



The Treasury Request for Information – New Zealand Government

How can Government improve results for our most vulnerable (at-risk) children and their families?

Submission on behalf of The Salvation Army New Zealand Fiji and Tonga Territory

BACKGROUND

1. The Salvation Army is an international Christian and social services organisation that has worked in New Zealand for over one hundred and thirty years. We provide a wide-range of practical social, community and faith-based services, particularly for those who are suffering, facing injustice or those who have been forgotten and marginalised by mainstream society.
2. We have over 90 Community Ministry centres and Churches (Corps) across the nation, serving local families and communities. We are passionately committed to our communities as we aim to fulfil our mission of caring for people, transforming lives and reforming society through God in Christ by the Holy Spirit's power¹.
3. This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit (SPPU) of The Salvation Army. This Unit works towards the eradication of poverty by encouraging policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand.
4. This submission has been approved by Commissioner Robert Donaldson, the Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory.

COMMENT ON REQUEST FOR INFORMATION PARAMETERS

5. This Request for Information (RFI) document states that this inquiry is focussed on existing or current government programmes. This submission will offer some comments about existing government programmes, but also discuss initiatives that are not necessarily connected to government agencies.
6. Given the limited space for RFI responses to 5-pages maximum, The Salvation Army's submission is structured as an overview of general comments and observations. The Army invites Treasury officials to visit one of our Salvation Army Community Ministry centres around the country, as well as other key Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and service providers, to gain more in-depth insights to the issues raised in this RFI. The Army submits that any critical social policy design or framework from the

¹ <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/mission/>

Government, particularly regarding vulnerable children and their families, should not be made in isolation or far-removed from the realities that these vulnerable families face every day.

- Finally, The Salvation Army submits that government agencies should better coordinate the time frames of the various consultations and inquiries they issue. We are aware of at least five major consultations from different government agencies that have submissions closing in December 2014. We submit that this uncoordinated approach adds unnecessary pressure on NGOs, charities and community groups. This stress is unwelcome because this is traditionally an extremely busy period for social service provision. Furthermore, it is unlikely that these public submissions will be even fully analysed before or during the Christmas period as government offices and staff wind down for the year.

RESPONSES TO REQUEST FOR INFORMATION QUESTIONS

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

8.1 Early Childhood Education – The Salvation Army submits that early childhood education centres are one way in which vulnerable children and families can be identified and engaged with. However, the real challenges are ensuring that these vulnerable families actually enrol their children into these centres, and also that the location of these centres are easily accessible for these families. We contend that the Government’s focus on providing additional centres in areas of high deprivation have helped increase the number of children from Maori and Pacific families enrolling into early childhood education. This is illustrated by the graphs below where the rates of enrolment for Maori and Pacific children into early childhood have increased steadily since 2008;

Figure 3: Rates of enrolment in early childhood education 2008–2013¹¹

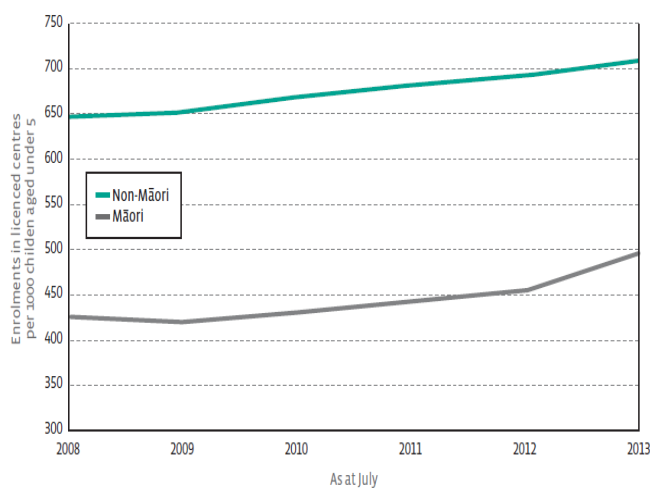
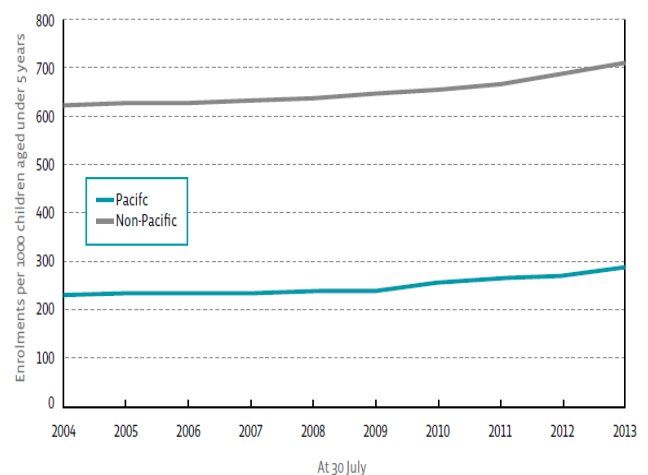


Figure 2: Early childhood education enrolments for Pacific and other children 2004 to 2013



8.2 Schools – The Salvation Army submits that local schools are a vital place where vulnerable children can be identified and engaged with. Local schools, particularly local primary and intermediate schools, act as community hubs in most communities. We support the current public debate about food programmes in schools. We are also keen to analyse further the potential for schools to receive more resources and support to become even stronger community hubs. All of these ideas or policies can play a key role in identifying and engaging with those at-risk of poor social, economic or health outcomes. In a 2013 paper, the Post Primary Teachers Association discussed at length the importance of supporting schools to become stronger community hubs². The PPTA states in this paper that there were successful working examples of schools operating as community hubs, citing Riccarton High School’s community library in Christchurch and the Victory Village community hub in Nelson as good models. The PPTA also commented that vulnerable students and poverty in the local communities could be addressed through these hubs, yet the dearth in resources, facilities and commitment often meant specific students or issues were missed. The PPTA called for greater research, resources and political commitment from government agencies for schools as community hubs. They also noted that the current Social Sector trials around young people involving Police, and the Ministries of Health, Education, Justice, and Social Development, was a good sign that government agencies were showing more interest in collaboration similar to the collaboration between community groups at schools as community hubs. The Salvation Army is very supportive of this approach or new direction, particularly when involving vulnerable or at-risk children or young people.

8.3 Salvation Army Community Ministry centres – The Salvation Army has over 70 Community Ministry centres operating around New Zealand. These centres vary greatly in size and the types of services they provide. The services, particularly the budgeting, food welfare and social work, provided in these centres are primarily funded by different government agencies (e.g. Ministry of Social Development); The Salvation Army’s own fund-raising efforts, and other philanthropic or private donations. Often, these Community Ministry centres are the first location where Salvation Army staff identify and engage with vulnerable and marginalised families and their children. Clients presenting with needs at our centres have been either referred by a government agency, from another Salvation Army social programme, or from another community group. Clients also present on their own accord. These types of community centres, particularly those located in areas of high deprivation, are important and usually safe locations for NGOs to identify and support at-risk families. Some NGOs, or collaborations of NGOs, provide critical wrap around services from these locations for some of the most marginalised in our communities. These include centres like the Friendship House in South Auckland, the Youth One Stop Shop in Palmerston North, and other vital centres throughout New Zealand communities.

8.4 Youth Mentoring Schemes – In recent years, there has been a proliferation of youth-focussed mentoring programmes throughout the country. Many of these programmes specifically work with at-

² Equipping schools to fight poverty: a community hub approach, PPTA National Executive, PPTA 2013 National Conference (http://www.ppta.org.nz/ict-docs/doc_view/1667-equipping-schools-to-fight-poverty-a-community-hub-approach)

risk children and young people. In 2012, the Children’s Action Plan³ was released. This Plan actively promoted youth mentoring as a critical mechanism to support and engage with vulnerable children and young people. Youth mentoring is popular and there have been examples of good success for some programmes. For example, the I Have A Dream⁴ programme which mentored and worked with the same cohort of children from primary school through to tertiary education (or other outcome) in Mt Roskill, Auckland, reported that their students had significantly better retention rates and overall academic achievement rates during the high school years than a control group at the same school⁵. Furthermore, 30 of the 38 young people in this programme entered tertiary education after high school⁶. While the number of young people on this programme is small compared to other youth mentoring programmes around New Zealand, there are clearly some good lessons about engaging and mentoring potentially at-risk children and young people that could help benefit further policy or programme development.

It is also our observation that there an increasing number of youth-related mentoring programmes operating in our communities. Many of these are ‘formal’ programmes, operating under some formal organisation such as charitable trusts and NGOs. Yet there are also ‘informal’ mentoring programmes operating in our communities, often through individuals or informal community networks. The New Zealand Youth Mentoring Network acknowledges this development in the youth mentoring sector by aiming to bring advice and best practice information to both formal and informal youth mentoring schemes⁷. The Salvation Army submits that it is essential to ensure all types of youth or child mentoring engagement follows best practice guidelines, particularly if the users of these programmes are at-risk, vulnerable or marginalised children or young people.

8.5 Christian Churches – New Zealand is a predominantly secular nation now. In 2006, over 2 million Kiwis (56 per cent of the population) identified as being affiliated with a Christian religion or Church. At the 2013 Census, 49 per cent of the population identified as being connected to Christianity⁸. Despite this increasing secularisation, The Salvation Army contends that Christian Churches play a pivotal role in engaging with and supporting vulnerable children and their families. Traditionally, Christian Churches have provided great social supports to vulnerable Kiwis. This continues today with social services like St Vincent De Pauls (Catholic), Presbyterian Support (Presbyterian), Habitat for Humanity (Christian non-denominational), and the City Mission (Methodist) still operating vital social services. Additionally, Christian Churches provide great spiritual support to vulnerable families. This type of support is not easily quantifiable at times. But these Churches provide critical spiritual support that works alongside the social service support. The spiritual support that at-risk children and their family access from Christian Churches include Sunday School, Bible Classes, youth groups, worship services and other Church activities. If the vulnerable family is choosing to seek and obtain this kind of spiritual support,

³ <http://childrensactionplan.govt.nz/>

⁴ <http://www.ihaveadream.org.nz/>

⁵ *I Have A Dream: Turning Dreams into Reality for Children Living in Poverty*, Jan Hill and Kerry Mitchell, The Education Group, Auckland, New Zealand - Paper presented at the AARE and NZARE Conference, ‘Speaking Back Through Research’, Brisbane 2014, page 11.

⁶ *Ibid*, page 15.

⁷ <http://www.youthmentoring.org.nz/about/index.cfm#>

⁸ <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/quickstats-culture-identity/religion.aspx>

then Christian Churches are a valuable way where vulnerable people can be identified and actively engaged in order to improve their spiritual and social condition and outcomes.

8.6 Other Key Locations – Clearly there are multiple locations or points where vulnerable children and families come to the attention of government agencies and services. For example, Work and Income New Zealand engage with adults and their children receiving welfare benefit, the Child Youth and Family Service are involved in cases of child abuse, and the Department of Corrections engage with the children of prisoners. The Salvation Army submits that there are other points of interaction or engagement with vulnerable children that exist outside government agencies or even the social services sector. In our experience, local sports clubs in the community are key locations where some vulnerable families are actively engaged. Obviously these families are primarily there for sports. However, these are groups and locations where important engagement can happen with at-risk children and families. Often these groups struggle with funding. But they become safe hubs for all sorts of families to gather and interact around a generally positive environment. Other organisations have acknowledged the growing importance of these sports clubs in recent years, with the White Ribbon campaign and some living without violence programmes being delivered at Rugby League clubs in Auckland.

Additionally, there are other informal points of engagement with vulnerable children and their families that function outside of formal government services, social service providers, or other community organisations. Gathering data and information about these informal supports is very difficult. But these supports can be good points to identify vulnerable children or key issues, and then pathway them to other key supports. These informal supports include wider family networks, social enterprise businesses (e.g. community cafes), and local neighbourhood projects (e.g. Vine Street Christmas Parade in Mangere East, South Auckland). These points can act as doorways where further engagement with at-risk people can be facilitated.

9. *How existing services could be improved to make the biggest difference to children and their families most at-risk of poor education, criminal justice and employment outcomes?*

9.1 The Right Pathways – The Salvation Army submits that it is absolutely vital to ensure that the service(s) that are engaging with at-risk children and their families is appropriate, relevant and effective for the actual family using the service. That is, these children and families must be pathwayed or directed to the correct service for them and their need. For example, in our experience, vulnerable families with acute housing needs have been referred to our social services for housing assistance. Sometimes these families have bounced around between other government and community services before they present to us. Other times, we have had to refer families on to other agencies or NGOs because we are unable to help or address their need. This adds more stress to these stretched vulnerable families.

We submit that existing services could support at-risk families better by ensuring the families have key support to navigate through the myriad of agencies or services they are engaging with. Recently, there

has been more attention paid to this need. For example, the Whanau Ora navigator roles support Maori enrolled with health services in their communities. This kind of guidance should be neutral and independent to ensure that the at-risk children and their families are engaging with the correct service(s) for them.

9.2 Resource – The Salvation Army does not believe that money or funding is the panacea to working effectively with at-risk families. However, we do affirm that appropriate funding for initiatives or services is vital to ensure the best outcomes are reached for these children and families. We submit that smarter appropriation of public money is needed. For example, we have submitted above that key locations like sports clubs or school community hubs are often underfunded. But with greater financial support, as well as other key investments like staff training or collaboration, these sites could work at a greater capacity in supporting vulnerable families to better outcomes.

The Salvation Army submits that any future appropriation of public funds targeted at at-risk children and families should focus on encouraging cross-sectorial collaboration and partnerships, providing critical navigating/guidance/advocacy support to those manoeuvring through these systems, and also invest into effective localised community development such as schools as community hubs, sports clubs in key communities, and other informal supports. We invite the Treasury to engage in a robust and face-to-face engagement phase with submitters after this RFI to discuss and debate how best to appropriate public funds for engaging with at-risk children and families. We have argued in another government inquiry⁹ that key social policy should not be made only in isolation from the realities of how complex and difficult it is to work ‘on the ground’ with our at-risk families. We encourage policy makers to venture outside of government offices to observe the policies they design operating in practice. This approach could be more crucial as the Prime Minister and his Cabinet have already publicly stated their intention to address child poverty and vulnerable children.

9.3 Extension of key services – The Salvation Army submits that some effective services already operating with at-risk families should be extended, and should continue to receive greater investment from funders. For example, there has been a consistent decline in the teenage pregnancy rate in New Zealand. The table below illustrates this pattern;

⁹ The Salvation Army submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into More Effective Social Services, December 2014.

Table 7B: Pregnancies and abortions for 15–19 year-olds 2008–2012

Year ending December	Number of live births	Number of induced abortions	Pregnancy rate (per 1000)	% of pregnancies aborted
2008	5,185	4,097	59	44%
2009	4,641	3,873	54	45%
2010	4,526	3,389	50	43%
2011	3,981	2,822	44	41%
2012	3,768	2,489	41	40%

This decline could be occurring for a number of reasons, including the work of government agencies and social service providers, or a general shift in attitudes towards sex by young people. Whatever the reason, it is crucial that there are a wide range of supports available to the mother and child, including health support, and educational pathways. The Taonga Unit in Manurewa is a good example of an effective service providing vital support to at-risk mothers and children. We submit that the Government should maintain support for these initiatives, but also broaden the services targeted at teenage fathers in the community.

Another service that we believe could benefit from investment is the Hauora Methamphetamine Treatment programme developed collaboratively since 2012 between the Ministry of Health, The Salvation Army, and the Notorious Chapter of the Mongrel Mob. Hauora is a residential treatment programme that works with whole families around addictions and other issues facing these families¹⁰. Additionally, this Hauora partnership has led to requests from a Wellington chapter of the Black Power to The Salvation Army for support in other key areas of need¹¹. We submit that many other NGOs and community organisations are engaging in innovative projects like this. Therefore government agencies should create more space and flexibility in their contracts for social services with NGOs to ensure their projects are effective and truly engage with at-risk children and families.

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

10.1 We submit that many of the key issues or problems are already being addressed or looked in to some extent by an agency, NGO or other group. Due to the limited space, we will highlight here some key areas that we believe must continue to be considered when looking at vulnerable children;

- **Childcare issues** – Many of the clients using our social services comment about their struggles to find adequate childcare or babysitting, particularly if they have to seek employment as per their

¹⁰ <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/faith-in-life/our-people-our-stories/journeying-together>

¹¹ <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/faith-in-life/soul-food/being-the-change>

benefit requirements. The free hours available at early childhood education centres does alleviate some of this stress. But childcare can be a major issue for struggling families. In addition, the employment that these parents take up is often shift work and uncertain, placing more pressure on these families. There are multiple likely effects to these issues, including children going unsupervised or being supervised by siblings, or inviting different adults into the home to help with childcare that could prove very unsafe for the children e.g. having neighbours or other family members babysit the kids who the parent(s) is unfamiliar with.

- **High cost of living** – The Salvation Army submits that the poverty or vulnerability of the parent(s) becomes the poverty or vulnerability of the child. In our experience, many families present to our Community Ministry centres with issues that often involve a lack of money to cover their expenses. Obviously, this is a very complex area that usually involves low wages, high levels of bad debt, housing costs, education costs, cultural and church obligations and numerous other critical issues. It is sufficient to state here that many vulnerable families we work with across the country simply are unable to afford some of the basic necessities of life. In 2013 alone, The Salvation Army gave over 56,000 food parcels to struggling families¹². These parcels went to nearly 29,000 individual people or families¹³. These are some of the most vulnerable in our society. This vulnerability is commonly due to just not having enough money to essentially live by. These financial issues are exacerbated in Auckland and Christchurch where our clients face the added pressure of the booming housing markets in those cities. This RFI will not address some of these complex, multi-layered issues. But we raise these financial hardships as a very real barrier to at-risk children achieving good educational or employment outcomes.
- **Cultural obligations and Church giving** – it is well known that Maori and Pacific are disproportionately represented in statistics around child poverty, unemployment, low educational achievement, and other key social indicators. Key issues like cultural obligations and giving to churches are often taboo subject areas, particularly for Pacific families. We submit that more open discussions about these issues are necessary within Pacific communities about these issues. These open discussions could inform non-Pacific people about these issues, and also ideally ensure that Pacific children are not put at-risk for their education and other needs because of these issues. We submit that real bravery is required from non-Pacific people to encourage these discussions, and from Pacific communities themselves to have these honest discussions. The Ministry of Pacific Peoples and other key organisations will play a vital role in this area.

¹² <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/sites/default/files/uploads/20131218SA%20Annual%20Report%202013%20-%20Web.pdf>

¹³ Ibid.

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

11.1 Financial Wellbeing – The term ‘financial literacy’ has become a government and community ‘buzzword’ in recent years. The Salvation Army is encouraged by this development. However, we submit that any financial literacy programme offered to vulnerable families must be robust, based on best practice, but also culturally relevant to the programme users. Also, the goal of these programmes should be towards financial wellbeing, which can involve broad goals such as debt eradication, saving for retirement, or creating emergency funds for the family. It will be interesting to see how effective financial literacy initiatives like Poto Money (Te Wananga o Aotearoa, Massey University) or the Turanga Initiative (Auckland Council) will be working with families. The Salvation Army supports these initiatives, particularly for at-risk families, as long as they are effective, empowering, realistic and relevant for these families.

11.2 Family Relationships – We submit that it is critical to provide greater support for how families interact and relate to each other, and how parents parent their kids. What this support should look like is debateable. We applaud recent developments such as parenting support for teen parents, or parenting workshops that groups like the Parenting Place operate. But we are interested in how some of the most vulnerable families in our society get help in terms of their family and parenting relationships. Too often, the intervention comes when there has been a serious break down, particularly interventions from the Police, Child Youth and Family, and others. We recommend that further investigation is needed to see how these vulnerable families can obtain effective and relevant relationship support to build on the resiliency they already have, rather than come in after the break down. The Salvation Army has one relevant model, the Positive Lifestyle Programme that works with individuals around how they can cope better with stress, anger, grief, self-analysis, and working towards better problem solving. Many of the participants on this programme are parents. Again, these types of initiatives that work to build personal resilience and stronger family and social connections are beneficial when looking at at-risk families. There are undoubtedly many other models or programmes operating locally and overseas that could be applied in a New Zealand context. In our experience, addressing some of these key relationship issues within at-risk families could help build independence, and strengthen the resilience they already have.

CONCLUSION

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