Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand:

What you told us

Report on the feedback to the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on Solutions to Child Poverty:

Issues and Options Paper for Consultation

December 2012

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1. Background and Purpose

1.   The Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty (EAG) was established in March 2012 by the Children's Commissioner, Dr Russell Wills. The EAG drew together the best available local and international evidence on child poverty and related issues, including actions taken in similar countries and used this to develop a package of proposals to reduce child poverty and mitigate its effects. The EAG's initial thinking was outlined in an *Issues and Options Paper* released in August 2012 (and available at http://www.occ.org.nz).

2.   The EAG sought feedback by 12 October 2012 on the proposed solutions to child poverty outlined in the *Issues and Options Paper* through meetings, hui and workshops in communities across the country, emailed comments or formal submissions; and an online survey. The EAG also requested the Office of the Children's Commissioner to consult with children so that their views could be included.

3.   The purpose of consulting on the *Issues and Options Paper* was to find out whether the proposals identified to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty would work for New Zealand and in our communities, identify any gaps and get a sense of the priorities for action. The feedback informed decisions on priorities and recommendations in the EAG's final report, to be released in December 2012.

4.   This Report synthesises the feedback received. It does not represent the views of the EAG.

5.   This Report begins with a description of the process for getting feedback, how much was received, and how it was analysed. The body of this Report then describes the feedback received.

2. Feedback and Analysis Process

Providing feedback

6. The *Issues and Options Paper* posed the following questions as a guide to respondents:

    - Which proposals will be effective in reducing child poverty?
    - Which proposals are less likely to be effective?
    - What are the most important proposals to reduce child poverty?
    - What needs to be done first and why?
    - What is missing from the package?

7. Individuals and groups provided feedback to these questions in a number of ways:

Consulting with children and young people:

8. Specific consultations were held with children and young people from seven high deprivation areas. Eight consultations were held involving almost 300 children and young people aged between 9 and 24 years representing a mix of Pasifika, Māori and other ethnic groups. The process and questions used were ethics approved, and focused on what children and young people thought would make the most difference.

Consulting with communities:

9. Twenty meetings and hui were held across the country from Northland to the South. Consultations included large seminars and meetings in regional centres. Specific hui and fono were held with Māori and Pasifika groups and other ethnic minorities. Numbers at meetings ranged from eight to more than 200 people. An estimated 1,200 individuals attended meetings and shared their views. Participants represented a diverse mix of New Zealanders, including: community and church leaders; health, education and social services professionals; local government; advocates; academics and university students; Māori, Pasifika and people from other ethnic groups. Young people also participated in some community consultations.

Free form written submissions:

6. 234 individuals and organisations provided feedback ranging from longer, researched submissions to short emails. Many submissions represented the views of constituent member organisations and service delivery groups. Submissions which included identifying information were categorised into the following groups:

Table 1: Free form written submissions

Submission category	Number	Description
General public	80	Individuals from a range of backgrounds, but not representing or affiliated with any sector or organisation.
Non-government organisations (NGOs)	50	Mix of advocacy and umbrella groups, community groups, service providers, disability-specific, Māori and Pasifika organisations. Many represented large memberships, and some agencies also consulted with children to inform their submissions (e.g. one agency consulted with 150 children).
Health sector	44	Mix of District Health Boards, Primary Health Organisations, professional organisations, regional and community health provider agencies, individual practitioners and researchers.
Education sector	18	Mix of principals, teachers, Boards of Trustees, professional organisations, sector-based unions.
Faith-based	16	Umbrella faith groups, churches and faith-based social service groups and communities/organisations including Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Bahai, New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services. Many were aligned with social services delivery.
Government	5	Local and central government.
Miscellaneous	21	Unions, Judiciary, academic, business, philanthropic, political parties, young people.
Total submissions	**234**	

Web-based survey:

10. One hundred individuals responded to the web-based survey. They provided detailed responses to the five open-ended questions. Comments generally related to key themes and have been incorporated into the analysis of themes. Personal identification and affiliation was voluntary, and all responses are treated anonymously in the summary.

How feedback was analysed

11. The feedback came in differing forms with differing levels of detail. Some respondents closely aligned their feedback to the five questions asked, while many did not. This presented a particular challenge in analysing the feedback.

12. **Notes were taken at all the community group consultation sessions:** The notes tended to document key points and themes, but not verbatim feedback. As these were group discussions, they tended to be very rich in content. These notes were analysed for key themes, points of agreement and points of disagreement. Key points across all consultation events were aggregated.

13. **All submissions were separately reviewed:** A database of all submissions was compiled with a unique identifier and key descriptors such as type of group (e.g. general public, health or education sector, Māori or Pasifika, children and young people). These categories were used to test if there were similarities or differences across the types of submitters. A high level content analysis was completed on each submission, and themes identified.

14. **Survey responses:** These were grouped by each of the five questions and a theme analysis was completed.

15. **Bringing it all together:** The various ideas from the consultations, submissions and on-line survey were grouped into categories, with the frequency of ideas noted. A set of broad themes was then finalised which were structured into an overall framework. Key themes and proposals were ranked by most frequent to least frequently agreed, disagreed, cautions, and new ideas and recommendations. The process enabled descriptions of common themes, ideas and comments and the overall congruence or divergence on these. Where possible, analysis was completed across stakeholder groupings, locations, key issues and support/non-support/require changes/non-committal with respect to matters covered in the *Issues and Options Paper* and other relevant issues. Quotes were selected to demonstrate particular findings and are incorporated throughout this Report.

16. The analysis did not measure the precise level of support expressed for the various proposals. For example, some submissions were made on behalf of large groups while others represented one individual's views. This report describes the general level of agreement or support for key ideas, but have not attempted to attribute any statistical measure.

17. **The children's consultation:** The analysis of the children's consultation was done separately. While a summary is presented in this Report, further information on the approach and findings is provided in Our Views Matter: Children and young people talk about poverty, which is available at www.occ.org.nz. Children also provided submissions and participated in community consultations. These views have been incorporated in the overall feedback, as described above.

18. **Quality assurance:** An independent policy specialist was commissioned to undertake further analysis. The approach and methodology was peer reviewed, as was the summary of submissions. The submissions report was also submitted to the EAG for review. These review processes provide for a level of confidence in the accuracy of the data, summary of themes and ideas.

3. Summary of feedback

19. The feedback received was thoughtful, informative and provided innovative ideas and comments. Some, particularly those describing individual experiences of poverty, provided distressing but motivating illustrations of the need for action.

20. Overall, the feedback received was very positive and generally supportive of the proposed solutions presented in the *Issues and Options Paper*. There was a high degree of congruence across the submissions. In addition, the written submissions, survey respondents and meeting participants all added constructive ideas on how to refine the solutions, expressed their priority recommendations for action, and provided numerous examples of local activities that demonstrated how communities are currently implementing aspects of the proposed community-based solutions.

21. Almost all submissions congratulated and thanked the EAG on the comprehensive approach to addressing child poverty and mentioned the importance and urgency in addressing the issue of child poverty in New Zealand.

22. Priority actions: There was a high level of agreement across all feedback on the following priority actions:

- Improve accountability mechanisms for addressing child poverty, through the enactment of legislation (e.g. a Children's Act) to formalise the process of setting targets to reduce child poverty, monitor progress, and report results.

- Strengthen the income and the tax-benefit system by introducing a Child Payment and undertaking an independent review of all child-related benefit rates.
- Pass-on child support payments to custodial parents who receive a sole-parent benefit.
- Establish a Warrant of Fitness for all rental properties.
- Provide food-in-schools to help hungry children.

23. A summary of the views on priorities are incorporated in the analysis against themes in Section 5 of this Paper. Section 4, provides a summary of the children's views, *Our Views Matter: Children and young people talk about poverty*.

4. Summary of *'Our Views Matter'*

24. Children can and want to be involved in the solutions to child poverty.

25. The consultation with children sought their views and experience of poverty and social exclusion and their ideas about solutions. This supports Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) especially:

    - The right to express a view 'freely in all matters affecting them' – afforded to all children 'capable of forming a view'.
    - The right to have the views given due weight – 'in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.

26. Between August and September 2012, Michelle Egan-Bitran, Senior Advisor with the Office of the Children's Commissioner, led a consultation process that involved 278 children and young people (including 10 young parents) aged between 9 to 24 years living in low socioeconomic communities throughout New Zealand. Facilitated discussions were held with children and young people from Auckland, Lower Hutt, Nelson, Porirua, and Whangarei. In addition to these facilitated discussions, formal submissions were also received from young people.

27. The consultation with children and young people focused on children's everyday experience of poverty, and the measures they think should be taken at a local and national level to improve children's lives now, and eradicate child poverty in the longer-term.

28. The overarching message was that children and young people want to be involved in developing solutions to child poverty and can provide a unique perspective on how to reduce child poverty and support the well-being of children living in poverty.

29. The main themes children and young people spoke about were in relation to housing, family, social connections, education and health. A synopsis of their views and suggestions follows here.

Housing

30. Children raised housing as a primary concern. They spoke about damp and cold houses, the cost of housing, and of families not being able to afford to pay for power, hot water or heating. All of the groups made the link between poor, unstable, and inadequate housing, and poor health.

    No money – given the dumb houses, the broken down ones. Broken down and you would feel unhappy, whakama.

    Get sick 'cause it's cold – can't afford heating.

31. The overwhelming message from the children was the need for better quality, insulated, warm homes that are affordable to heat. The children told us that there is a need for 'stricter rules' for rental properties.

32. Children and young people also spoke about overcrowded housing, including lack of privacy, arguments and tensions which affect family relationships, and difficulty in doing their homework.

    Less and smaller house, smaller environment, squashed – affects your health – brings you down mentally and physically.

    Need space for everyone and privacy.   Need a place to study.

33. The impact of insecure and unstable housing was also raised, including the stress and upheaval associated with children leaving their friends and their schools. The children and young people spoke of the importance of stable and secure housing, child and family-centred decision-making, and of children and communities being consulted and kept informed in any decisions made affecting their lives.

    When housing is stable my future is stable.

Role of family

34. Family is key in ensuring children have a good childhood. Children spoke of needing love, support, encouragement and guidance from their families. Children valued doing things together as a family and having fun. They recognised that poverty can impact negatively on family, and spoke of stress, possible tensions and arguments as a result of living conditions and the impact this has on family relationships. Some children spoke of having to take on more responsibility within their families in order for their parents to work. This resulted in them sometimes feeling overwhelmed and unable to focus on their education.

    Eldest having to play PARENTAL – due to parents at work.

    School drop outs to provide for family, unable to further education due to responsibilities, work.

35. Many of the children called for the government to create 'decent' jobs for adults to help families get out of poverty, and two groups called for higher benefit rates recognising that not all parents could work and provide for their families. Children also felt that the government should try and ensure that food, public transport, power, cars and petrol, education and rent are made more affordable. In addition to a fairer distribution of money and resources, children talked about the need to create greater equality through addressing power differentials and negative stereotypes about people living in poverty.

    They [children who don't have much money] don't have as many opportunities as more privileged kids. Kids get beaten down by negative stereotypes that they can't achieve as much. There needs to be more publicity around the good things kids are doing, more

positive messages about children and young people need to be shown. Kids need to be encouraged to help them think positively. Perhaps programmes are needed to help this.

They [The Prime Minister and Government] need to break down the barriers rather than taking a divide and conquer approach where they support the one percent. They need to look after the whole and make sure that everyone has what they need. They need to show some empathy and compassion. Maybe New Zealanders need to have more empathy and compassion.

36. Finally, children and young people spoke of the need for more information and support for children and their families, including life skills and budgeting courses for parents.

Just cos people are poor doesn't mean they can't be strong. Support from your family and supporting families helps.

Social connections

37. The ability to make and sustain good friendships and take part in social activities is vital to children's sense of belonging and their well-being. For the majority of the children in this consultation, being picked on, bullying and social exclusion were significant issues. In addition to being mocked or bullied by other children, they spoke of feeling judged. Children and young people are often fearful about being singled out or being seen as different and not part of the group.

Don't think the worst of us. We can achieve a lot with a little bit of support and encouragement. People think just because you're from [name of place] you're no good, your trouble but we've got lots of ideas, energy, gifts and talents.

Don't look down on them. Everyone is equal. We have the same potential as everyone else. Don't put barriers in front of us and don't leave us in the ditch. Help and support us, our families and communities. How can they [the Government] expect us to look after this place, New Zealand, in the future if they are looking down on us now.

38. Many children said that poverty limits their opportunities for leisure and community activities. They spoke of 'trying to interact with family and friends' but 'not being able to relate with people around you' because of an inability to take part in the same social and leisure activities. This was due to a range of reasons including the cost of fees, entry or membership fees, and transport as well as the added costs of uniforms or sports clothing and equipment.

39. Being part of a safe, connected and supportive community was seen as contributing to a good childhood. However, a number of groups depicted parks and playgrounds as unsafe, degraded and hostile, having to negotiate a range of risks, including broken glass. They experienced parks as 'scary places' and many had either experienced or witnessed aggression, drunkenness or harassment by adults or gangs of older youths.

Safe playgrounds – no violence, no drinking, no youth gangs and clean.

40.   Children spoke of the importance of parks being safe and accessible, and needing more leisure, social, and cultural activities in their neighbourhoods. Children would like their local councils to do more for children. They asked that local councils provide more free activities and facilities, that they look after their parks and playgrounds and that they work with others to make them safe and accessible places. They stressed that children and young people should be included in planning the facilities and activities.

Listen to people (us and local adults) instead of doing what they want.

Education and health

41.   Schools were seen by the children as places which have the potential to improve the well-being of children experiencing poverty and disadvantage. They saw education as key to getting a good job and escaping poverty. They also recognised the importance of having affordable quality childcare and after-school programmes available so that their parents can work. The children talked about the importance of having parents, teachers and other adults encouraging their educational aspirations. They also spoke of the need for more support to access higher education through grants and scholarships and supporting transition to work through incentives such as free transportation. Teen parents talked about the importance of being supported to gain qualifications while pregnant. Teen Parent Units that brought services to the students were seen as positive, overcoming transport difficulties.

42.   Negative views of school centred again on being picked on, bullied and socially excluded. Children spoke of barriers to education and inclusion such as costs of textbooks, stationery, uniforms, school trips and sporting activities. Children also recognised the increasing impact of technology, especially access to computers and phones to increase social connectedness and contribute to their school work. One primary school child talked about the lack of access to technology

'Computerism' – disadvantaged because you don't have a computer – not able to get the same as others or what you need.

43.   The children and young people consulted also raised concerns about the cost of healthcare and medicine, difficulties accessing healthcare, and hunger and food insecurity. Children said that the cost of some medicines means that poor children and their families will often go without treatment. The children and young people called for free primary health care to be extended to all children to age 17 inclusive. A number of the groups also suggested that social services and health services, including medical, dental and social services, be located within schools.

Better knowledge of resources/access to contraception, should happen through school.

Free check-ups – medical check-ups come to school! School dental care.

Free dentist and doctors in school grounds for the whole family.

44. A common theme across all of the discussion groups was hunger and the lack of nutritional food.

   Kids get mocked, sometimes kids tease kids who don't have lunch or breakfast.

   Kids asking for food, beggars in [name of place].

   Scavenging for food just to eat for a night.

45. The children spoke of the importance of food-in-school initiatives so that children are not hungry and can focus and achieve at school. They stressed the importance of children being involved in the design and delivery of such programmes so that they are inclusive and do not cause shame. Finally, many children called for schools to act as community hubs.

   School is one of the most important places in your life, the schools could provide financial advice for the parents – or provide a space for services to work with families – or direction to parents on the services available.

5. What you told us: Feedback on the *Issues and Options Paper*

46. This section summarises the results of the analysis of the consultation feedback. Overall results indicated a high level of support across respondent groups for the recommendations, with many suggestions for refinements and ideas for how to operationalise some of the actions.

47. Whether it was a community consultation, a web-based survey or a detailed submission, the overall themes that emerged were similar and there was a high level of congruence with our initial proposals in the *Issues and Options Paper*.

48. The main themes are organised within the following headings:

   - Accountability and strategy for addressing child poverty
   - Income support and employment (including benefit payments and tax credits; child support; employment and training; budgeting and debt)
   - Housing
   - Māori
   - Pasifika and other ethnic and religious minorities
   - People with disabilities
   - Health
   - Education
   - Community
   - The role of parents
   - Social inclusion.

Accountability and strategy for addressing child poverty

49. There was very strong support for the enactment of legislation (e.g. a Children's Act). Respondents noted that legislation would 'signal a cultural shift to value our children'.

50. The majority of submissions agreed that the legislation should include child poverty measures, targets and regular monitoring requirements.

51. Respondents agreed that embedding accountability mechanisms into legislation would ensure the continued focus on addressing child poverty in New Zealand, beyond electoral cycles. Numerous respondents referred to this as 'de-politicising' the child poverty issue.

> *Introducing legislation to embed agreed solutions to child poverty into the framework of health, education, welfare, housing, justice and employment policy is the most important proposal to deal with reduction [of child poverty] and meet targets to achieve a low level of child poverty.*

52. Nearly half of the respondents emphasised the importance of using a child rights rationale to drive actions to reduce child poverty. Respondents referred to New Zealand's responsibilities as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC).

> *In my view it is important for the final report to put more emphasis on children's rights as codified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by New Zealand in 1993, and our government's obligation to implement these rights.*

> *Have we been too easy on government appealing to social good, long term economic payoff etc? Are there legal obligations such as UNCROC rights that have not been delivered?*

53. A dissenting view considered legislation would be *'time consuming and bureaucratic'* when children needed immediate help. These respondents considered that actions to provide affordable and healthy housing, nutrition, and adequate income should take precedence over the enactment of legislation.

Child poverty measures, targets and monitoring

54. There was strong support for a comprehensive set of income and deprivation measures, targets and monitoring. They were seen as an integral part of accountability.

> *I think the most important proposal is the one concerning monitoring, together with a commitment in law to reducing child poverty. We need to know exactly what the problem is, how many kids are suffering, and how well the various measures are doing in making their lives better, and their futures brighter.*

55. Some suggested measures of inequality also be included. Others suggested the UN Millennium Development Goals may be relevant. Others argued that measurement of

poverty relative to income is not an adequate measure of a family's ability to meet children's basic needs.

56. While agreeing with the intent to set targets, there was a call for more ambitious targets, including shortening the timeframes to achieve these. Others called for regular publishing of monitoring results. One suggested a single easily understood target.

57. There was support from some respondents for specific indicators for Māori and Pasifika and for children with disabilities. One submission proposed a *'life chances indicators'* approach in support of child and family well-being.

58. Some questioned what intersectoral targets would look like, and which agency would be responsible for undertaking work on measures, monitoring and targets.

Minister and Ministry for Children

59. There were many comments calling for a Minister for Children and fewer for a Ministry for Children. There were some observations about the lack of champions for children at the governmental level and that a Minister and Ministry for Children would enable greater co-ordination and accountability for outcomes across government departments. Others saw the need for a Minister for Families, positioning the needs of the child within the wider needs of the family.

Child impact analysis of Government legislation and policy

60. About one-quarter of submissions recommended that child impact assessment be required for all proposed government policies and initiatives prior to their implementation. A few referenced recent changes in the benefit system and the impact that these changes may have on children.

> *We should put all legislation through a test whereby the question is asked – how will this affect kids.*

> *Require through legislation all tax, benefit and employment support decisions be accompanied by a Child Impact Assessment.*

Investment approach

61. Almost all respondents strongly supported the investment rationale to focus support toward the early years. However, some respondents argued that the final report should include a greater emphasis on providing supports to adolescents since early adolescence is also a critical developmental period. These respondents also cautioned that funding for young children and adolescents could become scarce during times of limited resources.

62. Some respondents contested the largely economic focus of the EAG approach, particularly the emphasis placed on employment, and said that this needed to be adequately balanced against the needs of the child.

Balancing parenting with work

63. There was some discussion about how the *Issues and Options Paper* defined 'work' . Many respondents commented on the importance of balancing parenting as 'unpaid work' against 'paid work', particularly for sole-parents.

   *The report is concerned almost exclusively with **material** deprivation. Our experience, again gained over more than twenty years, is that a significant minority of New Zealand children are also suffering from other forms of deprivation. …[such as] deprivation of parental time.*

   Meaningful, adequately paid employment is a pathway out of poverty but not all employment is meaningful nor adequately paid, nor is all employment suitable (working conditions, work hours, travel times) when caring for children. We need to value and acknowledge the vital role of parenting and count it as work. Sole-parents already do the work of two – to dismiss that contribution is insulting.

   The solution must be two-fold: meaningful, adequately paid employment AND state support for all families to ensure a minimum standard of living that enables all children to have adequate resources and support for a healthy life.

Integrated strategy

64. Numerous respondents expressed the view that the *Issues and Options Paper* tended to silo the actions required to reduce child poverty. They urged that the final report emphasise the need for a whole-of-government, well co-ordinated set of complementary actions to reduce child poverty and its effects. They cautioned that anything less would be ineffective.

   Proposals that deal only with immediate, presenting issues in isolation and fail to address the longer term, fundamental causes underpinning child poverty (and noted by the EAG) are not likely to have a significant, long-term effect on reducing poverty. There is some risk of exacerbating the situation and failing to break the cycle of the poverty trap through short-term, quick fix interventions that are not reinforced by a comprehensive, long-term plan for addressing all the causes of poverty.

Evaluation and research

65. Feedback regarding evaluation and research was limited. The comments made reinforced the consultation document's contention that new policies and programmes must be evidence-informed and rigorously evaluated. Respondents expressed concern about the lack of investment in evaluation and research.

   Future investment can be strengthened by evidence-based reviews of current programmes.

   Evidence-based …is a term which has become debased in meaning and I would like to have seen a hard-nosed definition of what the group considers qualifies as evidence.

Politicians have no real idea what it means and use it loosely to cover things that they are doing which are not evidence-based.

Income support and employment

66. This section includes feedback related to income (i.e. benefit support or tax credits, child support payments, and paid work) and concludes with feedback on proposed actions to help families reduce their debt.

Income, tax, and benefits

67. There was very strong support for establishing a Child Payment. Additional priorities for action were to conduct an independent review of all child-related benefit rates and pass-on child support payments to sole-parent beneficiaries.

Universal Child Payment

68. The majority of respondents favoured establishing a universal payment for all children, with the highest payment during infancy and decreasing as children get older. A small minority of respondents preferred that the payment be targeted to children living below a specified income threshold, rather than to all children.

69. Some respondents suggested that this be termed a 'short-term' or 'young child' universal payment recognising that the universality of the payment is time-limited.

> *We consider that the universal child payment is the most fundamental and obvious action, as it addresses both immediate short-term consequences as well as the longer term causes. This payment could be targeted to some extent by making it taxable, so that higher income families get proportionally less. It is interesting to compare this proposal with the universal superannuation, intended to ensure that no elderly person will live in poverty. Why can't the same principle apply to children? One sector, the elderly, is well catered for but not the equally or even more vulnerable young child sector. This is quite inconsistent with our principles of fairness and social equity.*

> *Universality is essential to ensure that the benefit is signalled as an entitlement rather than a hand-out and over time continues to be perceived as such and therefore retained in sufficient amount. The entitlement arises from the value we as a society place on children and the responsibility of raising them. The cost is small and the benefit great.*

70. Many agreed that the current system is complex and administratively costly. The system needs to be simplified, starting with the premise that all families must have an income they can live on.

71. The very small number of submissions that expressed disagreement with providing a universal Child Payment were concerned that the payment may have the unintended consequence of incentivising families to have more children. Others sought clarification that the payment would include grandparents and other relatives who are primary caregivers.

> *Grandparents are caring for a lot of kids but don't get the support being provided to the parents or child support payments.*

72. Some respondents supported a combined universal and targeted approach.

> *In our experience a universal income support payment is the most acceptable and effective way to pay child support income. If people are concerned that wealthy parents should receive the payment, it could be a progressive universal payment.*

73. Others called for faster implementation of a universal Child Payment.

> *[We] support the introduction of a universal Child Payment but believe it should be implemented immediately rather than delayed until the long-term. This is because further (even if improved) targeting of current child-related payments risks: a) some families missing out due to lack of information or distrust of approaching government and b) further stigmatisation of poverty, which is already significant in New Zealand.*

Independent review of all child-related benefit rates

74. There was very strong support for the EAG proposal calling for a review of the child-related benefit levels and their interaction with each other. Some noted that a review of the system needed to include consideration of benefit adequacy, and related policies such as the abatement regime.

> *I agree such a review is desirable but its terms of reference should not be about 'an income support perspective' and 'encouraging gainful parental employment' as is proposed here but be based on the primary aim of ensuring each child's needs are met. Strangely enough, this would be a novel perspective. We have already had reviews such as the 2010 Rebstock review with terms of reference that are primarily about reducing benefit costs, encouraging paid employment and raising productivity but essentially unrelated to children's needs.*

75. A minority of respondents recommended that the review consider whether a voucher system could be a more effective way to ensure children's material well-being needs were met. For example, government should consider the feasibility of providing payment cards, food stamps or payment made directly to schools for fees, uniforms, school trips, stationery and after-school care.

Pass-on child support

76. There was overwhelming support for the proposal to pass-on child support to the custodial parent. This was viewed as an efficient and pragmatic way to get more income to children that need it most.

77. Respondents commented on the potential to encourage non-custodial parents to pay support to their children:

In our view, parents should absolutely be able to care financially for their own children and the purpose of child support payments is just that, to pay for child support – not to further exacerbate the child poverty issue by diverting payments into a surplus fund, trapping sole-parents into a life of welfare dependency and stress. … We very much agree with the EAG that the whole amount of these payments from the secondary care-giver should go directly to the main-care parent.

78. There was also support for the proposal that the government guarantee child support payments by underwriting the payments so that delays in payment would not cause hardship for children.

Minimum wage

79. A significant number of respondents emphasised the importance of families having a 'living wage', whether it is through paid employment or through benefits. Some noted that policies were *'pitting beneficiaries against the working poor.'*

80. Many comments recommended *'ensure[ing] minimum income levels are set at levels which enable families to afford the basics'.* Some noted that income disparity was increasing and that even families with two employed adults are finding it hard to budget due to low wages and the high cost of living. Others noted that some school age children now had to find work to help supplement the family income.

    Parents need a liveable income for their families. [There are] too few jobs that pay a liveable wage.

    [There is a lack of] government policy to create sufficient well paid employment, but [New Zealand] has created the low wage economy, high unemployment, and [this] encourages wide income discrepancy.

    Jobs must produce better wages and conditions so that single mums can go to work and know that they can afford to pay the rent, buy food and clothes for their children.

Family Tax Credit and In-Work Tax Credit

81. Analysis of feedback identified mixed views on the EAG Family Tax Credit and the In-Work Tax Credit proposals. Some agreed with implementing incremental changes to the Family Tax Credit and raising the rates (particularly for young children). Others highlighted the increased costs during adolescence and the need to ensure that older children's needs are adequately met.

    Improvements from 2004 to 2008 have been attributed to the Government's Working for Families package which was designed to support low to middle class families with dependent children. We would therefore support the proposals to change Family Tax Credit rates to give more money to families with young children or more than one child.

82. Some disagreed with the EAG proposal to raise the Family Tax Credit. These respondents preferred replacing it with an extension of the In-Work Tax Credit to beneficiary families and those working part-time. They suggested that this would only be marginally more expensive and be targeted to those families with the greatest need. The In-Work Tax Credit was considered by a number of respondents to be inequitable and discriminatory for children whose parents are not employed.

> *Extend the In-Work Tax Credit to beneficiary families and those who do not presently meet the 20 hours per week work test and ensure it is indexed to inflation so its real value does not erode over time.*

Access to information about entitlements

83. Comments received primarily through community consultation channels were in favour of government providing more accessible information to the public about entitlements. There was support for more easily understandable (plain language) information about entitlements and more ways to find information and request advice.

> *Government needs to provide more accessible and plain language information about the benefits people are entitled to – many people don't know the right questions to ask, are embarrassed to ask, don't use written material well, don't have internet, websites not user friendly.*

> *Work and Income needs to check that all clients are receiving all of their entitlements. Many whānau don't know what they are entitled to and this information has not been forthcoming from Work and Income.*

> *Stop using stigmatising language in government documents and services.*

> *Provision of Independent Welfare Rights Advocacy services to support full up-take of entitlements.*

84. Feedback included support for the proposal to provide incentives to Work and Income and the Inland Revenue Department to ensure adequate up-take of benefits.

> *Clients of government agencies (e.g. WINZ, Housing New Zealand) can immediately be informed of the full range of income support and tax entitlements to ensure that they are accessing all of the assistance packages due. It will require a shift in agency practice, commonly reported by clients, of responding to what clients ask for, to informing them of what they are entitled to and can apply for. i.e. from – 'if they don't ask don't tell' approach to a position of genuine assistance and support.*

Work and Income board

85. There was general agreement with the proposal to immediately appoint someone with expertise in child well-being to the Work and Income governance board.

> *The Work and Income Board can immediately recruit a member with specialist expertise in child rights, well-being and development.*

Wider tax issues

86. A number of respondents noted wider tax issues that they felt needed to be addressed as part of the solutions to child poverty. These included changes to the tax structure to reduce taxes or provide tax breaks for low-income families, GST exemption on food, and capital gains tax on investment property.

87. Those recommending a capital gains tax stated that the income generated from the tax could be reinvested to reduce child poverty. In addition, this change in tax policy could trigger significant changes in the housing market that were viewed as beneficial (e.g. having some investors sell their rental properties could put downward pressure on house prices, and these houses could shift back to being low-income owner-occupied.)

88. A small number of submissions recommended revoking the reduction in the minimum wage for youth.

> *We note increasing reports of children working not just for pocket money but to provide a necessary addition to household income.. [International Labour Organisation and UNCROC standards] should be used as benchmarks for measuring progress in this area.*

Training and employment

89. An issue raised at nearly all consultation events and expressed across a range of submissions was the importance of job creation in local communities. Respondents felt more needed to be done by government to provide jobs. Respondents also called for more family-friendly employers and workplaces to enable parents, especially sole-parents and families where a disability features, to maintain employment.

Work, labour market and (re) entry into employment

90. Many commented on the current state of the labour market and the availability of work, particularly in provincial areas. Some commented on the need for an employment strategy to generate jobs, while others proposed suggestions such as reinvesting revenue from a capital gains tax to job creation initiatives. Some disagreed with the current focus on reducing employment regulation, noting that New Zealand was already one of the least regulated labour markets. Others suggested non-tariff barriers to re-establish domestic manufacturing jobs.

91. Youth unemployment was highlighted as a concern among a small number of respondents. Feedback from Christchurch submissions described the specific opportunities available to engage young people in meaningful, fair-wage employment.

> *… the city [Christchurch] could have zero youth unemployment. There are opportunities for people to work in entry level positions where the employer provides the training. The*

demand for jobs in the trades could change the lives of 10,000 families in Christchurch. The economic development plan should prioritise local families living in poverty who are in real need of work.

92. Some noted that paid work may neither be achievable nor desirable for some sole-parents (e.g. those looking after children with disabilities or other family members with chronic health problems). They highlighted additional barriers to employment such as parental mental health issues and lack of transportation.

93. Some submissions, particularly from non-government organisations, emphasised the need to focus on broader structural issues in the labour market that contribute to child poverty.

[The Issues and Options Paper] does not directly address the shortage of jobs in the current labour market, a situation that will worsen as welfare policies put more pressure on many benefit recipients to acquire part-time or full-time work.

We might think about solving child poverty in the face of persistent and high unemployment and significant under-employment. The data clearly shows that when jobs are available people will work, including sole-parents.

Analysis of market wages as an important driver of poverty….[recognises] that a high skill, high wage economy is desirable.

94. The importance of child-friendly workplace practices that make it feasible and desirable to engage in the workforce was discussed by numerous respondents. In addition, these submissions identified the need to increase the childcare subsidy since the current subsidy was considered inadequate for many working parents.

Most low-wage workers do not have any flexibility - they have to be on-site or they lose pay or in some cases their job.

95. Feedback indicated strong sentiment that stronger work testing of parents on benefits is not supported by the evidence. Sole-parents who are beneficiaries are applying for work even when the jobs are low wage and at unpredictable hours.

Single mothers in particular face a range of economic penalties as well as social difficulties. They are more likely to find only unpredictable, part-time work, making it hard for them to access the childcare and other support they need in order for work to be feasible. Forcing such women into low-paid, insecure work, given the exigencies they already face as solo parents, seems likely to worsen, not improve, their outcomes and the welfare of their children.

Career guidance/school to work transition

96. Some respondents noted the need for low cost or free support for adults in areas such as CV writing, basic literacy and interviewing techniques. Others remarked that not all skills were

derived from education qualifications and that people needed assistance to identify transferable skills.

Provide opportunities and incentives for women to retrain while at home with their pre-schoolers. Eliminate private training providers who charge exorbitant fees for a one-year course with no prospect of a reasonably paid job at the end.

97. Many mentioned the need to better prepare young people for work so they can break the cycle of poverty. There was support for enhanced school-to-work transitions and education that links to future occupations and trades. Reference was made to career development at the school level, including teaching young people how to gather information and navigate support services.

Sessions for students about benefits of work and study, how to apply yourself after you finish school, life skills, food grants

WINZ seminars for young people are not effective – funding should be used to provide training, coaching, mentoring in the community

Post school training/apprenticeships/tertiary education

98. Many respondents referred to the need to increase the availability of free training in trades with a period of guaranteed employment after training.

More effort – and investment – is needed to ensure that vocational qualifications are well-resourced, well-regarded vis a vis academic qualifications, and the appropriate pathways through school are made clear… Greater investment is also needed in areas such as apprenticeships to provide clear and logical transitions.

[We] support the employment and trade training schemes for Māori youth. Trade training schemes should be subsidised.

99. Others noted that it is important to link young people's income support benefits to educational engagement or apprenticeships. Some referred to the high costs for families to support children in tertiary education and that further assistance is needed.

Families need help for children at uni or doing other tertiary study. Keeping them in courses can mean real hardship.

Tertiary education is expensive for children from low-income families (student loans not withstanding). Many children work 30+ hours per week to support their studies. Access to and costs to tertiary education needs to be addressed if these children are to compete in the job market.

Adult education/incentives to up-skill

100. Mention was made in feedback that *'second chance'* education was critical to many getting back into the workforce and that there needed to be greater help and support for parents

who want to gain qualifications to get better paying jobs. These respondents supported the proposal to provide better support for sole-parents so they can access education and training along with support for childcare and transport.

> *Increase entry level subsidies or whatever it takes for young people to get work experience that leads to meaningful employment so that they enjoy and value the culture of becoming self-supporting.*

> *Change the opportunities for parents to get out of poverty – free studying and financial support to get a job – poor parents cause poor children.*

> *Government paid creches need to be made available for parents in training. Parents of young children should also have an affordable means of caring for their children while they work.*

> *Effectively manage and standardise the cost of ECE; provide adequate subsidies to parents who need ECE so they can afford to work.*

Budgeting and debt management

101. Feedback indicated general support for the EAG proposals and in particular support for financial literacy and social lending programmes. A small number of submissions called for increased regulation of loan sharks and reduced advertising of Lotto. Others noted the role that government has in assisting families to either repay money that they owe to government agencies or write-off the debt.

102. Some respondents noted the difficulty that low-income people have in budgeting to meet basic needs (housing, energy, transport, education costs and food). Respondents had mixed views, with some noting this was simply due to trying to manage with too little money, while others felt that some low-income families needed help to learn how to develop a budget and manage within that budget.

> *Some people just do not have enough. Budget advisors report not having anything to budget with. It is not just benefits. An increasing number of people approaching food banks are in employment, suggesting some people's wages are too low.*

Financial obligations

103. Respondents also mentioned the expectations placed on people within different cultural communities. These comments were especially relevant to Pasifika communities regarding family and church obligations.

Housing

104. Addressing the quality and affordability of housing was seen as the most important action to mitigate the effects of child poverty. There was very strong support for establishing a Warrant of Fitness for all rental properties. There was substantial agreement that the

affordability, supply, and quality of housing for low-income and beneficiary families must be urgently addressed. Respondents strongly supported: a review of the Accommodation Supplement (AS); increasing the supply of affordable housing, especially social housing; and approaches to improve community planning and housing design. A small number of respondents recommended rent control as a means of providing affordable housing.

Housing and child poverty

61. It was noted that policy solutions were required across a range of agencies to increase the quality of housing and reduce the unsustainably high costs for low-income families.

> *Our unhealthy homes create stress. Expenditure on power and doctor visits caused by damp unhealthy houses means less money for food, schooling and basic needs. This stress manifests itself in ill health, depression, hopelessness and vulnerability which in turn leads to unemployment and increased benefit payments.*

> *It doesn't seem to matter what we're looking at when working in Health - housing is the one thing that constantly comes up as a critical factor in determining the child's health or ability to recover from ill health. Cold, damp and overcrowded housing has a huge role to play in diseases such as rheumatic fever, asthma and other respiratory related illnesses. I sometimes wonder if we could just increase the housing stock in New Zealand and improve the current housing stock if we wouldn't see a whole raft of problems disappear.*

105. Many respondents commented on the rising cost of housing and the pressure this places on families to meet the rest of their family's living costs.

> *No matter how frugal these families are, parents face the tough choices of paying the rent – often eating up 70 percent or more of the household budget – or feed the family for the week, pay school costs or the power… If food wins over rent, then they face eviction and homelessness, and this is what we are seeing daily.*

Overcrowding

106. There was general agreement that overcrowding is a primary concern especially for Pasifika families. The issue is due to the limited supply of affordable housing and homes that do not meet the needs of large and extended families.

> *[There are examples of] 'sharing' households, or the impact of split families having to share housing with a host family or of having to leave their children with other family members because of their housing situation.*

> *The number of families living in garages is a completely disgraceful situation in a 'developed' country.*

107. Some respondents remarked that new refugees and migrants were living in very poor private rental accommodation and that some low-income families with children were living

in caravan parks. The availability of emergency housing was also mentioned by several as needing resolution.

Tenure and transience

62. Comments from social services providers, and descriptions of personal circumstances from individuals, pointed to the need to deal with stability of tenure, given the short-term nature of many housing options and the consequent lack of security.

    Stable housing leads to fewer changes of school.

    [There is a] ..growing body of evidence that relates children's poor educational and future well-being outcomes to poor housing. For many children home is not a haven. Many children move between houses occupied by other families (living in shared situations with no tenancy rights or privacy, and potentially open to abuse from host family members) or overcrowded houses.

    Can mean that children fail to access education, health and other young person's services and therefore place them at higher risk despite the best efforts.

Warrant of Fitness on rental properties

108. There was very strong support across all submissions for a housing Warrant of Fitness for all rental properties (including HNZC stock). The Warrant of Fitness was viewed as the most effective means to ensure that rental properties met minimum health and safety standards. However, concerns were expressed that, unless implemented well, unintended consequences could be rent increases or decreases in the supply of rental properties.

    I see dreadful houses in South Auckland every day in my job - absolutely disgusting that people are (usually) working and paying rent for such damp, worn and unsuitable houses for babies and mothers… it is so common it is seen as normal!

    [We] support the recommendation for a mandatory warrant of fitness of rental properties which includes minimum standards related to heating, insulation, sanitation and safety.

    While supporting the proposal, some questioned landlords' willingness to take action and noted the problem of market power with tenants. The unwillingness of landlords to insulate houses was given as one example. Some commented that there could be targeting of loans to landlords in low-income areas to enable housing improvements, while others questioned whether public money should continue to be invested in poor quality housing.

    It has always seemed wrong that the Government pays the Accommodation Supplement to tenants renting a property that is unhealthy or below an adequate standard. It seems to be right that a property must pass the Warrant of Fitness test before the Accommodation Supplement is paid on it.

109. All respondents from the business sector supported the implementation of mandatory Warrant of Fitness's for rental properties. The suggestion was made that the Warrant of Fitness requirement *'…could be gradually extended to cover owner-occupied houses as well given many of these were owned by lower income families with children'*.

Insulation, heating and health

110. Many submissions reiterated that New Zealand houses were cold, damp and mouldy and the impact this has on health. Many noted that high incidences of related health issues such as respiratory diseases and infections effected school or work attendance.

111. Others commented on the high cost of heating, particularly for low-income people in non-insulated housing. This added considerable pressure to manage budgets, and meant that many low-income families could not afford adequate heating.

> *We are concerned that recent media suggests that heating subsidies via ECCA are being phased out based on a Ministry of Economic Development (MED) Report, that found no clear economic benefits with grants for clean-heating. The MED report suggests that this may be due to the difficulties low-income families have in paying for power. Rather than scrapping the clean heating subsidy, further work needs to be done on how to improve the affordability of electricity for low-income families… The largest benefits were for Community Services Card holders supporting other research that showed that the sick and other at risk groups are the most affected by cold houses and therefore have the most to gain from insulation retrofits.*

112. Respondents strongly supported the extension of the *Heat Smart/Warm up NZ* initiative with a more targeted approach. Many suggested that the heating subsidies be reinstated. There was strong support for subsidising insulation and retrofitting or making these upgrades tax deductible.

Housing strategy and National Infrastructure plan

113. A small number of respondents recommended including housing within the National Infrastructure Plan. Submissions supported an analysis to determine the ideal mix between social housing, private rental and home ownership and setting targets for each.

> *We need a rethink on how we best provide affordable housing; at the moment affordable housing is occupying an increasingly marginalised place in our social and economic policies.*

> *[We need] a housing policy. State investment in infrastructure. Rent to own. Housing is a need that is too important to be left to the market only.*

> *Notable in their absence are any targets related to the provision of affordable housing in the recently announced public sector reforms. There is an undisputed shortage of affordable housing and no realistic strategy to address this. The small amount of*

funding allocated to the new Social Housing Unit (SHU) to increase affordable housing is far too small to make any impact.

114. Submissions encouraged government to implement policies that required property developers to submit plans that incorporated a mix of housing price ranges, social and private, and size.

    The drive for more social housing could also be enhanced by measures such as encouraging "inclusionary zoning" that requires developers to make provision for affordable housing in developments.

115. Many noted that the housing problem in Auckland was very large and that it would require neighbourhood planning, that considered social infrastructure and social capital development together with housing as part of the solution to building healthier communities. Feedback from Christchurch respondents indicated the importance of community input when determining the residential rebuild of the city.

    [There] needs to be a major focus on housing. The CBD had no residential housing in the plan. [The plan is] not conducive to work access and downtown in general. The current plan does not support a liveable city for everyone – including low-income families.

Home ownership

116. A small number of submissions expressed support to explore low-income home ownership options, including a rent-to-own scheme.

    More state housing and lower criteria for eligibility, better opportunity to buy state housing using rent as part payment for loan. This would increase housing stock over time as state housing becomes private housing having the effect of state housing being newer and modern so more effective in reducing need for on-going maintenance.

117. Others noted that low-income families needed to be able to get a loan for a bond and that the previous policy settings (such as state loans) had worked well to encourage people into home ownership by providing low-interest loans through HNZC or banks.

    Enable higher levels of home ownership by low-income families, including access to low interest mortgages fixed for long periods and support for shared equity schemes and papakainga ownership arrangements for Māori whānau.

Housing for Māori and Pasifika

118. A small number of respondents noted that Māori and Pasifika home ownership rates were less than those for non-Māori , non-Pasifika and that these groups were more likely to be renting low quality private rental housing. Some commented on the need to recognise housing choices that accommodated preferred cultural living arrangements. These included marae-based options.

Communal housing based on Māori/Pasifika kaupapa.

There has been no credible rural Māori housing programme since the demise of the Department of Māori Affairs housing section in the 1980s.

119. Others pointed to the HNZC Orama Nui housing strategy for Pacific peoples as an important strategy recognising the specific needs of Pasifika, but also queried whether this initiative would continue to be a government priority.

Rent subsidies and rent controls

120. Many respondents mentioned that the cost of private rentals is very high, relative to income. A small number of submissions supported government rent controls.

Helping those in private rentals – currently there is a big shortage of private rentals; landlords are ripping people off; rents are too high; need a maximum rent level that landlords cannot go over to ensure homes are affordable.

Accommodation supplement

121. There was support for the EAG proposal to review and refocus the Accommodation Supplement (AS) and income-related-rents so they work better for low-income families. Others suggested that the AS needed to be redirected to increase housing stock for beneficiaries, rather than supporting rental house owners.

At present the accommodation benefit keeps rents high and pays off a second home for the wealthy. This money should instead be invested in building up a state asset and helping poorer families into home ownership.

Social responsibility and housing rights

122. Some submissions noted that the right to adequate housing should be incorporated in law. Others commented on limited tenancy rights and the related problem of insecure tenancies generating residential instability. Questions were raised as to HNZC legal obligations and how low-income families can be protected from divestment of HNZC stock.

Māori

123. Respondents were complementary about the EAG's strong focus on the needs of Māori children.

124. There was support for the continuation and expansion of the Whānau Ora approach to empower families and children to identify goals and progress toward them. The analysis indicated that the learnings from the evaluation of Whānau Ora could be applied across government and community to reduce child poverty and mitigate its effects.

125. A number of submissions indicated that more could be done through Treaty settlements to implement solutions to child poverty and disadvantage. Overall, respondents were supportive of trying different and innovative approaches for reducing Māori child poverty.

> *If we get it right for tamariki Māori then we will get it right for all children.*

> *Aotearoa will not thrive as a nation unless Māori children thrive.*

126. Numerous submissions recommended that marae could be used as 'hubs' for service delivery, learning activities, health clinics and recreation. They would also provide for social and cultural support for vulnerable children and young people.

> *[We recommend] the utilisation of marae, and the maximisation of their potential, to facilitate the proposed solutions.*

> *Some marae could be upgraded to better support our people helping ourselves we can get back to our tikanga values.*

> *Reconnect whānau with their language and turangawaewae. Having a sense of identity, belongingness and self-worth are important. It is often the solo-parents in the urban areas that are the furthest away from their place in the world. Help these parents to re-connect with the wider whānau, hapu, and iwi. Connect them with their past and their future. Give them the strength to know that, no matter where they are in the world, they will always have their whānau beside them.*

127. Submissions included support for working with iwi and Māori organisations to develop measures and indicators of Māori well-being that include Māori concepts of poverty and wealth.

> *Measures and targets must mirror our aspirations, deficit models produce deficit outcomes.*

> *You see you wouldn't ask why the rose that grew from the concrete had damaged petals. On the contrary, we would all celebrate its tenacity. We would all love its will to reach the sun.*

128. Employment and training were frequently mentioned by respondents. Government was seen to have a key role in job development for Māori young people. This included the need to increase opportunities for skilled work.

> *Promoting apprenticeships and training incentives for Māori rangatahi. Our rangatahi are heading over to Australia in droves taking up jobs that earn them anywhere from $70-$120K per year. Australia is offering them a brighter future with more opportunities. Any schemes or allowances we introduce here in New Zealand need to be better than anything they can get in Australia. The introduction of youth rates next year will see even more young Māori head offshore. Whānau that have lived in poverty in NZ are*

thriving in Australia. Good on them for seeking a better future for their tamariki and mokopuna.

But it is not merely a matter of moving more Māori young people into work … we believe the areas of work and the pay rates of work also matter. Even when in work, Māori are disproportionately found in the low-skill, low-pay sectors of the economy. Attention must be given to helping young Māori people into high-value sectors and making full use of their talents.

Support the employment of Māori young people by promoting apprenticeships and training allowances, providing incentives to employers and extend initiatives to support community employment initiatives. Set up small grants schemes to support community projects for families to overcome lack of resources and develop skills to improve their daily lives (e.g. marae community gardens and food and cooking classes).

129. Other comments covered health, education, housing and justice issues and highlighted the need for greater cultural awareness and responsiveness both in terms of policy approaches and service delivery. Respondents emphasised the need for workforce training to increase the capacity of health, education, and the social sector to deliver culturally responsive services and support. Some commented on institutional racism as a concern that needed to be addressed to tackle inequality and intergenerational poverty.

Pasifika and other ethnic and religious minorities

Pasifika

130. Respondents identified the unique housing issues and needs of Pasifika peoples and recommended building social housing using 'village design' concepts. Respondents emphasised the need for providing financial services that work for Pasifika peoples; including budgeting, low or no-interest loans, and culturally effective approaches to helping people with their budgeting and financial management. Respondents reiterated the importance and urgency of enabling immediate action on Orama Nui, the housing strategy for Pasifika peoples.

131. Some noted the particular economic obligations that Pasifika have in supporting their extended families and religious communities and the additional pressures these commitments place on low-income families.

    Cultural obligations to extended family and churches is part of the Pasifika financial budget and is not acknowledged in terms of the impact on a family's ability to pay their other living costs.

132. Respondents noted that poverty was about more than 'money and material resources' and that proposals to address poverty should also include 'family, community, culture, spiritual, emotional wellbeing'. Feedback emphasised the importance of recognising the strengths that exist within Pasifika groups.

There are strengths around cultural constructs – our ability to come together to pull together during times of need, reciprocity, we connect – these Pacific principles of support should not be ignored.

Take a community look [to work toward achieving] parity. There are clear differences between island communities, different cultural obligations that are not considered i.e. Samoan fa'alavelave. [There is] a need to encourage a change in mind sets – family [and] feeding children as opposed to church obligations.

133. Similar to feedback on addressing Māori issues, respondents called for workforce training to increase the capacity of health, education, and the social sector to deliver culturally responsive services and support.

134. While the EAG proposed a focus on Auckland, some reiterated that there are significant concentrations of Pasifika in other areas.

The EAG report focuses on making progress to reduce poverty for Pacific children in Auckland where the majority of Pacific people reside. We would urge the EAG not to overlook other communities such as Porirua in which Pacific people constitute 27 percent of the population.

Other ethnic and religious minorities

135. There was also a call to attend to the specific needs and concerns of children within refuge and migrant communities. Respondents noted that there is significant population growth within many of our ethnic communities and therefore a need to ensure these communities are thriving. While not represented overall in statistics for children in poverty, particular circumstances can place members of these groups in highly disadvantaged circumstances. There was a call for community-based programmes and services that are accessible in areas where immigrant groups congregate.

Train the trainer has been very effective for Ethnic and Religious minority community leaders to deliver culturally/religiously appropriate programme to their communities. Communities must be respected to be able to deliver high quality child-focused programmes given the appropriate resources and support. Many European providers feel they are the only ones that can deliver these programmes effectively, however, we believe that programmes involving our communities should be piloted, monitored and evaluated with communities. Many ethnic and religious minority communities are very cautious with dealing with European-focused services, structures and institutions which historically have not understood the dynamics and complexities of our communities. More harm occurs with this isolation than when there is respectful co-operation.

136. Some respondents noted that migrants had particular needs and called for 'resettlement packages' with funding for literacy (English as a Second Language), health checks, employment services and key link people or contact points. Many noted the length of time

before migrants could access assistance. Others noted that 'refugees' are only considered to be 'refugees' for one year in order to access entitlements.

Disability

137. The *Issues and Options Paper* did not directly address disability, and a number of respondents were critical for the lack of proposed solutions to reduce poverty among children with disabilities and children whose parents have disabilities. Feedback received suggested that children with disabilities and parents with disabilities be included in the setting of targets to reduce the incidence of poverty amongst these groups. Policies and practices related to employment and participation in the workforce for people with disabilities also need to be acknowledged as these groups can be doubly disadvantaged.

138. Respondents noted that children with disabilities who are also poor face even more difficulties in accessing public education, health and community activities than their non-disabled peers.

> *Children with disabilities and their families face discrimination from the public, schools and government agencies. Children with disabilities and their families remain the only group that still have to fight for their basic human right to access fundamental services such as education and health care.*

Income and entitlements

139. Submissions highlighted that low-income and poverty are exacerbated for children with disabilities as the costs of disability are higher than for other children (e.g. transportation, health services, and access to other services that may only be available in urban centres).

140. Respondents informed us that often, when raising a child with a disability who has high care needs, one parent needs to remain at home to care for the child. Therefore, families often are reliant on one income rather than two.

> *There is often a large financial cost to families with children with disabilities …This extra cost leaves families with children with disability as well as disabled parents at a heightened risk of poverty. Too often one or more parents have to give up their job to care for their child because service provision is inadequate.*

141. For parents and children with disabilities, information and access to entitlements and allowances was considered of primary importance.

> *In the last Ministry of Social Development Statistical Report, 39 percent of families receiving the child disability allowance were on a main benefit or superannuation. This statistic is made even more worrying by, as noted by the Expert Advisory Group [Issues and Options Paper], the potential low take-up of the Child Disability Allowance among poorer families.*

In-home support

142. Increased in-home support, particularly for sole-parents, was called for as well as support which contributed to positive family environments and recognised the needs of other siblings. It was noted that, at present, support for these parents was not sufficient. Lack of support services was compounded by the lack of wider community support.

    Families report social isolation with family and friends becoming more distant from them following their child's diagnosis.

    [There is a need for] professionally run out-of-home respite and residential schools for those children with extremely high needs such as severe autism. It is impossible to work or to look after siblings with the huge behavioural issues of some children. These structures will contribute to keeping the family functioning and together.

Accessible housing and education

143. Submissions emphasised the need for more physically accessible housing, both at entry and exit and from room-to-room within the home. It was recommended that accessibility for people with disabilities become included as a housing quality indicator in the Warrant of Fitness policy.

144. Other comments related to the participation rates and access by children with disabilities to early childhood education and primary and secondary schooling. It was noted that children with disabilities were less likely to be able to attend their neighbourhood school. Some parents were personally paying for 'top up' teacher aide time over and above that provided by government to enable their child to remain at school.

145. Feedback from Christchurch noted that children and adults with disabilities were 'greatly challenged when trying to manoeuvre around Christchurch'. Moreover, there was the perception that some new buildings currently being erected were not accessible to people with disabilities.

Health

146. There was strong support across all respondents for free primary health care 24 hours/7 days a week for all children 0 to 5 years inclusive, with most submissions indicating funding should be expanded until all children up to 17 years inclusive receive free health care.

    Provide free, preventative health care for all children. Currently a visit to the GP can cost upwards of $50, a cost that most low-income families could not afford.

    [We] support free doctor's visits and [recommend] adding free or affordable dental services for 0-18.

147. Health professionals emphasised that even with free primary health care visits, many families need assistance to overcome barriers to taking their children to the doctor before a

condition becomes serious (e.g. owing money to the General Practitioner, cost of transportation balanced with meeting basic needs, previous negative experiences with the health care system).

> *Free access to primary care is only meaningful if it is provided in a way that parents will use it. The focus needs to be on getting all primary care providers to welcome families, especially Māori and Pasifika, in ways that work for families – not to ever turn parents away when they turn up and owe money – Government should address the power that GP businesses currently have.*

148. Respondents generally supported steps to improve maternity and early childhood health, including connecting pregnant women with services earlier, enrolling babies with a General Practitioner, the National Immunisation Register, and Well Child/Tamariki Ora services before leaving the hospital or birthing unit, and providing customised support for pregnant teenagers (e.g. continuity of maternity care, monitoring of alcohol and drug use, provision of child development and parenting information, and retaining them in education).

Universal and targeted funding

149. The majority of submissions supported the proposal for a child health funding strategy that combined universal services with additional services provided for children, based on need. Some noted that provision of core universal services was the only way that some families could be reached. Others argued that rather than universal provision, the provision could be capped so that the top income earners that don't require the free service would not be funded.

> *Any discussion of a proportionate universal service must include a discussion about differential distribution of resources based on an agreed needs assessment framework, in order to address the inequities in access and health outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.*

150. A small number of respondents did not support universal services. They suggested that a targeted approach is the most cost-effective way to meet the needs of children in poverty.

151. Many submissions noted the stigmatisation and discrimination that targeted programmes may have.

> *The more government 'targets' [services] the more tax payers react and the more stigma is attached to the targeted group(s).*

Antenatal and postnatal care

152. The majority of respondents supported the proposal for early enrolment of women with maternity services. Respondents also emphasised that maternity services needed to do a better job of out-reach to those women living in poverty and disadvantage who do not proactively seek maternity services early in pregnancy. Co-ordination between social and

health services was seen as essential to find and support those women. There were a small number of submissions that emphasised the need for intensive monitoring of pregnant teens, first-time mothers, and pregnant and parenting women who are using alcohol, drugs and tobacco.

We need to make it clear that the job of being a parent is the most important task facing humanity. Parents need to be highly valued by our society, and they need to know that, to do a really good job, they cannot expect to succeed on their own! Quite possibly they have never fed a baby, let alone bathed one and experienced what to do when they cry incessantly! Add to that the fact that young parents can easily be living some distance from any extended family and have no support when problems arise.

153. Other feedback noted the importance of policies to enable the primary caregiver to remain with the child in the first year with the targeted provision of in-home supports to influence parenting style.

Helping ensure improved early attachment via encouraging breastfeeding, avoiding/ reducing post-natal depression, access to parental leave in the first year of life with a minimum income for healthy living.

Adolescent health

154. There was strong support for school-based health and social services that have sustainable funding in all low-decile schools. Some commented that more health education in secondary schools (i.e. sexual health, healthy eating, alcohol use, smoking, and mental health) was also needed to promote healthy lifestyles and identify and treat health problems.

Nutrition strategy

155. A minority of submissions provided input regarding the proposal for a national Child Nutrition Strategy. The respondents agreed that a food-in-schools and early childhood centres initiative would be one part of the larger strategy. Numerous submissions promoted the development of vegetable gardens in schools and public spaces.

Yes a national plan for child nutrition. Let's make fizz, chippies and biscuits more expensive and keep milk, fruit, vegetables and wholemeal breads cheaper to encourage better use of them.

Food insecurity – children from low-income families are not getting the nutrition they need and this is hindering their learning and health.

Families cannot afford wholesome, nutritious food so their children go to school hungry and malnourished leading to further health complications e.g. pneumonia, influenza, and upper respiratory infections. Processed foods, high in sugar, are cheaper than milk and fruit. Malnourished children will not be able to concentrate at school and their ability to learn later in life will be compromised

Free food directly through the schools - to the kids. Adults can make their own poor choices - but this is our responsibility as a society to make sure their basic food need is met.

156. Some suggested that schools, NGOs and the private sector work together to provide food to hungry children, while others noted that this was not a role that charitable organisations should assume and that a liveable income should include the ability to provide for adequate food.

Service models

157. Many respondents supported the proposal for a greater focus on community-based services. There was support for the Whānau Ora model and other locally developed approaches to reduce child poverty and mitigate its affects. There was strong support for 'community hubs' as one means to make it easy and rewarding for families to access services and build social support networks.

158. A range of respondents recommended a 'rethink' of models of service provision to poor children, as current models of delivery are not adequately reaching who could benefit most.

Better access to existing health care is needed - While we recognise that the Solutions do support more holistic and primary health care through Whānau Ora services and community-based clinics, we suggest a structural change to where, how, and by whom, primary health care is delivered is urgently needed to improve equality of access and efficient delivery of health services. This is quite important in terms of the reality of the existing health system.

Common assessment pathway and information sharing

159. Respondents were supportive of a common assessment pathway and plan for all children. This was seen as a means to improve communication and collaboration about infants between midwives, GPs, Well Child/Tamariki Ora and specialists.

One of the biggest problems in managing the health of children is the large number of health providers having an input into a child's care. Currently there appears to be a coordination issue in that many health providers are unaware of what others are doing and thus the child has the potential to slip through the cracks.

160. Several submissions noted there is significant work on information sharing already underway and agreed that the government should build on these activities when progressing the development of an electronic child health record.

Professional development

161. A small number of respondents supported improving professional development regarding cultural awareness across health and the other service sectors.

[We] support the need for professional development to ensure health professionals know how to provide effective health services to Māori, Pasifika and others.

[We] suggest that non-Māori health providers are trained to better engage with Māori whānau and their needs, as a majority of Māori access non-Māori providers.

Education

162. There was very strong support for the food-in-schools proposal (including early childhood education centres), with a range of suggestions for how to operationalise this recommendation. Respondents discussed the roles that each school, community, parents, local business and government could play in supporting the delivery of food-in-schools. A number of specific suggestions were made, and examples of good practice provided on how to engage parents and develop strong sustainable partnership models. Respondents noted the cultural and social benefits of preparing and sharing food. There was agreement that the government should provide the policy, leadership, and support required to make sure that all children who come to school hungry are provided nutritional food while at school.

      Learning is dependent on being able to concentrate. Children who go to school hungry struggle to concentrate, and consequently struggle to achieve in school. What this means is that New Zealand children who are living under poverty are doing far worse in school than those in higher deciles, leading to trailing educational achievement of those in lower decile schools. It has been found in a Ministry of Health survey that 20.1 percent of New Zealand families with school-age children did not have enough food. This is why we agree with the recommendation of developing a national strategy for food in low-decile schools and Early Childhood Education (ECE).

163. Many noted that food poverty was an indicator of the increase in child poverty and that more parents were saying they could not afford to provide breakfast. Some schools noted the programmes they had put in place with volunteers to provide food (mostly breakfast) to children, though they needed to be cautious about how this was done so that children did not feel singled out. Others suggested that teachers could be well placed to identify needy children and manage food requirements of individual students.

      Make sure food is available in all schools, not just low decile; some prefer lunches rather than breakfasts – this would not take away parents' responsibilities…parent should help with breakfast and lunches – especially if they are not working.

164. Respondents also supported improving the quality, affordability, and access to Early Childhood Education (ECE). In addition, respondents emphasised the need to increase the number of ECE programmes, especially in low-income communities. There was strong support for expanding resourcing of before-school, after-school and holiday programmes that are high quality and free to families with low-incomes. These programmes should provide children with enriched experiences as well as enable parental employment.

Schools as hubs

165. There was strong support for schools as community hubs. Submissions stressed that schools needed specific support from government to enable the pooling of health and social services funding to support local hubs. Government policies can create barriers to providing locally-developed hubs.

> *Support schools and ECEs to be the core/hub of the community, they should be funded to how that works for their community, e.g. community group working with the school to provide wraparound services.*

> *Recognise the strength and potential influence of schools for making a difference and shift the funding accordingly. Most parents genuinely want the best for their children and pre-schools and schools could be the best hub or the entry point for everyone in the community. Secure, stable, non-judgmental and healthy schools are the best way to support children who are trapped by poverty and to educate and support their parents to find the way out and up. So schools must be adequately resourced so that they can offer all sorts of services to all sorts of people. WINZ and MSD don't seem to be able to reach people in the right way in the first instance, too regulatory and error-ridden. Schools and preschools can be the primary focus and the so-called 'helping agencies' could be the secondary response.*

> *The Victory School and Community Centre complex is truly impressive and a wonderful example of collaboration. The model of a primary schools serving as a community hub is highly desirable and should be replicated.*

166. Many respondents commented on the need to expand the social workers in schools programme and recommended that all schools should have social workers. Many saw this as a good model but there were too few to cover the areas that needed support.

> *Expand the MASSiSS programme to keep more young people engaged in school rather than gangs.*

> *Social workers in schools – very important, but not enough at present. [school name] has only a ½ time social worker; needs more; CYF referrals take too long for a response, and social workers need more training in health-related matters; not enough services are going into people's homes to see the circumstances.*

Access to education, transience and costs of schooling

167. Several respondents commented on the need for public education to be accessible to all. These respondents referenced the costs of schooling. Recommended solutions included providing scholarships and vouchers for children whose families are unable to afford school fees, uniforms and supplies. In addition, some submissions noted that the provision of technology into low-decile schools is making a difference and cited the Tamaki project as an example of what students can achieve when they have access to technology.

Curriculum to include life skills

168. Many respondents commented on the need for the curriculum to include life skills (e.g. financial literacy, budgeting, cooking) and a much stronger health curriculum emphasising sex education (to reduce teen pregnancy rates), relationships, resilience and risk behaviours.

    Education on life and the skills needed to go with it should be implemented first and foremost.

    More education is needed at schools for values and family planning for teenagers. Teen pregnancy is at an unacceptable level. Schools are having to be so competitive to reach national standard demands that basic values, education and health programs are not getting priority. Health education, basic cooking skills, gardening skills should be absolute priority starting with 5 year olds.

    Food and cooking are as essential to the good life as reading, writing and arithmetic and should be a core part of the syllabus. The superb work being done at [school name] (The Common Unity Project) shows how cost effective this approach could be. Australian schools appear to be way ahead of us in this respect. The approach would also avoid the stigma attached to poor schools receiving charity. [School name] is not only improving the lives of the kids at the school but teaching their parents new skills….Let's start by training up cooks and gardeners so there can be one in every primary school.

169. Others noted that greater emphasis should be placed on bi-lingual/second language learning (particularly in Te Reo and Pacific Island languages) as a way to raise Māori and Pasifika student achievement.

Teen parent units

170. There was overall support for the extension of teen parent units to meet childcare and education needs to make it possible for parents to remain engaged in their education. There was strong support for expanding these units in areas with high teen pregnancy rates.

    More support [is needed] for pregnant teens. Girls get kicked out of school for getting pregnant or made to not feel welcome - more needs to be done to keep girls in school.

Early childhood education and after-school programmes

171. There was agreement across submissions that all children should have the opportunity to participate in high quality ECE and after-school programmes. However, numerous respondents felt that the consultation document placed too much emphasis on ECE enabling parents to go to work and not enough emphasis on the benefits for children.

    …[We]object to the implication that the main reason for providing high quality ECE is to support parental employment. The main purpose of providing high quality ECE is to support and enrich children's learning and improve their present achievement and

lifelong chances of success. Supporting working parents is a subsidiary advantage of high quality ECE. Both aims are important in preventing poverty.

In my view the report does not give sufficient emphasis to the powerful influence of early childhood education on children and family well-being, health and learning, or cite relevant recent evidence that integrated early childhood education approaches provide effective interventions which can ameliorate (though not completely prevent) poverty.

172. Many commented on the need to increase ECE participation by Māori and Pasifika children. Some respondents recommended that ECE should be available in all neighbourhoods and that enrolment in ECE should be state funded and free for 2-4 year olds.

    We believe the ECE proposal should be expanded to recommend that the government continue to fund universal access to early childhood education, and, in addition, target funding to increase participation especially among Māori, Pasifika and low-income communities. We also believe the government should establish a legal right to early childhood education.

173. Others disagreed with the EAG proposal tied to the ECE Taskforce recommendations and considered that the changes needed in ECE such as increased capacity and training will require additional investment and cannot be done in a fiscally neutral manner as suggested in the Taskforce report.

    ...[We] disagree with the endorsement of the ECE Taskforce recommendation in this report as the mandate for the ECE taskforce was to make fiscally neutral recommendations.

174. There was a strong call for the expansion of after-school and holiday programmes that provide subsidies to working parents, especially those on low-incomes. Remarks included concerns with the quality of provision as well as the costs. Some noted that such programmes needed to keep children involved, engaged and learning. They observed that holiday programmes were expensive and that these need to be more affordable.

    Holiday programmes need more activities for children to be worth the money spent; rural areas struggle because these types of services are not there; programmes are expensive especially when there are multiple children, costs add up when including transport and food; some are not good quality – not good supervision; holiday programmes are too expensive and too short to be effective.

Costs of ECE and child care

175. Many mentioned the need for access to free and flexible-hour child care.

    Providing ECE and OSCAR services are important but they need to be affordable and available everywhere not just in certain areas. After having my first child I went back to work after a year, I was earning $328.30 per week. Childcare for one child was costing

me $250 per week. $50 per day currently childcare centres can be charging up to $80+/day… that left me with $78.30 per week which barely covered the costs of parking or bus fare. Why work? I enjoyed what I was doing but it didn't cover the bills, so after a month of getting up at 6am and getting home at 6.30pm I left my job, and choose to stay home with my toddler, once I had my second child there was no discussion of going back to work as the costs of childcare for 2 children far outweighed the costs of staying home. Once my children started school the costs of sending them to before school/after school and holiday care also seemed to outweigh my earning potential. My experiences are all from the 1990s… But I know parents with young children and they are still faced with the high costs of childcare compared to what they can earn. I recommend that they stay home, it's much easier and their children will only be children for such a short time, use the time to get to know your kids and learn some new skills.

Decile rating and low-decile schools

176. Some respondents were of the view that the decile rating system had significant flaws and that many middle-ranking schools also had significant needs but were not eligible for specific forms of funding. While there may not be large concentrations of poor people there were pockets of very needy families within some higher decile schools. These families and children needed additional services. A small number of respondents noted that decile ratings can have unintended consequences such as rating for real estate desirability or otherwise, and that they can brand neighbourhoods. The low-decile schools too often do not attract the best and most experienced teachers. These issues contribute to an inequitable education system.

Community

177. Group consultations and written submissions highlighted the willingness of community leaders and organisations to play a bigger part in addressing child poverty in their communities. However, they noted that the Government's unilateral contracting approach created challenges to those who wished to work in partnership at the local level. A common recommendation was to enable more flexibility solutions to tailor actions to the strengths and needs of the local community. Many community leaders endorsed the report's recommendation for stocktakes of existing resources and making it easier for communities to share good practice.

[We]need a stocktake [or asset mapping] across communities, at the community level to better understand our strengths and starting point; acknowledge and recognise what is being done and is already underway, where, and what are the elements that might work for other places. This will lead to sharing of knowledge and resources and building on what is already in place. We need to find the leadership (this is an asset to be valued and developed.

Identify all of those interventions currently in play in the community e.g. community initiatives, individual acts of philanthropy, educational initiatives, school health program, housing initiatives, and map these against the elements of the "Driver Diagram" to reduce child poverty by a certain amount by a certain time. Such an approach will identify what is currently being done, allow us all to see the range of that work, potentially identify the efficacy of those initiatives, give people doing similar things the opportunity to learn from each other or join forces, allow for philanthropists/corporates to invest in initiatives that spin their wheels, and ultimately, to get better alignment of all the existing energy and resource toward achieving the ultimate goal.

178. Support for community hubs was expressed across all respondent groups. Respondents stressed that the process for developing hubs needs to incorporate community development principles and will take time, funding and leadership.

179. Respondents strongly agreed that government's role is to act as an enabler to allow these initiatives to thrive. These should 'add to' and not displace government responsibilities. The role of local government was seen as a critical enabler both in shaping neighbourhoods through urban planning and through locally initiated leadership, facilitation and services.

    Invest in 'public life' rather than privatisation. Communities can alleviate the impact of child poverty for individual children and family-by-family.

Local solutions

180. A small number of respondents expressed support for the Social Sector Trials as a means of '*customising*' local solutions.

    Pending the results of its evaluation, we recommend expanding the Social Sector Trial model (SST) to enable an additional focus on child poverty reduction in local areas; and the development of partnerships with philanthropic organisations and local businesses in order to increase the scope and capacity of SST child poverty reduction.

181. A number of submissions recommended small grants to support community projects and to help overcome the lack of resources, while developing local skills. Others mentioned the role of 'navigators' in linking low-income people with community resources and networks.

182. Some respondents noted the importance of supporting existing community infrastructure, including marae-based learning, health clinics, community hubs, out-of-school care and recreation.

    An 'aunty service' through the marae, community centre, Plunket, school. Whaea who can lend a helping hand when families are in crisis. Non-judgemental, non-punitive, just mature, wise, loving 'grandmas' and 'aunties' who can fill the gap where there is none and give wisdom and practical help. All families go through crisis at some time, most need a higher adult: child ratio at these times, so that the children don't suffer. This builds families' resilience and keeps families together.

183. Several submissions cautioned the current central government focus on limiting the scope of local government.

> *The potential impact of local government reforms … could affect the ability of local government to become involved in issues such as local child poverty strategies given the narrowing of purpose of local government away from the promotion of social (and other domains of) well-being.*

> *Increase the role of local government in social issues and in raising awareness rather than putting limitations on local government. Child poverty occurs at the local level and local communities are best aware of the issues that affect their children. Central government must provide communities the flexibility and support needed to take action.*

Voluntary sector and partnerships

184. Respondents noted that the voluntary sector is essential to improving outcomes and that these voluntary efforts may sometimes partner with government, but are not necessarily dependent on government.

> *Reunite church and government in social service arena: churches have backed out, or felt pushed out, but they are needed and have to come back into the mix.*

185. Others noted that incentives could be considered to encourage voluntary agencies to initiate different approaches.

> *Churches and many community groups are providing and supporting community gardens. Churches in particular, have land assets which are being used productively to grow food to meet the needs of communities. We propose a tax break for food production which would provide an incentive to community garden initiatives. Legislation to this effect is in place in Japan. We appreciate that an investigation is needed to address the benefits and effects for farming as well as community level food provision.*

186. Some noted that the role of the business sector was unclear but that they should be integral to locally based poverty-reduction work. Some remarked that there is a need to engage with the business community on how they saw their contributions and responsibilities at the local level.

Information-sharing

187. There was general support for the proposal to streamline information systems across health and social services by establishing electronic information-sharing across sectors. Respondents agreed that doing so would improve case co-ordination and provide timely access to child and family information. A few noted that this would require a significant investment to enable an integrated information system. Others emphasised that careful management of ethical, security and privacy issues would be essential.

188. Some commented that more information-sharing would be desirable so that families or children did not become 'lost' to the system. Others remarked that better integrated information would also enable more effective research, evaluation, and monitoring of services and programmes.

Community hubs

189. There was strong support for community hubs as 'one-stop-shops' located in areas that are easy for families to access. It was noted that many low-income families may not have access to phone or computer. Most suggested that hubs should include health, social services and legal assistance and could be extended to include other services as determined by the community.

190. Many considered that hubs located near or within schools would be useful as they thought schools were the best conduit for many services for children and families. However, others recommended that marae could be utilised as hubs, as well as community centres and any other neighbourhood gathering place as determined by the local people.

> *Service Hubs operating out of low-decile schools to provide a range of wrap-around services such as teen units, after school programmes, holiday programmes would seem to be a good use of resources and utilise existing trusted relationships to give access to such services.*

191. Respondents provided international examples of community hubs. Some of these respondents noted that a number of schools and early childhood centres were working towards such hubs, but that additional support would be required to fund and supervise nurses and social workers. A small number of submissions cautioned that if hubs were underfunded or funding was reduced over time the reach and effectiveness of the hubs could be compromised. A few noted the culture change that would be needed amongst administrators and professionals to achieve effective community hubs in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

> *It constantly frustrates me that we all work in separate little boxes and don't interact to share information to help people - until there is a crisis - then it's really hit or miss if it works - believe me. I worked in the, then, new Children's Centre initiative in the UK before I came here in 2008. We were all based together in the local Children's Centre - midwives, health visitors (Plunket), pre-school nursery, parent's groups, citizen's advice and welfare clinics, adult education and back to work classes for mothers and fathers whose children could be cared for in the creche, visiting dental and specialist clinics in the locality. The local GP was next door as was the local primary school. It was a hive of activity and co-operation in a very poor local location and very quickly valued by parents. We had lots of immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, poor workers, single parents, extended families - a big mix. People found us easily and if we did not deal with their*

need we could signpost them to the correct place. I feel this is the way forward in cheap, sustainable co-operation - sharing facilities and getting to know each other.

Home-based services

192. There was a call for more home-based services, noting that 'surveillance' was not sufficient and that some families needed more wraparound in-home support to build resilience and self-determination. Others suggested that alternative funding models to agency based funding needed to be considered such as 'funding the family' to enable them to select support and services that met their needs and circumstances.

The role of parents

193. There was general agreement that the final Report should more thoughtfully consider the role of parents. There was a wide range of comments on ways to help some parents to provide better parenting and support for their children, from improving parenting skills to helping parents learn basic life skills (e.g. budgeting, cooking, literacy). Many respondents noted that some parents need support to better understand child development, engage with their children's schools, and provide for their children's health and nutritional needs.

194. A very small number of submissions expressed the view that 'poor parents need to take responsibility' and 'poor parents are having too many kids'.

195. The majority of respondents noted that most low-income families provide a supportive family environment for their children and recommended that the final report emphasise the importance of valuing parenting. They emphasised that government policies should enable parents to successfully support their children. They reiterated that parent/child attachment and supporting parents to be able to provide positive nurturing environments particularly in early childhood and adolescence, is an important role of government social and economic policy. A few noted that the voice of low-income parents needed to be actively sought and that these parents should be encouraged to participate in the democratic processes.

> *Paying parents to raise their children, at least until they are 5 years old, is a better way to use money than providing good child care and paying someone else to raise the children. The reference on page 9 of the report to assisting parents "to increase their hours of work up to about 30 hours per week" is the wrong emphasis altogether. "Assistance" so easily becomes compulsion. We suggest supporting parents adequately to raise their own children, if they wish, and recognising the contribution that these parents make to society.*

> *The value and importance of parenting needs to be given greater support and recognition. The emphasis on supporting parents into the workforce should not be seen to devalue this very important role, particularly with regard to mothers – the first educators of the child. Additional financial support for children can best be utilised when*

mothers are given opportunities for self-development and are supported in acquiring skills such as parenting, budgeting, nutrition and child development.

Families with multiple challenges

196. Many submissions discussed the magnitude of the economic and social problems facing families, including the high levels of stress resulting from poor living conditions, lack of money, few support networks, substance and alcohol abuse, mental illness, unemployment, poor nutrition, school exclusions etc. Many noted the lack of services to support families with multiple needs that are provided '*within the family and home'* context.

> *The most challenging and disturbing aspect of their job [in education] is witnessing the material and emotional hardship that some of their students are experiencing and being able to do very little about it.*

Addiction and social harm

197. Included in feedback were numerous comments related to alcohol, drug use, gambling, and smoking as factors that aggravate the impacts of child poverty. These respondents commented on the easy access to alcohol and gambling and the difficulty that some parents have in managing addictions. These types of addictions were viewed as imposing financial pressures on family incomes. Some recommended urgent action to support the Law Commission's recommendations on alcohol.

> *Alcohol is a big issue and the paper does not adequately address alcohol problems.*

198. Others mentioned that families under stress looked to some forms of 'escapism' or 'self-medication' such as smoking and alcohol consumption, but that the impact of behavioural modification by rising prices could have an unintended negative impact on children.

> *The unintended consequences to trying to limit smoking, drinking, coffee etc by raising price: people still need some form of self-medication, so just puts less money for the children in these households.*

199. Feedback included proposed measures to restrict access and therefore limit the social and financial harm they imposed.

> *Ban on gambling casino machines; introduce limits on TAB and gambling amounts able to be spent.*

> *Given the harm that gambling causes it was shocking to see the CEO of the NZRFU come out against gambling reform. It is vital that we stop gaming companies preying on vulnerable people in poor communities and strengthen our gaming laws. Hopefully the government will take more heed of the advice on gambling reform than they have done with alcohol. Implementing the key measures of the Palmer Report would see a significant reduction in alcohol related harm.*

Support the Gambling Amendment Bill which aims to enable local authorities to reduce the number of, or even eliminate, pokies from areas where they are doing harm. The Bill also requires that 80 percent of the gambling proceeds be returned to community groups in the same geographic area where the gambling venues operate. In Tai Tokerau this would help address what we see as the reverse of Robin Hood: the money spent on pokie machines that comes from poor communities where most of the pokie machines are located (e.g. Kaikohe) goes to the more affluent communities like Kerikeri. The affluent communities have the capacity and capability to apply to the grant makers and usually the relationship as well.

Domestic violence

200. Some noted that the increasing incidence of domestic violence was a reflection of families under stress and a symptom of not addressing issues of poverty. Others mentioned the links between poverty and abuse and the role of domestic violence in children's lives. Services to support children in situations of abuse needed to be closely linked to 'in-home' and 'in-community' support, that regard it as important to reach parents and wider communities and that are culturally inclusive.

    Continue government support for parenting programmes that work with the wider whānau and address multiple issues. Lift the performance of government services, by working with Pasifika community and church groups.

Social inclusion

201. Many respondents expressed strong views on the need for social and cultural change in how people view those who live in poverty. Fostering social inclusion, critical to addressing the stigmatisation and marginalisation of already disadvantaged groups, was often mentioned in the feedback. Many considered that recent changes to the benefit system exacerbated the stigmatisation, discrimination and marginalisation of low-income families and those in poverty. Some noted the need to actively counteract the sense of social isolation that this could engender.

    The media should be obligated to present a balanced view on issues of poverty. The media is so important in bringing issues to the nation's attention. However the information needs to be balanced. Not all beneficiaries are fraudulent. Not all beneficiaries are addicted to alcohol and gambling. Not all Māori are child abusers. The media needs to be more socially responsible and present a wider perspective on important issues.

    There could be a 'Valuing our Children' strategy in New Zealand. It could include awards for child-focused activities both locally and nationally, positive PR messages in the media, on the streets, in offices, businesses, etc.

Parents raising children in poverty were often themselves raised in poverty. How do we eliminate the culture of blame, the 'good poor' and the 'bad poor'. Not all poor parents make bad choices for their children.

There is a narrative of discrimination running through all of the recent welfare reform, people are feeling discriminated and stigmatised. This narrative needs to be turned around.

202. These respondents agreed that the whole community has a role in reducing child poverty and mitigating its effects and that this needed to be positively communicated. Others noted that strong leadership is needed to change attitudes and to create a cultural, social and political shift.

[We need] attitudinal change. Many New Zealanders still deny that child poverty exists, or if reluctantly recognizing its existence and impact on children, fail to understand that blaming and punishing the parents of children in poverty neither motivates nor enables them to get out of poverty. Positive public attitudes about alleviating child poverty.

Stigmatising poor people causes 'poverty of aspiration'. We can learn from initiatives like 'Like Minds Like Mine'.

Policymakers need to go to the grass roots to understand local needs.

6. Conclusion

203. Overall there was strong support for the EAG proposals in the *Issues and Options Paper.* Some considered the proposals could go further or faster, but also noted the need for strong leadership and the political will to carry these through. Generally, the submissions expressed the belief that implementation of the EAG proposals will reduce child poverty and improve the lives of children living in poverty.

204. This Report provides a synthesis of the feedback received. The views expressed here do not represent the views of the EAG.