



## NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF NEW ZEALAND

TE KAUNIHERA WAHINE O AOTEAROA

15 August 2012

S12.27

### **Submission to the Social Services Committee on the Families Commission Amendment Bill**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organization representing 47 nationally organized societies and national members. It has 22 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies as well as individual members. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Family Affairs Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee drawing on previous submissions and established NCWNZ policy.

#### **Introduction**

NCWNZ has a long history of promoting legislation that improves outcomes for children and their families. While it is recognized that in general, strengthening families will benefit children, NCWNZ has some reservations about this bill, namely that children's needs and rights could take second place to those of their parents or caregivers. We strongly support the statement "the best interests of the children must remain paramount."

Families are the very heart of our community, made up of different generations and different cultures. All families have their own aspirations and expectations about what families should or should not do, but the core functions that families have in common are nurturing, rearing, educating and protecting children.

#### **Clause 5 – Amending Section 7 - Commission's main functions**

In the 2003 NCWNZ submission (S03.56) on the Families Commission Bill, some members held reservations based on the impetus for the establishment of the Commission i.e. the need to accommodate a coalition partner. Others were concerned that the effectiveness of the Commission would depend upon the powers accorded it, i.e. the degree to which it would have "teeth".

Many respondents believed the Commission should work closely with the Commissioner for Children, as well as other government and non-government agencies.

NCWNZ members support the new function of providing independent monitoring and evaluation of programmes and interventions across the social sector, and research into key issues, programmes, and interventions across that sector, with the key word being 'independent'.

In 2009 the OCED suggested the framework on which monitoring of 'better outcomes for children's health outcomes' could be based. That same framework could apply to families' health:

- Invest early in children's lives
- Concentrate on improving the lot of vulnerable children
- Design interventions for children that reinforce positive developments across their life cycle and across a range of well-being outcomes
- Regularly collect high quality information on children's well-being, that is nationally and internationally comparable
- Continuously experiment with policies and programmes for children, rigorously evaluating them to see whether they enhance children's well-being, and reallocating money from programmes that don't work - to those that do.

### **Clause 6 – Amending Section 8 - Commission's additional functions**

(3) "(ba) to prepare and publish an annual Families Status Report that measures and monitors the well-being of New Zealand families":

This will be a substantial piece of work and will require a large proportion of the resources available to the Commission. While NCWNZ supports this additional function, we are concerned that it could mean a reduction in resources for the main function of acting as an advocate for the interests of families generally.

### **Clause 8A Commission's monitoring, evaluation, and research function**

NCWNZ supports this new clause. With the setting up of the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (SuPERU), high quality monitoring and evaluation of how effective initiatives are in addressing key issues across the social sector, will be an advantage to families.

In the 2003 NCWNZ submission S03.15 under the heading "Functions of the Commission", it was stated that NCWNZ supports the proposed primary function being one of advocacy on behalf of families. It is important to ensure the Commission retains a certain independence from government in order to effectively carry out its role of scrutinising government policy.

There is no single approach to improving and strengthening family's functionality - action across a range of fronts is required. Knowing what to invest in requires good information, evidence and analysis. There is support for reviewing existing programmes, so that funding for programmes that are not working can be directed into programmes that are working. Research and evaluation needs to be independent of Government policies and agendas.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion to NCWNZ submission S03.56 is just as relevant today as it was in 2003: "While NCWNZ acknowledges the changing shape of the New Zealand family, and its increasing diversity in forms, values, and cultures represented, we uphold the principle that the family is the social foundation of our society and needs to be protected as such. Our children are best raised in their own families, so it is vitally important that families are supported socially and financially to carry out their roles and responsibilities toward their children and to the community. Our children are our future, so an investment in the well-being of our children is an investment in our future as a nation".

We hope that the changes to the Families Commission, together with the additional functions, will provide more robust and effective measures across the social sector. Investment in programmes that are working well, will do something meaningful to lift the

standard for so many New Zealand families. These programmes will need the assurance of cross party support and a long term commitment, so that the public investment in strengthening families 'does make a difference'.

Elizabeth Bang  
National President

Billa Field  
Convener, Family Affairs Standing Committee