



MANAAKITIA A TATOOU TAMARIKI

**CHILDREN'S
COMMISSIONER**

'This is how I see it'

**Children, young people and young adults'
views and experiences
of poverty**

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Foreword

Children and young people have a right to an adequate standard of living to support their positive development and wellbeing.

In 2007 and 2008 my Office examined the incidence of poverty among children and young people in New Zealand and its impacts on them. As part of that work a project was set up to get the views and experiences of children, young people and young adults. Between August 2007 and June 2008 the Office worked with nine community partners, 56 children, 32 young people and eight young adults¹ living in low socio-economic communities throughout New Zealand. The purpose of the project was to explore the following questions:

1. Does poverty exist in New Zealand?
2. How would you define poverty?
3. How does poverty affect children and young people?

The result is *This is how I see it: Children, young people and young adults' views and experiences of poverty*, a collection of photos, poems, artwork, stories and autobiographical accounts. To access the collection and a copy of this report, go to www.occ.org.nz².

This report sets out the project findings. Part I provides background. Part II outlines and discusses the findings from the project. Part III sets out some conclusions. Appendix 1 discusses the methodology used, including the design, process and management of safety and ethical issues and Appendix 2 gives some of the words used by the participants in their descriptions of poverty.

This report will contribute to building knowledge and understanding on how poverty affects children and young people in New Zealand. I hope the valuable information it contains and insights it provides will better inform communities, policy advisors and

¹ A child in this project was defined as 0-17 inclusive in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a young person was defined as being 18-24 years of age to be in line with the upper age of the Ministry of Social Development's definition of young people in the *Children and Young People: Indicators of Wellbeing in New Zealand 2008*. A young adult was defined as those involved in this project who were 25 years and over.

² The opinions expressed in the photographs, artwork or written representations reflect the views of the children, young people and young adults and do not necessarily reflect the official view, opinions or policies of the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

decision-makers about the impact of economic hardship on children and young people.

Dr John Angus
Children's Commissioner

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Part I: Background

Children have the right to a standard of living that allows them to live healthy lives free of hardship, achieve their full potential and participate in society fully. Growing up in poverty impacts on children and young people. We know, for example, that poverty erodes a child or young person's quality of life. It limits their future opportunities, exposing them to material disadvantages and greater risk of poor health and other poor social outcomes that often extend into their adulthood.

Child poverty affects everyone. It results in economic and opportunity costs for society, both now and in the future.

Poverty is your problem, it is everyone's problem, not just those who are in poverty.

Rebecca, Te Puru

Perry's 2009 report on household incomes in New Zealand shows that children and young people are disproportionately affected by poverty³. Perry's report confirms that younger children are more vulnerable to economic hardship than their older peers and that the configuration of family structures within households impacts on the degree of deprivation experienced by children and young people living in those households.

Statistics show that:

- child poverty rates in New Zealand rose sharply in the late 1980s and 1990s through low wage growth for many working families, high unemployment and benefit cuts. Income inequality in New Zealand rose more than in any of the 24 countries for which there is comparable data (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD)
- from 1982 to 2001 poverty rates for younger children (0-6 years and 7-11 years) were consistently higher than for older children (12-17 years)⁴
- sole-parent households with dependent children have the highest poverty rates of all household types

³ Perry, B. (2009). *Household incomes in New Zealand: trends in indicators of inequality and hardship 1982 to 2008*, p.90.

⁴ Since 2001, the poverty rates for these age cohorts have been more volatile.

- children in households with three or more children generally have higher poverty rates than those with only one or two children⁵
- the difference in poverty rates in 2007 and 2008 for children in workless households was greater (around seven times higher than those in households where at least one adult was in full-time work) than from 1992 to 2004 (three to four times higher)
- in 2008, around one third of all poor children came from households where at least one adult was in full-time work.

A strong economy, higher rates of employment, wage growth and the progressive introduction of the Working for Families (WFF) package have improved the economic circumstances of many families. Nevertheless, the incidence of poverty and hardship, relative to many OECD countries, has remained high (Fletcher and Dwyer, 2008; Perry, 2009; OECD, 2009). As the 2009 OECD report points out, the *“material conditions for kiwi kids are relatively poor. Average family incomes are low by OECD standards, and child poverty rates are high”*.

The recession threatens to worsen this position. Data from previous recessions suggests children and young people bear a heavier cost than other age groups unless steps are taken to prevent this from happening. Children and young people are more likely to live in families and households with low wages and increased job uncertainty. The current economic climate will likely result in an increase in the number of children and young people living in households dependent on income-tested benefits and an increase in the length of time those households remain dependent on benefits.

We should be concerned at this prospect. The evidence is strong that prolonged poverty and deprivation during the early years of life are associated with increased probability of later poor outcomes across domains that include health, educational achievement, criminal behaviour, employment, earnings and productivity and children’s general development. Children and young people growing up in poverty also have a higher incidence of accidental injury, physical abuse and neglect (Fletcher and Dwyer, 2008, p. 17 adapted from Hirsch, 2006).

While we know how many children are affected by poverty, who are most affected and where they live, the current information on child poverty in New Zealand does

⁵ However, in 2008 children in larger households made up just under half of all poor children (47%) a decline from 57% in 2004.

not include the views of children and young people themselves. Little has been recorded about how New Zealand children and young people see and experience poverty in their lives. Their experiences are subsumed into the experiences of households and families. It is assumed parents' and other adults' interpretations of children's experience of poverty are the same as those of children and young people themselves.

The new sociology of childhood challenges such assumptions by arguing that children's perspectives are unique to children and filtered through fundamentally different views of, and responses to, the social world (Corsaro, 2003; Qvortrup, 1994). Children and young people are seen as competent interpreters of the social world and social actors able to contribute to society in their own right.

This provides a strong rationale for listening to and respecting children and young people's perspectives (Smith, Gollop, Taylor, & Marshall, 2004).

As a result there has been a movement towards more participatory research approaches with children and young people in order to better "*understand the social world from the view point of the child living in it*" (Greig and Taylor, 1999, p.43). There is now a growing body of international research on children and young people's experiences of poverty (Crowley and Vulliamy, 2007; Horgan, 2009; Ridge, 2002; Ridge, 2003; Ridge, 2009; Roker, 1998; Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Van der Hoek, 2005) to inform policy and service responses to it.

Part II: What the children, young people and young adults told us

This project gathered information from children, young people and young adults about whether they felt that poverty exists in New Zealand and if so, how they would define it and how they think that it affects children and young people in New Zealand. This part reports back on what they told us.

Child poverty in New Zealand

The overall message from the children, young people and young adults involved is that poverty exists in New Zealand, it is complex and it impacts on children and young people in ways that are distinct from adults. One marked difference between the views of the children involved and the young adults who took part was that children emphasised the impact of poverty on schooling, social inclusion and self-esteem.

The findings show that the participants in this project believe the experience of poverty is almost always negative, and can have psychological, physical, relational and practical effects on children and young people's lives, as well as their families and the wider community. This is consistent with the literature review on children's lived experience of poverty carried out by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth Collaborative team in New South Wales, Australia in 2008 and the review of findings from qualitative research carried out by Ridge (2009) in the United Kingdom since 1998 with children and young people who are living in poverty. As Ridge states:

A review of evidence from children reveals that the experience of poverty in childhood can be highly damaging and the effects of poverty are both pervasive and disruptive. Poverty permeates every facet of children's lives from economic and material disadvantages, through social and relational constraints and exclusions, to the personal and more hidden aspects of poverty associated with shame, sadness and the fear of difference and stigma. (2009, p.2)

The children and young people's written definitions of poverty (see Appendix 2), photographic images and interpretations, artwork, poems and autobiographical accounts were analysed to identify dominant themes that were important in the participants' responses. The themes that emerged were:

- lack of money
- lack of essentials, including food
- health
- housing
- social exclusion
- school
- work and the impact on children
- child abuse, neglect and violence
- gangs
- mental and emotional wellbeing
- addictions
- physical environments
- future prospects

What follows is a discussion of each theme. Where possible the children and young people's views in this project have been compared to views of children and young people from international studies involving children and young people's experiences of poverty. They have also been set in the context of other New Zealand data.

Lack of money

Many young people spoke of often worrying about themselves or their families having enough money to pay bills. Some teen parents and young adults questioned how they and their children could get by on such low benefit rates given the cost of essentials. Teen parents (11-17 year olds) and young people (18-24 year olds) in particular were acutely aware of the cost of everything, for example, food, rent, power, petrol, and the cost of baby-related essentials. Having enough money to cover these costs was often a problem and created additional pressure and stress for them.

Fixed expenses alone can be a struggle for low income earners.
Anonymous, Whanganui

Children and young people's concerns about having sufficient income have been highlighted in a number of other studies (including Roker, 1998, Crowley and Vulliamy, 2007; Ridge, 2002; and Ridge and Millar, 2008). Shropshire and Middleton's 1999 study shows that children in poor families are more likely to know about family income than their more affluent peers.

Lack of essentials

A lack of essentials such as food, clothing and warmth was identified by the children and young people as a common part of being in poverty.

Cold – got hardly no clothes, looking for some. Wonder if there's any money in here [clothing bin]. No money, no clothes! Desperate.
Anonymous, Paeroa

Supplying food for you and your family can be a struggle. A lot of fridges would look like this [empty] before pay day.
Anonymous, Whanganui

Findings from studies carried out by Willow (2001) and Taylor (2004) and findings from other studies where children were living in poverty reported going without food, clothes and basic everyday necessities like bedding and towels were issues.

Research shows that for children a lack of material goods and childhood possessions including toys, games and appropriate clothing can have a profound impact on their everyday lives and their social interactions with their friends. Visible signs of poverty and difference and an inability to take part in the same social and leisure activities

meant that children experienced bullying and were fearful of stigma and social isolation (Roker, 1998; Ridge, 2002 and 2007; Crowley and Vulliamy 2007; and Elliot and Leonard, 2004).

International literature suggests that clothing is also an issue for both adults and children in low-income families. Adults suggest that the issue is in not being able to supply adequate clothing (Adelman et al., 2003). Children report the issue being one of not having the 'right' type of clothing and shoes (trainers) to fit in with peers, in particular the significance of fashion brands or "labels" to children from low income families (Middleton et al., 1994; Elliot and Leonard, 2004). Findings from this project differed from such studies in that while children and young people spoke of not having the right clothing, this was more about not having the correct uniform; not having enough clothing; lacking warm clothing, school uniforms and sports uniforms; and of their clothing being in poor condition due to their parents being unable to replace the clothing. There was no talk of not being able to have more expensive labels or brand clothing.

Many of the children and young people in this project spoke about hunger, lacking nutritional food and malnourishment being an issue for many of them. This is not surprising when seen in light of the 2002 National Nutrition Survey that found while about four-fifths of households said they could always afford to eat properly, one in five said they could "*sometimes afford to eat properly*". Forty percent of households in the lowest socio-economic areas said they could not always afford to eat properly, compared with six percent in the highest socio-economic areas. Families with European children were the most likely to be always able to afford to eat properly (86 percent) compared with 64 percent of Maori families and 47 percent of Pacifica families. Households with more than five children were also less likely to always be able to afford to eat properly (Ministry of Health, 2003).

This is what my stomach looks like with nothing in it!!! [blurred image] This is what I look like when I haven't eaten! Fading away!!!
Eyez, Paeroa

Hungry. Rumaging. Scrounging.
Anonymous, Paeroa

Very few international studies with children and young people have identified access to food and nutrition as being issues. A notable exception is Willow's consultation with children in 2001 that identified access to food as being an issue for some

children and young people living in poverty. Roker's 1998 study found that one-third of low-income children reported that income affected when and what type of food was bought by their family.

Health

Participants spoke of the impact on their health of not having adequate or nutritional food, clothing and warmth, saying that they were more likely to become sick but were unable to afford to go to the doctor or pay for medical supplies.

Poor health...Sick easily...High risk of getting sick or disease...Can't afford doctors fees...Can't afford to go to the doctor or dentist...Unpaid doctors fees.
From young people's group definitions of poverty

Housing

Research looking at the impact of poor quality accommodation and homelessness reveals that the type and quality of housing experienced by children can significantly affect their social and emotional wellbeing (Roker, 1998; Ridge, 2002; Rice, 2006; Walker et al, 2008). The voices of young people in Roker's study (1998) reveal some of the social and emotional costs of poor housing borne by children and young people, and their anxieties about stigma and difference. What is particularly apparent is how problems with living environments impact on other areas of children's lives including their relationships with family and friends. This is consistent with what many children and young people spoke about in this project – they too spoke of having to move a lot due to them or their families being unable to pay the rent.

Poverty is...moving houses, always moving – stressful. Having to move in the middle of the night – unable to pay rent, scary.
From young people's group definition of poverty, Paeroa

The children and young people in this project also spoke about the impact of constantly moving on their ability to make and maintain friends, saying that children and young people living in poverty “*don't make a lot of friends if moving a lot*”. A group of children said that they did not want to invite people to their house because they were too ashamed of the state of their house, revealing their concerns about stigma and of being different.

Many children, young people and young adults in the project also spoke of run down, cold, damp housing with no heating and large numbers of people having to live in the same house to get by. All three age groups made a link between poor, unstable and

inadequate housing and poor health. This is consistent with New Zealand data which shows that there is a direct link between damp, cold housing and a wide range of illnesses and diseases including respiratory infections, asthma, rheumatic fever, tuberculosis, skin diseases, depression and other mental illness. (Howden Chapman et al., 2007; *Housing, Heating and Health Study*, 2007).

The children and young people in this project spoke of the link between poverty and overcrowding. Unlike their international peers they did not expand further on this issue to discuss the impact of such living conditions. Children in studies such as those carried out by Roker (1998) and Middleton et al., (1994) reported that a shortage of space, overcrowding and not having any privacy or space to be alone, causes arguments and tension which in turn affects family relationships.

Stuck in an old house can make you sick.

Shane, Dunedin

Other participants spoke of living in houses where they had no electricity or water and how they and their families had adapted to get by.

This [stream] is where we wash, drink and have a bath because I don't have running water in our taps.

Eyez, Paeroa

A number of young people spoke of difficulty accessing state housing due to a shortage of houses in their areas. This often resulted in them and their families experiencing long delays in being housed. One group questioned why some state houses were left unused for significant periods of time despite the shortage of housing.

State housing should be kept in liveable condition. There is such a shortage of housing that government owned housing should be habitable at all times. Not left abandoned for months on end. Why should there be houses like this when hundreds of people are waiting for housing?

Anonymous, Whanganui

A couple of the groups voiced their concerns about the health and welfare of homeless people in their communities. One young person described them as “*unemployed, hungry, afraid...degraded*” (Sa’o, Otahuhu). The young people felt saddened that people had to live on the streets and worried about them having “*no shelter, no food, no medical supplies*” (Otahuhu group definition of poverty), stating that “*...people shouldn't have to sleep on the streets*”(Panepasa, Otahuhu).

Social exclusion

Being picked on, rejected by their peers, bullying and social exclusion were significant issues for many of the children and young people. This was exacerbated by not being able to wear adequate and suitable clothing and not being able to take part in sporting, cultural and school activities.

Can't afford school uniform...Lack of books...Left out...Get picked on at school...Stress...Shame...Low self-esteem...Unhappy...Lonely...Sad... Depressed ...Angry...Feelings of worthlessness.
From young people's group definitions of poverty

Poverty is...not getting proper opportunities like going on school trips, hard to take part in things like sports and other activities.
From young people's group definition of poverty, Dunedin

International studies show that a key area of concern for children and young people is the effect that poverty can have on their friendships and other social relationships. Children and young people are particularly worried about being able to fit in and join in what others are doing and this results in significant anxiety, unhappiness and social insecurity for them (Roker, 1998; Willow, 2001; Ridge 2002, 2007; Elliot and Leonard 2004; Crowley and Vulliamy 2007 and Walker et al., 2008). Children and young people are often fearful about being singled out or being seen as different – what academics would call 'othering': being 'other' and not part of the group.

Research suggests that children in poverty show low levels of participation in organised out-of-school activities compared to their more affluent peers (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Middleton et al., 1994; Sutton et al, 2007). Being left out of activities being enjoyed by peers is a common experience for children and young people living in poverty (Van der Hoek, 2005; Willow, 2001).

Ridge's 2009 review of UK studies involving children and young people also highlighted the link between social exclusion through lack of money and resources and bullying and stigma. Studies carried out by Daly and Leonard (2002) and Willow (2001) also showed that children living in poverty experience a lot of pressure to fit in with peers and are often subject to bullying if they cannot afford to.

Childhood is an important time for the formation of self and social identities. The ability to make and sustain good friendships and take part in social activities is vital to children and young people's sense of belonging and their wellbeing. As Ridge (2009) points out, children living in poverty "*have the same social and cultural expectations*

as other children, and are driven by the same social imperatives. They want and need to 'fit in' and 'join in' with other children" (p.22). However, unlike their peers they are faced with considerable social challenges on a daily basis, which are exacerbated by the economic and material constraints that structure and inform their lives (Ridge, 2009, p. 26).

This is consistent with what the children and young people spoke about in this project. Many of the participants expressed concern about how poverty affects their social lives and their opportunities for leisure and community activities. This sense of social exclusion was also seen as being exacerbated by not being able to wear adequate and suitable clothing and not being able to take part in sporting, cultural and school activities. Multiple moves, as reported by some children in this project, have also been shown to make it difficult to maintain networks of friends (Roker, 1998).

School

Children and young people feel under social and material pressure at school and experience economic barriers to participation. They spoke about missing out on school trips; not being able to afford school uniforms, stationery and books; and not always feeling as though they could take part in sports and other activities due to costs. Many children and young people said that this often caused them to feel a sense of shame, further alienated them from their peers and could be a source of bullying.

Participants also highlighted stigmatising institutional processes and practices within schools.

These included:

Teachers causing shame to students in front of their peers because they have no stationery, uniform etc. Schools should deal with parents and not punish the kids for not having shoes, books, etc.

From group definition of poverty, Whanganui

Poverty is...going to school but schools not understanding difficulties families are having – shame and embarrassment for kids. Kids playing up at school and get in trouble because of family issues. Schools reacting to kids' behaviour and not why they are acting that way and maybe kicked out of school.

Group definition of poverty, Palmerston North

School is an important place for the development of children's skills and capabilities for future, as well as being a key site of social and cultural learning.

Similar to the children in Horgan's 2009 study, the children and young people in this project were acutely aware of the hidden costs of going to school. Ridge (2002) and Crowley and Vulliamy (2007) also found that the cost of school trips was particularly problematic. The ability to take part in school trips could be especially important for children and young people in families that could not afford to go away for holidays and who were missing out on opportunities for shared activities in their communities (Ridge, 2009).

The children and young people's sense of 'lacking opportunities', 'missing out' and not having the necessary material or financial resources to take part or 'fit in' often caused them to feel a sense of shame. This further alienated them from their peers and they said that it could be a source of bullying. A review of literature shows that bullying and the fear of being seen as different at school underpinned children's accounts of school in many studies (Willow, 2001; and Ridge, 2002, Walker et al., 2008, Horgan, 2009). In Willow (2001) and Crowley and Vulliamy (2007) consultations, children talked about the painful social and emotional effects of poverty. According to Ridge (2009):

Children were particularly aware of their vulnerability to teasing and bullying, and many had experienced name calling and the humiliation of being picked on and ridiculed for wearing the wrong shoes or clothes, or for not fitting in to the demanding social and material norms of childhood. School uniforms were also seen as costly and one 11-year-old described how teachers put pressure on children about school uniform policies. (p. 29)

The relationships children and young people have with teachers have been shown to play an important role in school engagement for some disadvantaged children (Taylor & Nelms, 2006). Where co-operative relationships are not developed, children report feeling less in control at school, lacking confidence to perform the tasks required of them, and they may develop negative attitudes to learning (Hirsch, 2007).

Work and the impact on children

Children and young people talked about loss of time with their parents as a concern, or changes to family practices for spending time together.

Hard working parents but still unable to support their family. Parents working too much and unable to spend time with their children, missing special occasions like birthdays.

From young people's definition of poverty, Dunedin

Participants spoke of the roles children and young people take in response to parents having to work including looking after siblings while their parents are at work. This often means that children and young people are missing out on school. It also challenges the idea that children and young people are a barrier to work as they are playing an active part in keeping employment going.

Children left home alone as parents need to work. Children having to stay at home to look after brothers and sisters.

From young people's definition of poverty, Dunedin

Many teen and young adults said that getting into work and working long hours was not necessarily the best solution for them and their children as they recognised the importance of the early years and wanted to raise their children themselves. Others spoke of their desire to "create a better life for them and children" by studying or working but said that Work and Income assistance was not enough to cover transport and childcare costs.

A review of literature shows that children and young people have shown a keen awareness of their parents' situations and the potential tensions and strains that poverty creates within families. Children and young people have considerable empathy with their parents and understand the financial pressures they are under and have used words such as sadness, anger, frustration and loneliness to describe how their parents might feel about having no money (Ridge, 2009).

Younger children in the Crowley and Vulliamy study (2007) expressed an acute awareness that parents might feel sadness and shame if they were poor. Children in both studies were also concerned that parents might argue about money. Children and young people in this project echoed this.

Child abuse, neglect and violence

Many children and young people associated poverty with abuse, neglect and other forms of violence.

Not enough love...Neglect... Abuse...Molester...Child molestation... Rapist...Rape...Emotional abuse...Physical abuse...Bashed...Alcohol and violence...Parents not caring...Family violence...Gambling and violence.

From group definitions of poverty

When you are poor you can get angry. Frustration can get worse then comes VIOLENCE.

Anonymous, Paeroa

The young spoke about the emotional impact of growing up in such environments.

Your useless! Your nothing! I'm useless...I'm nothing...What did I do wrong?

Anonymous, Palmerston North

It's a really hard nights sleep. It's normal. It's better than listening to my parents fighting and drinking all the time...I'm hungry, I'm cold and I don't want to go home. No use going home to no food in the cupboards. I'm alright here!! [wrapped in a mat sleeping under a bridge].

Mere, Paeroa

I would prefer to be in here [prison cell] than at home with so much violence.

Anonymous, Paeroa

The research and literature says that poverty is correlated with higher risks of physical abuse and neglect of children and young people (Gelles, 1992; Drake and Pandey, 1996). Violence and chronic neglect tend to escalate in the presence of other social problems, and are sometimes linked with poverty, overcrowded housing and alcohol and drug abuse (Cadzow, Armstrong and Fraser, 1999; Dubowitz, Zuckerman, Bithoney and Newberger, 1989; Wilson and Horner, 2005).

Research shows that the highest rates of partner abuse tend to be found among young cohabiting adults of low socio-economic status, particularly when they have children.

One group in this project spoke of the “*cycle of violence and abuse – as an abuser or abused*” (Palmerston North group definition of poverty). This is consistent with what research tells us: that witnessing and being a victim of family violence during childhood is correlated with later victimisation and perpetration of violence (Lievore and Mayhew, 2007).

Gangs

A considerable number of the participants had either grown up in, or joined a gang. Many born into gangs emphasised the fact that they knew nothing else and felt that they had never been given a real choice about what their life would be like. For these young people, the gangs were their natural family or whanau. Young people spoke of the negative impact of growing up in such environments.

My Self - My Poverty Story

*I come from a big family of TEN
Our life revolved around DRUGS, ALCOHOL, MONEY, GANGS
VIOLENCE and ABUSE.*

*Throughout our lives all we could depend on was each other.
Mum was an alcoholic and was rarely home,
and then only to recover from a nights drinks.
If dad wasn't at home he was either
in jail, at work or down at the Mongrel Mob pad.*

*I reckon you don't have to be poor to live the life of poverty.
We were impoverished by a lack of emotional
support, love and security.
Anonymous, Paeroa*

Despite these negative experiences many young people explained that because they had grown up in gangs with their natural family or whanau, if they wanted to leave this lifestyle behind this would mean leaving behind their families. This is echoed by Zatz and Portillos (2000 cited in Nakhid, 2009) study with young Pasifika people involved in gangs in the suburbs of South Auckland. The study shows that gang-family ties are stronger if “family” is contextualised to include the nuclear family, the extended family and close friends (p.6).

*I don't have a choice, if I leave the gang I leave my family.
Anonymous, Paeroa*

Many young people saw gangs as a way of being accepted, a possibility of good times and of not having to live in poverty. But they knew that it came at a cost. Young people said that joining a gang was sometimes good to start with, but hard to cut ties with if they want to go elsewhere.

Mental and emotional wellbeing

Many young people spoke about the impact poverty and related issues have on their mental and emotional wellbeing.

*Not enough love...Abuse...Neglect...Troubled...Family
Less...Stress...Mad...Mental...Nuts...Jealous...Lonely...Low self-
esteem...Lost...Desperate...Angry...F***ed up...Worthless...No family...
Very angry person and tagging...Could become a bully...Suicide.
From Paeroa group definition of poverty*

*Bullying...Sad...Disappointed...Left out...Frustrated.
From Dunedin group definition of poverty*

Depressed...mental illness...Neglect...Social difficulties.
From Otahuhu group definition of poverty

Having no family/no support...Mental health...Depression...Abuse...Neglect...Self-harm.
From Whanganui group definition of poverty

Dis [burnt out car] like my spirit living here.
Streets Ahead 237, Paeroa

As Ridge (2009) states:

Poverty strips children of economic security and penetrates deep into their social relationships. It also has an emotional cost as children struggle to cope with social risks of difference and disadvantage. Children's inner fears are largely hidden, and they are rarely asked what their thoughts and feelings are. Sensitive done, research with children and young people reveals that poverty can cause significant anxiety and sometimes depression. Children can feel different and inferior and they can be anxious and fearful about being bullied, isolated and left out. Poverty brings uncertainty and insecurity to children's lives, sapping self-esteem and confidence and undermining children's everyday lives and their faith in future wellbeing. (p. 29)

Social support appears to be one factor that acts as a buffer against the effects of poverty (Bottrell, 2007; Van der Hoek, 2005). Such support may come through relationships with family and/or friends (Attree, 2004) or youth and community networks (Bottrell, 2007). Vinson (2007) argues that social cohesion acts as a buffer against disadvantage. Family relationships are reported as crucial (Attree, 2004). Children explain how their situation is not as bad as it seems because they have such good relationships with family. The close family relationships these children have make their lives enjoyable and meaningful: they feel valued and loved despite living on low-incomes (Roker, 1998). For children living in poverty, the cost of not having good family relationships is high, with these children appearing the most depressed and pessimistic (Roker, 1998). This was echoed by a community partner who said:

Most of the young people involved in our workshops had experienced some kind of poverty. Less important than the actual lack of material things, was the reason why they lacked these things. If the young person's main caregiver/s have things in their lives that are more important than the child or young person, they feel poor, and they feel it very deeply.
Community partner, Paeroa

In the same way as having good relationships with family reduces the impact of poverty on children, having good relationships with friends is cited by young people as improving their situation (Roker, 1998).

Addictions

Children and young people talked about the stress and pressure of growing up in poverty and that being affected by related issues can often cause them to get involved in risky and health-compromising behaviours such as drinking, smoking and taking drugs.

Stressed out need a smoke...can't handle things...!!addiction!!
Anonymous, Paeroa

ESCAPE. I started to drink and I couldn't stop. It used to be fun. NOT NOW.
Anonymous, Paeroa

Physical environments

Many children and young people believed that there was a need to upgrade physical environments in order to improve opportunities and wellbeing. This included clean public spaces and having access to safe playgrounds and recreational facilities.

Good old Otahuhu! But this place @ night is DANGEROUS! Gang related. [Carpark of a community and recreation centre]
Anonymous, Otahuhu

Stop drinking in my park.
Streets Ahead 237, Porirua

Parks are pubs. Bus stops are beds and home sucks.
Streets Ahead 237, Porirua

We need a place to go to...Bring this [empty swimming pool] back to da way it woz...We need water for our pool.
Streets Ahead 237, Porirua

The prevalence of gambling, liquor and fast food outlets in their communities was also seen as contributing to challenges the communities faced such as health, violence and alcohol, drug and gambling addictions.

Why do we have so many pokey machines everywhere?
Cheaky Bee, Porirua

Poverty Through Brown Eyes by Andrew, Otahuhu

*These eyes of mine are in familiar places,
no life or depth just empty spaces.
I walk up the road to find cardboard boxes of alcohol substances.
No more needs to be lost here.
Four alcohol shops in the space of a 2km races*

*What's happening to this place?
No park or day care places.
The TAB next to the pub.
What's this frikin called...it's like a field day for the parents of P.I. children.
No bread, no butter, all the kids cry
"Maybe next Thursday bub", says the mum to the child.
Poverty through brown eyes...Ain't much of a smile.*

A Scottish study (Wager et al., 2007) revealed that public space had a far greater significance for disadvantaged children than more affluent children. Public space is social space for children and young people and its value for the wellbeing of low-income children is revealed by a study supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Sutton et al., 2007). This study used participatory methods to compare the lives of children from different social backgrounds. The study drew on findings from research with 42 children with a particular focus on children's freedom, safety and use of public space. Findings showed that for the disadvantaged children in the study, public space and street play were of vital importance. In particular the use of public space compensated children for a lack of space at home and reduced opportunities for alternative activities. The quality of space, security and opportunity that children can enjoy within their home neighbourhood is therefore of critical importance for low-income children.

Future prospects

Children and young people expressed their concerns about future prospects with many having a sense that 'this is my lot in life', they were living day-to-day, or just trying to get by. One young person from Otahuhu spoke of being "*locked up in poverty*". Discussions and work around the future were characterised by a lack of hope.

What's out there for us?
Streets Ahead 237, Porirua

Will tomorrow be better than this?
Nick, Porirua

WHAT NOW? I don't care anymore?
Anonymous, Paeroa

Prostitution, Street workers – underage, young mums, solo mums – with no education trying to help their families.
From group definitions of poverty

Final notice...Urgent...Phone Bill...Pay now!...Power Bill...\$100 for 1 hour...keep busy kids...
Majenta, teen parent, Whanganui

A number of the groups spoke of young people and young parents being involved in prostitution. A couple of young people had been prostitutes themselves or their mothers had been. These young people spoke about how financial difficulties, a lack of education, qualifications and work experience along with responsibilities to provide for their families had led them, or their mothers into this work.

One 27-year-old woman reflected on her experience as a 20-year-old young mother and prostitute.

Define happiness. I have experienced both wealth and poverty...neither has brought me happiness!!

By Fleur

Well I'm not sure how to start this...I'm a young mum with a now three-year-old son, and I am also an ex prostitute...I first started working [as a prostitute] when I was 20 after a very abusive relationship but that's another story. I left school when I was 16 and didn't have many skills or a qualification to get what I thought was a good job at the time. Then I met a girl that was working [prostitution] and saw how much money that she was bringing home and thought about how easy it would be. At the start it wasn't too bad, I partied hard and did what I wanted without a care. Then I fell pregnant with my son and that changed my whole world. I had to stop working and live on a benefit alone, something I wasn't used to at all. After I had my son things were even harder, I didn't have much help from family and my son's father was in jail at the time as well, I did the best I could with what I could do, but when my mum left town and left me with my teenage brother that was a bombshell!! I had a 10-month-old and a 15-year-old and myself to support and very little income, as my mum wasn't much help financially, so I went back to work but this time it was not for myself it was to support my family...a baby that was constantly growing out of his clothes, a brother that ate like a horse and wanting only the best (label clothing and shoes) and then the everyday things like food, rent, power etc...So I went back to work as a prostitute to have enough money to be able to provide for my family. Even when my partner got out of jail I thought that things would have gotten easier, but money seemed to have been even tighter so I kept working while he stayed at home with our son and tried to keep my brother on the right tracks...but boys being boys it didn't always work! When my partner left, that made things a lot harder. I kept working for a little while after he left us and made things hard with my son - how do you explain to a two year old that his dad had left? I soon left work after that. Not long after I left work and found what you would call a "normal job" in a café out of town. It was hard though having very little time with my son as I started work at 9am in the morning and finished at 5pm, but really I was up at 6am to drop my son off at 8am to be at work on time and then sometimes not getting home till half past six after I picked him up. At least with working nights [prostitution] I got to spend some time with my son, kind of felt ripped off with the lack of time that got to spend with my son. When things didn't work out there, I started doing a course to help my son and myself to have a better chance at a normal life...I'm

now getting some qualifications so I can one day find a job to be able to give my son the life that he should have. I have thought about going back to work [prostitution] when things have gotten hard but haven't we have always found a way to work through it. But the thought of how easy it was to make so much money in such a short amount of time, can be tempting at the best of times, but I know at the end of the day that I am a better person and the time that I have with my son is precious, and not to be wasted. I have learned and grown from this and understand that there are a lot of young mums that are like I was. This is an easy way to give what your children need but not always an easy job at times or to walk away from easy money. I'm glad that I made the choice to help myself, to help my son, to give him a better life, and a better chance for myself!

Research suggests that living in a low-income family affects children and young people's aspirations and their planning for the future (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998; Sutton et al., 2007; Taylor & Fraser, 2003; Willow, 2001). While the majority of children living in poverty will engage actively in what Ridge (2002) terms the struggle for social inclusion and survival, some appear to resign themselves to their situation. These young people, having become used to a 'restricted' lifestyle, clearly did not believe that their situation would change (Roker, 1998).

The impression I get is that these children are already resigned to the inevitable, that their situation is one of lifetime poverty.
Community partner, Paeroa

Calls for action

Participants called for action to address poverty, asking the government and those in power not to think of them as a statistic but to actually do something to help.

Poverty by Sa'o Otahuhu

*Poverty is just a word...
but a word that means a lot
not when said
but when seen.*

*Poverty is a cycle
but an on-going cycle
not being altered
but left aside.*

*Poverty is on our conscious
but at the back of our minds
not acted on...
but why not?*

PLEEZZE To people in power + the Government – don't tuck us away as a statistic.

Alice, Te Puru

This is what poverty is about, having families, the community helping to stop poverty.

Panepasa, Otahuhu

What have you learnt, think about it. What now can you do!!!

Jack, Te Puru

Part III: Conclusions

If New Zealand policies and services are to be successful in making things better for New Zealand children and young people through better responses to poverty, it is important to understand what poverty is for them and how they experience it. This project shows that we can learn from children and young people about how they have experienced and perceive poverty.

By engaging with and listening to children and young people we have the opportunity to:

- begin to understand some of the experiences and realities of childhood poverty
- gain insight into the issues and concerns that children in low-income households identify as important
- learn how policies and the provision of services impact on children's lives
- gain valuable insights into how we can better meet their needs.

As Smith and Taylor (2000) state:

Giving more prominence to children's voices is one way to ensure that child advocacy is well-founded and that decision-making is guided by a more complete picture of all the key issues.

We cannot see the views of the 56 children, 32 young people and eight adults involved in this project as necessarily being fully representative of what all children and young people living in poverty experience. However, their experiences are very similar to those reported in other studies. Some of the findings are expected. Of particular significance is the impact poverty and the economic hardship associated with it have on children and young people's social relationships, social inclusion, school experience, sense of self and future prospects. Deep emotional costs were evident as many of the children and young people struggled to cope with the negative consequences of difference and disadvantage.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

Participants

The Office of the Children's Commissioner worked with the following community partners to explore children, young people and young adults views and experiences of poverty in New Zealand:

- Paeroa New Zealand Children's Art House Foundation
- Creative Kidz Art Club Te Puru
- YMCA Whanganui and Palmerston North
- YMCA Otahuhu Raise Up n Represent
- Te Aka Ora Charitable Trust, Gisborne
- The Otago Youth Wellness Trust, Dunedin
- Porirua Health Links Trust
- Streets Ahead 237, Porirua

The Office was ultimately satisfied that the children, young people and young adults recruited reflected a range of backgrounds in terms of socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and a mix of rural and urban children and young people.

Fifty-six children, 32 young people and eight young adults participated in the project. Fifty- nine females took part and 37 males. The participants came from three age groups: 11-17 years, 18-24 years and 25 years and older. They came from Otahuhu, Te Puru, Paeroa, Gisborne, Whanganui, Palmerston North, Porirua and Dunedin. This included working with two groups of teen and young parent groups in Gisborne and Whanganui. For these groups, along with other young parents involved in the project it meant that they reflected on not just their experiences of poverty but also of what it means to raise children under these circumstances. Most participants in all but one small group had direct experience of growing up in poverty.

Project Design

A series of focus groups were held with the groups of children, young people and young adults to define poverty and to discuss how it impacts on children and young

people. Facilitators worked in a strengths-based manner (Ministry of Youth Development, 2002) to create safe environments in which the children, young people and young parents felt comfortable, honoured and empowered. The facilitators encouraged and fostered critical reflection of the issue of poverty and its impact on their lives and/or the lives of others in their communities. This was done in a manner consistent with their age, maturity and/or abilities.

Aspects of the photovoice⁶ method were used as it is a well established approach to accessing the voices of groups who are often marginalised (Wang and Burris, 1997). This combines photographic images and participants' explanations to document social issues.

This project mainly sought to explore children and young people's views and/or experiences of poverty through photographic images and participants' interpretations of pictures. Participants could also draw, write poems, stories, lyrics or record dramas to express themselves and their perspectives, which many of them chose to do.

The process

To be effective and ethical in its implementation, this project required careful management of relationships to ensure that the exploration of views and experiences of poverty did not become a stigmatising or shaming exercise and would in fact be a positive experience for the children and young people involved. As Alderson and Morrow (2004) state:

...enable children to be heard without exploiting them, protect children without silencing and excluding them and.....without distressing them. (p.12)

Aspects of Russell Bishop's work around Whakawhanaungatanga (1996) were drawn upon to help guide the process of collaboration and partnership with both community partners and the children. In particular, the project was designed around a process of co-joint construction at all stages, from the terms of reference and project methodology to facilitation and what will be done with the work. This process was predicated upon warm interpersonal relationships based on mutual respect, commitment to one another and to exploring the issues of poverty in a manner which would be a positive experience for participants and community partners, shared

⁶ Photovoice is an innovative, participatory approach to knowledge creation and action processes, pioneered especially by Carolyn Wang and her colleagues in China and the US (Wang and Burris, 1997), as a way of including often marginalised or disempowered voices into social analysis for social change and positive social development.

common understanding, cooperation and a shared responsibility for one another. This was seen as being essential as the community partners had local knowledge in terms of understanding the local population profile and practice context. This meant they were likely to be sensitive to local issues and concerns, in a way that an 'outsider' might not, and thus able to recruit more effectively. Secondly, there were ethical advantages in that the workers knew the individuals and dynamics of the groups. The involvement of workers was therefore, likely to provide participants with support if need be to ensure that they would be able to participate in the project with minimum risk of psychological stress or discomfort.

Existing relationships and networks were used to help identify potential community partners. Once identified, a copy of the draft Terms of Reference was sent to them with information sheets outlining safety and ethical issues and how these could be addressed in the project. A meeting was set up to discuss the project, including what the Office hoped to achieve, ethical and safety issues and whether the potential community partners worked with any groups of children who might have valuable insights to offer. Where face-to-face meetings were not possible this process was carried out by telephone.

This process of setting up the project involved the Office and potential community partners assessing the appropriateness of carrying out this work, the ethical issues and the potential risks to individuals, community partners and the wider community from participating in the project. This was weighed up against the potential benefits (Laws and Mann, 2004).

During these discussions it became apparent that groups of children they worked with also had many young people, and in a number of groups there were some adults. It was decided not to single out the children, reducing the potential to stigmatise or shame those involved. It was decided that young people and a number of adults would take part if they were part of an existing group the community partners were working with.

Unexpected recruitment difficulties arose in one site that did not have a pre-existing group of children who could take part. It was decided that individual case workers would give greater support to these children and prepare them for smaller group discussions to ensure that they felt comfortable in the group setting.

Another community partner saw the project as a great opportunity for people to have input on the issue of child poverty, so they combined a number of groups. This resulted in only five of the 15 participants being between 0-17 years of age.

Once a mutually agreed upon Terms of Reference was signed off by the Office and community partners, the project manager worked with each group to tailor the process to meet the needs of their particular group of children and young people. This took into consideration the community partners capacity and capability and who would facilitate the sessions and discuss with the children and young people the potential ethical and safety issues involved. Each partner agreed on project plans.

The community partners approached groups of children and young people they worked with and gave them a flyer about the project, an information sheet and information about the Office of the Children's Commissioner. They were asked if they would be interested in taking part in a discussion about poverty. Community partners also went through this information with the children and young people verbally. This was because it was important to adapt and present information in different ways for individual participants depending on their competencies and circumstances if consent was to be truly obtained (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005).

The project manager was also aware of literature which discussed differing cultural world views around the issue of children's and young people's consent to take part in research or projects, particularly those of a sensitive nature. This centred around the fact that the complex discussion surrounding children and young people's consent has been looked at from a predominantly western perspective, which tends to focus on ethical issues regarding an individual's involvement and their subsequent rights. According to Suaalii and Mavoia, however:

For Maori and Pacific peoples, the right to give consent and to pass on knowledge is enmeshed in collective frameworks where the individual is an integral part of an extended family and wider community. (2001, p.1)

Community partners were also given information sheets for parents and guardians and children and young people were informed that their parents were more than welcome to attend the information session, or contact the project manager if they had any questions or queries regarding the project. Parents of one group of 11-14 year-olds attended the first session and actively engaged in the process. For another group of predominantly Pacific children, while their parents did not attend the initial information session, a number of the children explained that they had discussed the

project with their parents. One young woman in particular explained that her parents had spoken to her about her responsibility not to cause shame for their people. This is consistent with Suaalii and Mavoia (2001) who state:

The avoidance of shame is a powerful determinant of behaviour in Samoa (Schoffel et al, 1996) and Tonga (Morton, 1996) as well as in other Pacific societies. From a young age, children learn to behave in a manner that will enhance, or at least maintain, a family's reputation, thus avoiding shame. . . This expectation of appropriate behaviour extends to Pacific children's participation in research, so that neither their words nor their actions cause shame. Disclosure of information, or even mere participation, might impact negatively on immediate and wider family, as well as local communities.
(2001, pp.4-5)

The project manager tried to be cognisant of these implications for families, as well as for individual participants, respecting both collective responsibility and the potential for shame. (Suaalii and Mavoia, 2001).

After talking with her parents, this young woman was given their blessing to take part in the project as they felt that she was mature enough to do so in a responsible, thoughtful manner.

Once the children and young people had been given the initial information and asked by the community partners if they would be interested in taking part in a project on children and young people's views and experiences of poverty, the children and young people then effectively volunteered to be involved in the first session. This was on the understanding that it was to find out more about the project, ask questions and then decide if they would like to take part.

Consent was seen as a continual process and participants were reminded they could withdraw from the project at any time, and without any negative consequences (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; Laws and Mann, 2004: NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). Throughout the project this was revisited. A number of children and young people decided to opt-out of the project for various reasons, including a lack of interest and having to deal with other issues.

Following the first session, the Office and community partners worked with the children and young people to decide how best to move forward with the project, this included process, timeframes and identifying what support, information and resources each group needed to take part. This allowed the children and young

people to significantly guide the process and determine how they would express their views and experiences.

In terms of impacts, community partners and participants saw engagement of many participants who had been disengaged from mainstream education and could be deemed as being 'marginalised'. The project saw critical awareness of and reflection on poverty emerge; sharing of stories and views; competencies develop in capturing their views or experiences through artwork or photographic images; articulation of the significance and meaning of their work; and development and creation of work which can be used by the young people and community partners in their own communities to advocate for change.

Appendix 2: Descriptions of poverty

These are some of the descriptions the children, young people and young adults gave when they were asked to define poverty from their perspective.

Gambling **Gangs** **Get sick easily** **Being left out**
Not having enough money **Shame** **Neglect,**
Violence and abuse **Lack of warm clothing** **Bashed**
Living week to week **Not accepted by peers**
Debts - phone and electricity cut off
Drugs and alcohol
Hard to fit in and take part in things like sport
Going without necessities
Moving a lot - scary and stressful
Bad housing, over crowding
Can't go on school trips
Choices you can't make, choices taken away
Lack of warm clothing
Can't afford to go to the doctors
Cold, grotty, disgusting housing
Not enough food, hungry
Can't afford school uniform
Get picked on @ school **Missed opportunities**
Feeling of worthlessness
No good clothes, get picked on or bullied
Sad. Disappointed. Frustrated. Angry.
Children paying the price for parents mistakes
Lack of school books and stationery