

My name is Graham Howell, and I am Benefit Rights advocate, working with the Benefit Rights Service in Wellington. While this is personal submission I have discussed it with my colleagues.

We are a free/confidential service providing advice and advocacy for people having problems getting their full and correct entitlement, or who have been accused of benefit fraud or have debts to MSD. Our client base in any one year is over 600 individuals or parents. We represent them as far as preparing for High Court cases but we not lawyers. I have many years experience and along the way have completed a Masters by thesis into the maladministration of the delivery of the Special Benefit, a form of on-going hardship assistance.

I believe much of the premise about the need for, and delivery of social services be it by government, those contracted to government, and those independent of government funding is flawed.

Yes, social needs exist, and the most critical needs are of those with inadequate resources of their own to meet them themselves thus they need to be provided by others. Because the inadequate resource issue is not being addressed through providing or ensuring the individual has the resources themselves the process of meeting those needs has been institutionalised. Institutions, even family have restrictions and boundaries meaning people with needs miss out..

While benefit rates are not part of your survey, nor does it seem are low wages and nor is the delivery of supplementary income support by Work and Income to those on low wages and fluctuating hours of employment. These gaps drive the need for social services and if the demand part of any economic market is not looked at, examining the supply side has limited use. Hence the flaw.

Unless the demand side is included in the measure of productivity of the social service sector any findings are thus of limited value.

As regards the groups contracted to government the risk of devolving to very local communities creates a pressure of the organisations being too small to cope with changes in demand. Take a food-bank for a single street rather than a suburb. Once the small food-bank runs out, tough for the next family in need. Staff in any organisation burn-out and the need to limit hours of work in some fashion yet deliver service is more difficult when the unit the small. Thus the risk of non-delivery As well the administrative costs escalate managing contracts. Critical in the contracting model is the size of unit providing the contracted service and the need to reduce costs in the centre.

Yet if resources were provided to the individual they would have choice as to how to use their resource in order to meet their social needs.

Yes a degree of collectivism and consolidating resources is needed for areas such as education and health. Thus I am not advocating for no professionally provided schools or hospitals with appropriately trained staff. My comments above are more about vocational training, ensuring income adequacy and meeting housing needs.

Graham Howell