

UNICEF New Zealand submission to the Productivity Commission

Cut to the Chase: Putting children at the centre

Contact:

Deborah Morris-Travers, UNICEF NZ National Advocacy Manager

deborah@unicef.org.nz or Tel 0274 544 299

Background

UNICEF was established by the United Nations (UN) to advance the rights, protection and healthy development of all children. UNICEF NZ is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's human rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential, with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) as its platform for advocacy.

UNICEF NZ works in partnership with Government agencies to promote the progressive implementation of UNCROC. While we are not involved in social service delivery in communities, we work in partnership with a range of community organisations and local councils to promote Child Friendly Cities and to undertake strategic advocacy initiatives. We also work with schools and community partners to provide Child Rights Education and to enable child and youth participation processes.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) is the most widely ratified human rights treaty ever. This speaks decisively to the importance the world places on the development, care and protection of children. New Zealand ratified UNCROC

in 1993 and in so doing committed itself to upholding children's rights in policy, practice and in law.

Each country reports on its implementation of UNCROC to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child every five years. The latest report from the New Zealand Government was submitted in late 2008 and a response was received from the UN Committee in February 2011.¹ Among the 2011 recommendations to the New Zealand Government - and relevant to the context of social service delivery and purchasing in New Zealand are:

- Ensure all existing domestic legislation relating to children is consistent and is brought into compliance with the Convention (11a)
- Adopt a comprehensive policy and corresponding national plan of action for the implementation of the Convention, in cooperation with the public and private sectors involved in the promotion and protection of children's rights and based on a child rights approach (15)
- Strengthen and expand dissemination and awareness raising activities to ensure that the provisions of the Convention are widely known (19)
- Initiate a child budgeting exercise that will allow it to specify strategic allocations to implement children's rights, track implementation, monitor results and evaluate impact (17)
- Address inequalities in access to health services through a coordinated approach across all government departments and greater coordination between health policies and those aimed at reducing inequality and poverty (37)
- Intensify efforts to render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities with timely responses at the local level, including services to parents who need counselling in child-rearing, services for the treatment of alcohol or drug

¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 56th Session: *Concluding Observations-New Zealand*: February 2011.

related problems and in the case of Māori and Pacific Islander populations, culturally appropriate services to enable them to fulfil their parental role (31)

- Ensure full protection against discrimination on any grounds by taking urgent measures to address disparities in access to services of Māori children and their families (25)
- Take all necessary measures to provide appropriate support to allow disadvantaged families and their children to move out of poverty in a sustained way and continue to provide assistance to those who remain under the poverty line (43).

UNICEF NZ commends these Concluding Observations to the Government as measures that – if implemented - would significantly improve the social and economic conditions in which children, families and communities live.

In her address to the UN Committee in January 2011, the Government's spokesperson, Sue Mackwell from the Ministry for Social Development, expressed the view that children are valued and cherished members of New Zealand society and that UNCROC was an essential human rights instrument playing an important part in the protection and promotion of the rights of children.²

UNICEF NZ's position on the Issues Paper: Cut to the Chase

UNICEF NZ welcomes discussion about the effectiveness of social services. Our comments on the paper are focused on children as the citizens who are the most vulnerable and dependent on the adults around them to protect and provide for them. Children do not choose where to be born, they have no power in decisions about where they live or how the income in the family is used, but they are essential players in building our nation's future. For these reasons children's needs must be given priority.

Children also represent the best investment for Government. Effective investment in families and communities helps create the conditions for social and economic

² www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/monitoring/uncroc/uncroc-in-nz-3rd-and-4th-periodic-report.pdf

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wellbeing, so that children can thrive. The 1990 World Summit for Children³ promised to uphold the far-reaching principle that children had “first call” on all resources and that their best interests would come first even in times of economic distress

UNICEF NZ advocates for a rights-based approach and encourages greater rigour in the use of UNCROC in the design and commissioning of social services for children and their families. We contend that policies that enables families and communities to meet the needs of their children, with a culture that values and protects them, will reduce the need for social services. As such, we consider that there is significant value in the community-led development and the movement towards child friendly cities. In connected, supportive communities children thrive and are protected.

UNICEF NZ recognises that there is significant scope for improving social service delivery and the commissioning/ purchasing decisions that underpin them. However, care must be taken in any effort to reform these processes to ensure that changes are supported by a range of evidence (including the voices of those who deliver and use services). It is important that any process of reform acknowledges the complexity of the social and economic issues faced by some families and communities, and the need for a variety of responses to be available and accessible.

We consider that greater political courage and commitment is needed to ensure that those with complex needs and disadvantage are reached – even if the service and people reaching them are non-traditional service providers. This is hard to do – especially when families/ whānau have become adept at avoiding services and systems. Kaupapa Māori and Pasifika services have an important part to play: Whānau Ora, Kohanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori, Tamariki Ora, Aoga Amata and others. These services can usefully be supported by kaupapa Māori and Pasifika research and relevant professional development, including an understanding of children’s rights.

³ UNICEF New York, *We the Children: Meeting the Promises of the World Summit for Children*, NYC 2001

UNICEF NZ Recommendations

Our overarching recommendation is that social services, and the policy and purchasing decisions that underpin them, should take account of the protection, provision and participation rights of children that are articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This can be implemented through:

1. **Provision of child rights training** for those working for, and with, children. This includes policy analysts, managers and the children's workforce as defined in the Children's Action Plan. Such training should enable analysts and service providers to better understand their obligations to ensure policy and practice is consistent with the protection and provision rights in UNCROC, and enables children's voices to be heard. UNICEF NZ is available to assist with such training.
2. **The systematic use of Child Rights Impact Assessments in policy, commissioning, purchasing and service delivery**, to ensure rigorous assessment of impacts on children/ tamariki to enable the delivery of policy and services that uphold children's rights and improve their wellbeing.

UNICEF NZ makes these recommendations because rights are not "nice to have" aspirations but entail clear obligations and are a recognised tool to achieve overall child wellbeing. Rather than a charity or philanthropic ethic, an absolute, inherent and inalienable prerogative to apply all rights to all New Zealand children, must drive all decisions that impact on any child in New Zealand.

UNCROC Article 4 requires government to "undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention".

Cabinet has agreed that the promotion of human rights is a means to ensure better outcomes for people (Cab Min (09) 13/3C). However, UNICEF NZ's own inquiry conducted during 2011, has shown that there is an extremely low level of

awareness of UNCROC in New Zealand and its implications for legislation, policy and practice are not adequately understood in the public service sector.⁴

UNICEF NZ also recommends:

3. A system of “proportionate universalism”⁵ to ensure that all children benefit from essential universal services with a proportionate increase scaled to alleviate hardship and address particular needs for children in more disadvantaged situations. *“Focussing solely on the most disadvantaged will not reduce health inequalities sufficiently. To reduce the steepness of the social gradient in health, actions must be universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.”*⁶

These basic universal services should include culturally appropriate:

- Antenatal care
- Midwifery/ Lead Maternity Care
- Well Child Health/ Tamariki Ora service
- Free GPs 24/7 up to the age of eighteen
- Parenting education and support that enables the development of secure attachment
- Breastfeeding support
- 6 months paid parental leave
- Immunisation
- Warm, dry housing
- Nutrition (affordable food)
- Dental care
- Quality early childhood education
- Relevant, responsive schools
- Literacy, vocational or tertiary training, and
- Adolescent health and mental health services.

⁴ UNICEF NZ, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Education and Training for professional working with and for children in New Zealand*, Wellington, February 2012

⁵ Professor Sir Michael Marmot, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, Report to the Secretary of State for Health, UK 2010

⁶ Marmot, 2010

4. Developing a national consensus about the respective roles of Government, local government and community. This clarity will enable each sector to fully occupy the space for which they are responsible and meet their obligations to children and families.

We draw attention to the case made by UNICEF NZ in 2010⁷, and referred to Ministers that illustrates how the obligations of UNCROC extend to local authorities. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has confirmed that New Zealand's international obligations apply to both central and local government. Stronger communities can be achieved through local government providing strategic leadership. A useful framework for achieving this is the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative. This has potential to create a common agenda for collective impact in communities, and a framework that enables continuous improvement to give effect to children's rights and interests at a local level. (see www.unicef.org.nz/Child-Friendly-Cities)

The 2012 report by Every Child Counts, *The Netherlands Study*, suggests there is a need to rebalance the power back towards communities, with central Government responsible for investment in services, certification of quality, ensuring policies and programmes do not harm children, and equitable regional distribution of services.

5. Commissioning and purchasing decisions need to prioritise children's early years for effective investment, recognising the need to ensure culturally appropriate initiatives that enable families/ whānau to meet the needs of their children.
6. Relationships and communication between social service agencies, for enabling information sharing and collaboration vital for effective social service delivery, is not currently resourced adequately. Indeed, a competitive contracting environment has created disincentives to community organisations working together – despite the potential benefits to children and

⁷ UNICEF NZ, *Local Government Respecting the Rights of our Children*, Wellington, July 2010), [UNICEF NZ Submission to the Productivity Commission: Cut to the Chase, December 2014](#)

families from this way of working. Funders should insist on evidence that social service providers are working collaboratively and ensure that contracts provide for this.

7. Community knowledge and leadership plays a vital role in identifying problems and solving them, through community-led development. These community processes should be supported by access to local data and adequate funding. While there is a role for Government in providing the set of basic universal services identified above, it is important that Government agencies and funding arrangements do not undermine the power and potential of community responses to problems.
8. High trust funding arrangements that remain in place for 3-5 years help agencies to respond to diverse needs in an agile way. This is important for enabling innovation and flexibility in response to what families and communities require. Government contracting needs to allow for organisations to learn, grow, change and be responsive to families, rather than delivering a prescribed set of outputs.
9. Funders can play an active role in the monitoring and evaluation of services – or in supporting community agencies to monitor and evaluate their work well so that the agency can focus their efforts on with working directly with the people using services. Linked to this, UNICEF NZ would support the implementation of better data collection – nationally and locally – so that commissioning, funding and service delivery is better informed about local need. Monitoring and evaluation can include the qualitative feedback of those people, to assess how well services are responding to local need and maintaining a focus on people. Services should be client-led.
10. Commissioning agencies and funders must recognise that some services and solutions take time to prove their worth. Where there is reasonable evidence of positive impact, funders should be prepared to invest for a period of time

and enable an increase in scale. Early Start⁸ is a good example of this. There is evidence that it is effective, yet the programme has not been taken to scale. HIPPY⁹ is another programme with emerging evidence of efficacy. Once proven, there is a need to ensure sustainable, long-term funding so that services can be delivered at scale, with programme fidelity and quality training of staff.

Concluding Comments

There is growing political and public awareness of the need to ensure all children in New Zealand have a standard of living that supports their mental and physical development – as required by Article 27 of UNCROC. The delivery of social services will only be effective when the conditions of social and economic wellbeing are also addressed, and parents are equipped with the skills to care for their children. Support from extended whānau and community plays a vital role in enabling parents to successfully navigate the responsibilities of parenting, particularly when they are also in paid work.

UNICEF NZ urges the Productivity Commission to look closely at the child rights principles that should underpin social service funding and delivery in New Zealand, and work to embed these in the funding process. This would rapidly change culture and practice, and enable agencies to move beyond the competitive model that currently constrains child-centred practice.

We look forward to hearing what changes the Productivity Commission recommends to Government.

⁸ www.earlystart.co.nz

⁹ www.greatpotentials.org.nz/our-programmes/hippy/