



A child's potential is a terrible thing to waste. Everyone agrees kids need the right conditions to grow into strong healthy adults. Children thrive when they have the basics: nutritious food; a warm, safe home; medical attention if they are sick and a good education.

Sadly, too many kids in New Zealand don't have the basics. One in five New Zealand children live in poverty – that's about 200,000 Kiwi kids. Furthermore, in many areas, we have become world leaders in the worst outcomes, including

child health and child harm.

One group speaking out on behalf of those children whose meager standard of living compromises their wellbeing, education and ultimately their future is the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).

Formed in 1994 out of a deep concern for raising levels of poverty in NZ and its effects on kids, CPAG is an independent charity working to eliminate child poverty in New Zealand through research, education and advocacy. The guiding principle of CPAG is the right of every child to security, food, shelter, education and healthcare. It is non-partisan and strongly believe caring for children is an ethical and moral issue, not a political one. Its three main functions are to:

1. Undertake independent up to date research on the underlying causes of poverty and its effects on children and their families.



2. Promote social policy for all New Zealand children

3. Support other organisations working to improve the situation of children and young people in New Zealand by providing clear, independent and reliable information.

CPAG has more than 2,000 members and supporters across the country, from all cross sections of society including leading professionals in the health, education and community sectors, as well as ordinary mums and dads who want New Zealand to be a better place for everyone.

What is good for kids is good for society and New Zealand's future. New Zealand is facing a massive demographic shift as its population ages and as baby boomers work fewer hours and require additional and more expensive care. As a nation, New Zealand will need every one of our children to be an educated, well-informed and functioning citizen.

In its latest report, *Left further behind: how policies fail the poorest children in New Zealand*, the organisation reflects on what is required to ensure all children have the resources and opportunities to develop their potential.

This includes an extensive section on education covering early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors.

Another recently released CPAG report, *Hunger for Learning: nutritional barriers*

to children's education shows how necessary it is for schools in low income areas to provide food for their children – brains require actual food as well as information. There is also a great deal of evidence that a good quality breakfast improves children's educational outcomes including test scores, attendance and behaviour. While some children may not like breakfast and others may not have breakfast because their parents, for whatever reason, do not provide it, it is well borne out in international and New Zealand research that the major cause of the lack of an adequate breakfast for young children is, quite simply, poverty.

A popular public perception of child poverty in our country is that it is a symptom of the personal failings of caregivers' particularly beneficiary parents. However, largely missing from these discussions are issues of insecurity in the labour market, income adequacy and other stresses faced by families.

Moreover, poverty is not just an issue for beneficiary families. Food banks and budgeting agencies report that the biggest increase in people seeking assistance is from working families.

Irrespective of the cause, children are not responsible for their poverty and we as a society have a collective responsibility to ensure that all children regardless of circumstances have the best opportunity at school and in life. Any solution requires collective action from families and communities and a commitment from

the government to make investing in our children a top priority.

KidsCan Charitable Trust also champions the cause of combating hunger and disease afflicting our children.

Chief executive Julie Helson says the organisation endorses the call for doctors and nurses to be available in schools, providing free medical intervention to prevent diseases which were effectively eliminated decades ago in most European countries.

"Prevention is by far the most cost effective alternative to expensive treatments and hospitalisation."

She echoes the position of CPAG in saying child poverty should not be just a political football, and everyone who can, should be helping to overcome this serious problem. "New Zealanders contribute \$100 million every year to support children overseas... there are similar needs in our own backyard... which is why KidsCan introduced a New Zealand child sponsorship programme, so that caring Kiwis can support the many other children."

Supported by various sponsors KidsCan provides food, shoes and raincoats for more than 40,000 disadvantaged children in 208 low decile schools across New Zealand with a further 100 schools waiting for similar support. .

For more information visit www.kidscan.org.nz and www.cpag.org.nz