister's keeper.

Therefore God's people are called to do the same, to have compassion for those around them. In the Old Testament this was not limited to charity but also had to do with the redistribution of wealth and social justice with organised social service delivery. Jesus and the early church would have taken this whole Jewish background of organised compassion and the redistribution of wealth for granted. It would not have occurred to them that this should not continue to take place.

In June 2005 the national Church Leaders prepared a briefing paper for a meeting with the Prime Minister, at which issues including funding for aged care services and home ownership were discussed.

The paper, entitled 'Towards a Robust Society: A Statement from Church Leaders', struck a chord with us.

"In our own discussions we frequently turn to the word "robust" in describing the type of society we would like to see in New Zealand. The word robust means vigorous or strong, words which need some explanation or qualification when used to describe society. The Latin origin adds another dimension to the understanding of robust – it is derived from robur meaning oak, a reference to a tree known for its sturdiness and vigorous growth...To be robust our society must offer to everyone support and opportunity, shelter and freedom, resources and vision."

The paper then goes on to discuss issues such as 'Understanding ourselves as persons in community' and then comes to a topic which closely relates theologically to the idea of NZCCSS – 'Giving priority to the wellbeing of world and neighbour':

"Christian tradition maintains that human activity is characterised by an interplay between freedom and restraint. The freedom we aspire to is not the unrestrained

freedom of the autonomous individual; it is freedom that learns to identify and respect certain parameters and responsibilities, including a commitment to the integrity and health of the natural world, and is utterly bound up with the wellbeing and freedom of one's neighbour."

"Moreover, as the well known parable of the Good Samaritan suggests, we are obliged to take a broad view of who our neighbour is. One of the marks of a mature society is the extent to which it cares for, and upholds the dignity and worth of its most vulnerable members and refrains from indulging in politics of exclusion, which most often take the form of scapegoating certain groups for society's ills."

The paper concludes:

"Our pastoral responsibilities as Christian leaders mean that we walk beside many New Zealanders on their daily journey through life. Some are members of our congregations, others we meet as part of working with those who are disadvantaged or in difficulty. We see the pain that can be inflicted on individuals by the climate created by those who have a public voice. With public office comes great responsibility."

"The tree which we used as the image of a robust society has a place for many birds in its branches. Our words uttered in public or private may speak about who is acceptable, who is valued, what contributions matter in our society. Our words help shape society... The challenge facing all of us, and particularly our leaders, is to shape our society in a way which reflects what is best in our human nature."

Cross-Department Issues

There are a number of issues which cross several government departments and agencies, which NZCCSS would like to highlight. These include:

- **Workforce Capacity Issues in the Social Services Sector**

NZCCSS is aware that numerous government reports have identified emerging shortages in skilled labour in health and welfare sectors which will affect services for children, families and older people. For example:

*"Looking forward to 2011 a considerable shortfall in the supply of qualified social workers relative to demand is forecast."*¹

Of particular concern is the shortage of competent social workers who are willing to work in field care and protection identified by the Care and Protection Workforce Development Group.²

Although specialist mental health services have increased since the 1998 Mental Health Commission Blueprint, there are still gaps, particularly in services for children and young people.³

With the introduction of a Differential Response Model by Child, Youth and Family, NZCCSS is concerned that there will be increasing competition between the NGO sector and government for a scarce supply of qualified social workers.

¹ Child Youth and Family Workforce Capacity Development Strategy, Martin Jenkins & Associates, June 2004:9

² Care and Protection Workforce Development Action Area 8 Care and Protection Blueprint, April 2004:4

³ Improving Mental Health 2005 -2015, The Second New Zealand Mental Health and Addiction Plan, 2005:9

In aged care there is an urgent need to address issues of staff turnover in home support workers and train the 45,000 strong workforce to a basic level, as well as actually recruiting these staff in the first instance. In residential aged care a similarly parlous situation exists and is unlikely to improve in the short to medium term.

A major issue is the dichotomy of a strong economy with low unemployment which impacts on attracting and retaining staff. A shortage of Registered Nurses, for example, has only been exacerbated by the Nurses District Health Boards (DHB) Multi-Employer Collective Agreements which gave public sector nurses a twenty percent increase while nurses employed by non-government organisations (NGOs) are not funded to the same level.

- **Workforce Income Disparities**

NZCCSS believes that if charitable organisations are to be viable, the sector needs to be wage competitive, otherwise these organisations risk becoming second tier wage providers. Social services and health services in New Zealand are dependent on a partnership between public and NGO providers, and a two tier wage system will destroy the effectiveness of any system of social service and health delivery.

An example of our concern is the Nurses DHB Multi-Employer Collective Agreements noted above. This has led to a potentially split workforce and is contrary to government rhetoric about partnership with NGOs.⁴

NZCCSS' view is that a Registered Nurse working with older people requires the same base skills that are also needed in a DHB or Public Health Organisation and is usually the only Registered Nurse on duty with high levels of responsibility.

Unions are seeking 5% wage increases for their staff⁵, but NGOs cannot fund these increases if they do not receive additional funding from government.

- **Income Levels for Charitable Non-Government Organisations**

Many Christian social services are dependent on government for funding as are DHBs and Child, Youth and Family (CYF). However, government does not expect DHBs and CYF to survive without annual inflation increases. While the private sector can grow its income in an expanding economy and therefore remunerate its workforce the NGO sector cannot because in most cases government is our monopoly purchaser. There is a need for recognition of inflation and for government to fund NGOs and have our funding keep pace with growth in the economy.

NGOs remain concerned about their ability to meet rising administration and compliance costs. In a 2004 survey carried out by the Health and Disability Sector NGO Working Group, lack of funding for workforce development and the high cost of contracting and compliance were identified as the two most important issues facing NGOs in the next five years and were seen by many "as being serious enough to threaten their sustainability".⁶

⁴ 'Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community - Government Relationship' 2001, www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/communities-hapu-iwi/community-and-government/statementofintent.html

⁵ www.sfwu.org/index.asp?pageID=2145831143

⁶ Report on NGOs Relationships with the Ministry of Health, Survey conducted October 2004, Stakeholder Report, March 2005:9

- **Child Abuse and the Continued Need for Effective Coordination in Government**

It is of grave concern to NZCCSS that a country like New Zealand continues to have tragically high rates of child maltreatment. For example:

New Zealand ranks 24 out of 27 OCED countries in a UNICEF report on child maltreatment deaths – only Mexico and the United States ranked higher.⁷ There has been no change in rates of abuse and neglect of children over the last 6 years. Younger children and Maori are the most at risk.⁸

A whole-of-government approach to care and protection issues for children and family violence is required. Child, Youth and Family, Police and the Ministries of Social Development, Health, Education and Justice all share outcomes relating to care and protection and need to be working more effectively together.

NZCCSS believes that a framework of ministerial joint responsibility for areas that cross portfolios should be introduced with performance targets for government Chief Executive Officers in their annual agreements with their minister. For example, the Chief Executive Officers of the Ministries of Education and Health could have performance measures about how they contribute to care and protection outcomes for children.

- **Poverty Within Families⁹**

In 2004 approximately 1 in 5 (21%) New Zealand children lived in impoverished households, that is, with incomes below 60% of the 1998 median equivalent disposable family income net of housing costs.

The groups most likely to have low living standards due to low incomes are single parent families, families reliant on income tested benefits, families with dependent children (particularly large families), Maori and Pacific peoples.

Despite an encouraging decline in the proportion of impoverished families in New Zealand (which peaked at 34% in 1994) the proportion of children in low income families remains higher now (21%) than in 1988 (14%).

NZCCSS is concerned that the Working for Families Package of initiatives is doing very little to alleviate poverty for the children whose parents are dependent on the State for their income. The Child Poverty Action Group estimates that 175,000 of New Zealand's poorest children will be left behind and even worse off than before in relative terms.¹⁰

- **Affordable Housing for People on Low Incomes**

NZCCSS believes that good quality and affordable housing should be accessible to all New Zealanders. Housing plays an integral role in family well-being and thus New Zealand society. Inadequate housing has flow-on effects on health, education, use of social services, community participation, violence and abuse. Housing affordability has declined significantly since the 1980s for the lowest income New Zealanders,

⁷ The Social Report 2005:107

⁸ Children and Young People: Indicators of Wellbeing in New Zealand, MSD:6

⁹ The Social Report 2005:64

¹⁰ Cut Price Kids: Does the 2004 Working for Families Budget Work for Children? November 2004:4

both in relation to the cost of home ownership and the cost of renting.¹¹ Families have to devote a large proportion of their income to pay for their housing costs.¹²

A recent survey by the Salvation Army noted that “Homeownership housing policy needs to include low income households... the survey suggests that low income households do aspire to homeownership and its associated tenure and financial security.”¹³

NZCCSS’ Poverty Indicator Project found that “more than 60% of foodbank clients spend greater than 30% of their net income on housing” and “average private rental costs have risen for clients at all foodbanks over [the] four years [of the project].”¹⁴

There is a key role for government to ensure that there is adequacy and affordability of housing for all New Zealanders, both through the direct provision of housing (and income support) and through regulation and strategic oversight of the housing sector.

- **Ageing Population and Care for Older People**

There is well understood and documented evidence in the changing demographics of New Zealand society. For example by 2051, there will be 1.18 million people aged 65 years and over in New Zealand, representing an increase of 165% since 2000.¹⁵

It is also anticipated that there will be further significant changes in community and family structures impacting greatly on the natural supports that people have as they age. A particularly concerning trend is the increasing portion of older people who will have little or no assets or income leaving them potentially vulnerable in a largely market driven service delivery environment.

The composition of the market is changing rapidly with many religious and welfare providers reviewing their role in the market. The inability to cover operating costs from funding levels for subsidised residents in residential care has had a significant impact and resulted in a range of responses from providers from diversification and cross subsidisation, to exit from residential care. NZCCSS retains some concern about the potential impact if there are further member exits from residential care and in particular, who will support vulnerable older people who are not always attractive to commercial enterprise.

A range of innovations have also occurred in community based care with religious and welfare based organisations trying to find solutions to the current home care crisis and deliver viable alternatives for older people who wish to remain in their own homes.

NZCCSS believes that the way service for older people are currently organised and funded shows the lack of value that is placed on older people. When support services are simply seen as another area of health costs that needs to be contained, then older people risk missing out on the support they need, the workforce in aged care ends up being exploited and the Government’s own Health of Older People

¹¹ From Housing to Homes, Salvation Army 2005:5

¹² The Social Report 2005:68

¹³ A Home I Could Own, Salvation Army 2005:22

¹⁴ Poverty Indicator Project: Foodbank Study Final Report, NZCCSS 2005:15

¹⁵ www.vuw.ac.nz/ageing-institute/main.htm

Strategy is undermined.¹⁶ Ironically a desire to contain costs for support services may result in cost blow outs in other more expensive health services.

A continuum of support services should be available for older people that enable the aspirations of the Positive Ageing Strategy to be achieved. Religious and welfare providers have a strong tradition of working with government to develop and implement innovative services which meet local needs. Organisational values and aspirations are often well aligned with government forming a strong basis for useful partnership.

A rapidly ageing population places challenges in front of government and the community. The decisions that are being made now will have a marked impact on New Zealand's future and the support available for people as they age. NZCCSS wishes to positively contribute to discussions and debate that will yield the best answers for our ageing society.

¹⁶ The Landscape of the Aged Care Sector and the Place of Religious and Welfare Providers Discussion Paper, October 2005:1