



Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers  
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## **AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (ANZASW)**

Submission on the More Effective Social Services  
Draft Report

To the: 2015 Productivity Commission

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## AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional body for a national collective of more than 3,500 social workers, who have day-to-day involvement with the most vulnerable people in our society. Our work is guided by a Code of Ethics that is aligned with the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

Social work is founded on principles of human rights and social justice. We are guided by the Treaty of Waitangi and respect the equality, worth and dignity of all people. In accordance with the March 2012 IFSW Global Agenda<sup>1</sup> “we commit ourselves to supporting influencing and enabling structures and systems that positively address the root cause of oppression and inequality. We commit ourselves wholeheartedly and urgently to work together, with people who use services and with others who share our objectives and aspirations, to create a more socially-just and fair world”. We believe the overarching principles of social work are respect for the inherent worth and dignity of human beings, doing no harm, respect for diversity and upholding human rights and social justice.

Our mission is to enable people to develop their full potential; our skill-set is problem solving and facilitation of positive change in individuals, organisations, whānau and communities. We recognise the environment contains opportunities for people to be both agents of change and victims of factors beyond their control. As a profession, we strive to alleviate poverty, foster social inclusion and liberate those who are vulnerable or oppressed. Social work is evidence-based and draws on theories of human development, behaviour and social systems.

Social workers respond to crises and emergencies along with the personal or social problems that arise from experience of barriers, inequities and injustices within our society. Our interventions involve problem solving, development of coping strategies, one-on-one counselling and therapy, family and group work, agency administration, community organisation and helping people to access services, resources and support systems within their community. We work across government and non-government settings including community organisations, iwi agencies, private practice, youth justice, child protection, mental health, addictions and disability. We are involved in research, training, education, professional development, competency assessment, data gathering, risk assessment, structural analysis, interagency protocols and the improvement of social policy.

### Introduction

There are sections within the ‘More Effective Social Services – Draft Report’ that are encouraging for the social services sector. Of particular benefit are the development of an accurate data collection and analysis system and the intended improvement of managing and co-ordinating services.

However this report does leave concerns in regards to private enterprises, social investment bonds, definitions and clarification as well as the obvious lack of information and recommendations for prevention and alleviation of drivers or contributing factors of poverty and vulnerability.

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<sup>1</sup> International Federation of Social Workers, International Association of Schools of Social Work and International Council on Social Welfare (2012). ‘The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Commitment to Action’. Available at [isw.sagepub.com](http://isw.sagepub.com) (accessed 13 June 2012)

Whilst it is understandable to evaluate social services in Aotearoa New Zealand in order to ensure that clients are receiving the most appropriate and effective services it is equally essential to simultaneously focus on prevention of poverty and vulnerability. In order to make a sizeable decrease in the future need for social services and the number of those living in poverty there needs a significant focus on the alleviation of poverty.

Allowing profit driven enterprises or social investment bonds into social services is not going to significantly slow the ever increasing number of people in poverty. These investments promote cost effective, goal driven services that work at meeting targets in preference to long-term improvements. There is no mention of investment in; countering the social conditions contributing to vulnerability, preventing the risk/cycle of poverty for children, decreasing the social, and eventually financial, costs by providing the vulnerable with the essentials to live healthy and increase wellbeing, or working towards a society of equal opportunity providing a better future for all.

In order for this Report to be a true and accurate depiction of what is needed to decrease vulnerability and poverty in future generations it must include ways and means to address and improve the contributing social conditions. Working tirelessly on this will amount in decreasing dependency on social services and an increase in opportunities and equality. Ignoring this will perpetuate the cycle of poverty/vulnerability and therefore the need for social services, along with the costs will expand.

## **Feedback**

### **Inclusions for the Report**

#### **Definitions/Clarification**

The Report does not go far enough in its discussion around what are regarded as quality services or how 'quality' can be measured (and from whose perspective). While the report offer up the idea of a single outcome framework (now prematurely picked up in the draft Community Investment strategy) there needs to be more work done around how we should measure impact. There are some excellent UK examples that can be found at <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/>.

#### **Addressing the drivers of 'vulnerability'**

Evaluating social services and looking for ways in which to make improvements that will benefit clients is a positive step in the right direction. However this step cannot be taken without also moving forward with the intent to alleviate the social factors/conditions that leave so many vulnerable.

Waiting until a child, family or person is in need before providing social services works against long-term improvements whilst propelling the need to increase services and discouraging early intervention and prevention. There should not be criteria that have to be met before a person is entitled to any services/opportunities/a chance of improvement. We should always be working towards addressing and alleviating the social conditions which contribute to poverty and vulnerability in order to increase opportunities and wellbeing.

This is a long-term goal that will require a collaborative effort across Ministries, Services and Communities but it is one that should be high up on any priority list when looking to reduce the need for, and therefore the cost of, social services.

Lacking in this report is information or mentions the drivers of “vulnerability” – for example:

- Inadequate housing – the Coroner has now reported that a cold damp State House was a contribution factor in the death of a child.
- Inadequate incomes – budget Advisors report that many of the clients that they work with simply do not have enough money to meet even their most basic commitments. This relates to be beneficiaries and low income workers.
- Poor housing and inadequate income contribute
  - to poor outcomes in the education system
  - Ongoing preventable health issues

## Social Investment Bonds – Advantages and Disadvantages

### Advantages

Positives that were identified at the Christchurch SIB Seminar by Paul Riley of Key Assets included:

- The ability to budget for full funding for the service including; administration overheads and costs of evaluation. This is particularly useful in the social service sector as workers are often overloaded with cases and struggle to find the time for tasks that an administrator would be able to handle. This would therefore alleviate these tasks and allow social workers more time to dedicate to clients.
- The ability to be able to negotiate contracts for up to 4 years in some cases with a 2 year right of renewal. Giving services a peace of mind that is rare in the social services sector and allowing them to plan ahead with certainty.
- Philanthropic Trusts who already fund social services would benefit from a return on investment which would make them more likely to reinvest (A note of caution was that if it was a commercial enterprise such as a bank investing their drive will be profit rather than social good).

### Disadvantages

The particular concerns or fears surrounding Social Investment Bonds are:

- In the UK Key Assets reported in the NZ Seminars that the Investor has a high level of hands on involvement with the service including with trouble shooting when outcomes were not being met. The concern is that an investor’s solution will inevitably focus on outcome achievement which is central to obtaining a return on investment. This may be at the expense of the best outcomes for service users.
- No relevant cultural considerations within Aotearoa New Zealand. There needs to be reference to and development of how Social Investment Bonds will work for Maori and Pacific Island people in particular.
- There is a shift of focus off the clients and their needs to profit and outcomes. This could blur the lines between the best service for a client or the most cost effective, goal driven service

- The priority is to get clients back to work however this is not always clear cut, especially in the mental health field. There needs to be consideration for the negative effects job hunting can have on clients e.g. rejection, 90 day trial period, suitability. This also shifts the focus from skill enhancement and job quality which are important factors in long-term outcomes.
- There should not be a blanket across all services and clients. There may be certain services and clients that would benefit from the advantages of Social Investment Bonds but this will need to be carefully considered.

## Private Enterprises – Concerns and Issues

The inclusion of private enterprises shifts the focus from helping and assisting the most vulnerable in society to goals, outcomes and profits.

The biggest issue with the introduction of private enterprises is the uncertainty of what outcomes/goals are included in the contracts. There is a possibility that those who are most affected or the service users will not be consulted about what an appropriate outcome looks like. This would result in a system working towards specific outcomes that meet targets rather than what works best for clients and service providers.

## Data Collection and Analysis

There is no system for collecting and analysing data and outcomes for social services in a timely and accurate manner. This is something that needs to change in order to evaluate services and make decisions on increasing/decreasing/stopping/continuing them.

Those drafting policies around gathering data need to reconsider the language being used to describe 'outcomes' they are seeking. Suggesting "social problems" can be solved by single or multiple providers is a deficit approach which presupposes that 'social ills' are caused by individuals who have some control over personal circumstances which may frequently be out of their control. Using language such as "social issues" widens the discussion around what works and takes away the notion that if providers fail to deliver positive outcomes it is somehow their fault or the fault of their clients.

The system that is developed needs to be helpful to clients, staff and management alike and should be able to define where improvements can be made and which services can be modelled. However it is essential that there is allocation and understanding of the variables and differences for complex clients and those with short and long term goals. An outcome cannot be stock standard for all clients in all areas of practice.

We have learned from the CYF 2014 Workload Caseload Review that the requirement to report and meet KPI requirements had a perverse outcome. Social Workers were penalised for not meeting KPI requirements so face to face contact with children & their families was reduced or ceased (CYF Workload and Casework Review: Qualitative Review of Social Worker Caseload, Casework and Workload Management, Section 10)

It is vital that outcomes are reflective of the client and their needs as well as realistic. They should also encourage contact with clients and families rather than the KPI system above. Data also needs to be analysed with consideration to clients' needs and service providers. Sometimes what would seem like a small gain within the data could be a significant gain for the client and service provider.

Once a system that provides helpful data that is accurate and correctly analysed is developed this will encourage data sharing between services in order to make the clients experience smoother. This will also provide data and recommendations for those wanting to make improvements and will allow those services that are excelling to share the pathway to their success.

### **Managing and co-ordinating current social services**

There needs to be major improvements in the way that services are managed and co-ordinated. Currently there are no system/guideline for organisations and agencies to communicate and liaise when clients transition from one service to another. This can leave clients to feel apprehensive when transitioning without consultation.

The 'shared goals' service needs to be carefully developed and implemented in order for clients to feel consulted and autonomous when transitioning. If services were managed to assist and share we would see a smoother/more functional transitional period and better outcomes for clients.

This requires that Ministers from each relevant government department to clearly communicate with their CE's and their staff (particularly their contracting staff) about how they should collaborate/ communicate when engaging with providers. A cross agency/department protocol for this would need to be established to set out this process. This protocol should be simpler and more consultative than the current Community Investment strategy that has been drafted.

### **Aligning Geographical Boundaries**

#### **Advantages**

Having an alignment of boundaries has the advantage of having those most familiar with the needs, trends, resources and opportunities being made available to children and families. It also enhances better outcomes for those needing the service and those delivering the services.

#### **Disadvantages**

Families could miss out on wider opportunities and resources that are not immediately available in their own community. There are current situations in the smaller towns in New Zealand where some of the needs for the families are best met by having services outside of their own geographical area being involved and allowing opportunities for improvement for the family and their own community.