14 February 2002   S02.05

Submission to the Social Services Select Committee on the
Social Security (Working towards Employment) Amendment Bill 2001

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 43 nationally organised societies. It has 35 branches spread throughout the country to which women from some 150 societies are affiliated.

This submission is written on behalf of the Social Issues Standing Committee from responses from the members of that committee.

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1896 NCWNZ has taken a keen interest in matters relating to children and families. Our members welcome this new approach to social development for working age beneficiaries in New Zealand with the removal of current work test obligations for recipients of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) or Widows Benefit. This Bill is not as harsh as the Social Security (Work Test) Bill in 1998. However, New Zealand still has the lowest level of family benefits in the western world for those needing the DPB.

Clause 112 60Q – 60Z

1.   (a)   Beneficiaries will be able to move ahead with the support and encouragement of Case Managers.

      (b)   Case Managers need to be experienced in social work, career profiling, and to take into account the client's broader social needs. The Department will need extra resources to increase the number of case managers and improve their training.

2.   Different needs for different age groups to be recognised.
      (a)   School age solo mothers may want to resume their education. More schools are needed to provide facilities for these students as for example he Huaraki Tamariki, the school for teenage mothers in Porirua. The achievements of this school in the 2001 Bursary results as reported in the Auckland Herald are to be commended.

      (b)   Case Managers should understand people who have just recently been widowed. Some Case Managers in the past have lacked skills and understanding of people in a grief situation. Women over 50 often find their age is a barrier to employment.

(c)   Peter Hughes CEO of the Ministry of Social Development, said at the Social Development Forum on 15 November 2001 - that "building trust and confidence among the staff of the Ministry, and between the Ministry and its clientele is important so that a climate of openness prevails".

(d)   There should be continued access to the Case Manager if jobs are lost through restructuring or through the inability of the client to sustain employment and family responsibilities.

(e)   In rural communities travelling to appointments with Case Managers could be a problem.

3.   Liaison with community organisations would strengthen the support to the client, eg Mental Health Forum in West Auckland networking with Housing New Zealand.

General Comments

The Bill does not acknowledge the unpaid work of parents – mothers in particular in staying home and looking after their children. Nor does it take into account the lack of child care facilities for those clients who are in employment. More emphasis should be put on creating jobs because in reality there are not enough paid jobs for all solo parents to be able to secure work that pays well and enables them and their families to live in dignity.

Conclusion

NCWNZ does not think it will be possible to cope with the large number of beneficiaries to whom this scheme will apply. It would be better to start on a small scale or perhaps with a pilot scheme to test the procedures. The aim is to get beneficiaries into work; if there are no jobs, beneficiaries will feel they have failed yet again. NCWNZ hopes that monitoring will be put into place to observe the effects and the success or failure of these new measures.

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