



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to Treasury on the RFI:
How can government improve results for our most vulnerable (at-risk)
children and their families?**

Part 1: Our contact details and response summary

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What geographical location does your response relate to?	New Zealand
What group of people or issues is your response targeted towards?	The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 288 organisations affiliated at either the national level or to one of our 21 branches. In addition to our organisational membership, about 260 women are individual members of branches. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action. This discussion document has been prepared by the Family Affairs Standing Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.
Does your response relate to a new service or modification of existing services?	Modification of existing services.

Part 2: Our RFI response

A: What works best to identify and engage the children and their families most at-risk of poor education, criminal justice and employment outcomes?

In its submission in 2013 to the Vulnerable Children's Bill 150-1, the responding NCWNZ members supported the measures outlined in Clause 6 of the Bill for improving the well-being of vulnerable children provided that there are concrete plans of action, which included enhancing and supporting existing and effective policies with adequate funding. The Bill listed these measures:

- a) protecting them from abuse and neglect;
- b) improving their physical and mental health and their cultural and emotional well-being;
- c) improving their education and training and their participation in recreation and cultural activities;
- d) strengthening their connection to their families, whānau, hapū, and iwi, or other culturally recognised family group;
- e) increasing their participation in decision making about them, and their contribution to society;
- f) improving their social and economic well-being.

With continued support these supporting agencies can continue to work towards improving outcomes for these families and those who do not currently meet the required 'status' of being classed as a vulnerable family. At present there is no definition of who are vulnerable families/children except under Clause 7 so defining who are vulnerable families/children would go some way to working towards identifying and engaging a wider need.

C: What issues or problems are not currently being addressed that increase the risks to some children of not achieving in education or employment?

The level of income in households is a major factor for some. To rise above the perceived poverty line, incomes needed to be increased and a living wage for all employed people is an economic necessity. Household income should be sufficient to cover everyday items such as mortgages/rents, food, petrol, power and education.

Longer working hours and the high cost of everyday items is driving a wedge between families as less time is spent parenting children as both parents are required to work and children spend more time with paid carers than they do with their own parents. One way members saw to enable parents to spend more time with their children was to reintroduce the Universal Child Allowance so one parent could work part time and be able to be home before and after school for their children.

Members believed that more education is needed for those who immigrate to adjust to New Zealand cultural ways, while still having their cultures acknowledged and understood

by the New Zealand population.

Providing healthy, safe, affordable housing to low income families. Getting landlords to maintain their properties so those renting them can remain healthy. Having an economic rental standard and enforcing a maintenance standard. The cost of rentals is a large proportion of the income for low income families. This combined with the substandard state of some rental properties is seen as a major contributor to children's health outcomes today having a negative impact on their ability to thrive and learn.

Having faster response times to reported cases of children at risk. Reducing the time it takes to remove children from situations which continue to escalate and threaten their well-being.

Employment opportunities, access to transport, access to medical care all need to be considered, especially in rural areas.

Increase the home visits for Public Health Nurses / Midwives / Social Workers.

D: What new interventions, services or arrangements could make the biggest difference for at-risk children and their families?

Accepting a 'One size fits all' mentality is not effective. Any solution needs to take into account all the differing localised conditions. More community-based solutions need to be acknowledged and supported. Examples include agencies who support Special Needs children and teenagers.

Programmes need long term sustainable funding. Providers need to report on the effectiveness of their interventions.

Rae Duff
National President

Belinda Greenwood
Convener, Family Affairs Standing Committee