

## Progress made, but much more to do

**It is now four years since Government pledged to eradicate child poverty by 2020, providing an ideal opportunity to review progress to date.**

The release of the latest child poverty figures, showing that 3.8 million children were in poverty in 2001/2, confirms the scale of the Prime Minister's ambition to end child poverty in a generation. Despite the Government spending £12 billion a year more on poor children and their families than in 1996/97, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that the Government will need to direct additional spending to families with children if it is to meet the target of reducing child poverty by a quarter by 2004/05.

The new Child Tax Credit will make a real difference to low income families and their children. However, there are other measures which would make a difference and can be tackled now. Over one million poor children live in households where at least one adult is working full-time and



ensuring that work does pay is absolutely vital. Urgent consideration should also be given to the TUC's call for 16- and 17- year-olds to be included in the national minimum wage. Similarly, overdue reforms in the NHS National Service Framework should be implemented now to reduce health inequalities that mean a child born today in Manchester can expect to live seven years less than a child born in Barnet. Action should also be taken to tackle the 80,000 homeless households currently living in temporary accommodation.

Ultimately, whilst there is a great deal of work going on in a number of government departments to tackle various manifestations of poverty, the Government needs to develop a comprehensive route map which details how it intends to deliver on the Prime Minister's pledge.

This strategy document would bring together preventative and alleviative policies, across all government departments, which aim to improve outcomes for children living in poverty. It would outline the Government's medium to long-term policies and key milestones in relation to the eradication of child poverty and identify the roles to be played by other agencies (for example, local government) in ending child poverty. The document would ensure that all relevant government departments are working towards the pledge to end child poverty with a systematic and strategic approach. It would also send out a clear message the wider public about the importance of the pledge to end child poverty.

Finally, we know that investing in poor children improves not only their life chances, but also the experiences of the community around them. In times of economic uncertainty, spending decisions become increasingly difficult, but giving every child the best start in life remains both morally and economically the right choice.

### Recent publications from End Child Poverty

End Child Poverty has recently published papers on *Child Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*, produced in association with Shelter, and *Child Poverty and Education*, produced in association with the National Children's Bureau.

The briefing papers are the fourth and fifth in a series of six; subject areas already tackled include *Tax and Benefits, Child Poverty and Health* and *Supporting Poor Children and their Families*.

All publications are available, free of charge, from End Child Poverty. Please contact Claire Kober on 020 7843 1913 or [claire@ecpc.org.uk](mailto:claire@ecpc.org.uk) to request a copy.

# The view from here

**It's strange how our perceptions can change. If the Government in 1993 had announced that the number of children in poverty had dropped by 400,000 there would have been great excitement. The same announcement in 2003 has been greeted with disappointment and anxiety.**

The current Government's pledge to end child poverty by 2020 has raised our expectations. Now all of those concerned with children in poverty have to face the reality that this is going to be a long struggle made worse by the fact that an increasing standard of living for the majority leaves those in poverty further behind.

Many groups will continue to press the Government to fulfil its pledge. But End Child Poverty has a particular contribution to make. This is to build a grass-roots movement committed to ending child poverty.

The direction of the economy indicates that the Government will have to make some hard choices about priorities in the next few years. Education, the health service and transport are the issues at the top of people's minds. Unless there is a popular movement to say that ending child poverty is a priority, there is a danger that it will not get the attention and the money it needs.

We are encouraged by the success of the Jubilee campaign in making third world debt a grass-roots issue but it had the advantage that third world poverty was so stark and was made real by a series of powerful documentaries. Poverty in the UK is less visible. Children are not visibly starving so we don't see the children with poor diets and the mothers who go without in order to feed them. Children are not dying on the streets so we forget that poor children have lower birth weights, worse health



and die earlier than other children.

The good news is that our member organisations put us touch with hundreds of thousands of people who share our concern for children and young people. Our aim is to mobilise the energy and commitment of those people to keep child poverty at the top of the political and national agenda.

**Ian Sparks, Chair, ECP**

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## Child Poverty and Work

As the sixth briefing paper in a series, End Child Poverty is working with the Work Foundation on the issue of *Child Poverty and Work*.

The new briefing paper will be launched at a joint seminar, to be held at the beginning of July. If you have a particular interest in this area and would like to be involved, please contact the End Child Poverty office.

## Beyond the bus shelter

**Although in recent years there has been an interest in rural issues, culminating in a range of responses from the Government's Rural White Paper to the 'liberty and livelihood' countryside march last September, the voice of rural young women is yet to be heard.**

Young women's experiences of rural life are varied – but mostly split according to their social class and income. Whilst the more affluent young woman with a supportive family network may find the green and pleasant landscape and the lack of overcrowding in rural areas fulfilling, those on low income may have a different view. For those on low income, limited education and employment opportunities, as well as the rising cost of housing and scant public transport, have compromised their scope for social participation.

Young women's experiences of social exclusion in rural areas are more than just a matter of poverty. It is a multi-dimensional and complex affair which can deny them participation in decision-making and political processes, access to employment and integration into the common cultural life of the community. The most striking obstacle to young women's social inclusion in these areas is the lack of education and employment prospects, compounded by gender stereotyping. For rural young women, by and large, traditional gender roles remain unchallenged, the expectation being that women will set career aspirations aside if they have school-age children. The job opportunities open within the immediate vicinity also reflect gender stereotypes, being concentrated in the low-paid service and caring industries.

There is a generally strong family ethos in rural areas. This means that while some young women value local networks of intimacy and support, those whose family links have either broken down or are located at a distance are often lonely and vulnerable. Furthermore, the intimacy of local networks often compromises privacy, so that personal problems of a sensitive nature such as

sexual health matters, illicit drug use, alcohol misuse, domestic violence, self-harm and eating disorders cannot be easily brought into the open.

Young women from minority ethnic groups face the additional disadvantage of the lack of language-specific services and appropriate medical care. The small numbers of women from minority ethnic groups within rural populations has meant that they are often overlooked and invisible.

Young women with children face the disadvantages of limited day care provision for children under five and a lack of after-school facilities. This makes

young women dependent on family support and restricted their access to leisure and employment. Those without family support have been consequently impoverished and, in some cases, forced to accept unsatisfactory arrangements for their children.



A substantial improvement in the number and quality of rural services – transport, health and social welfare, career guidance and social housing – is required. However, to address the kind of social exclusion specifically experienced by young rural women, the YWCA is calling for urgent action on the following areas:

- Gender must be mainstreamed in rural regeneration strategies.
- Service providers should consider setting up telephone helplines and making more use of mobile units and outreach activities to improve access to services.
- Service provision for young women should be of a holistic nature, in order to overcome the stigma of using a service in a close-knit community.
- The government must provide more funding for further and higher education colleges to offer transport, extend child care provision and distance learning, in order to improve access to education and training for young women in isolated rural areas.

**Mandana Hendessi, YWCA**

## Quids for kids

**Emma Knights of the Local Government Association outlines its new family benefits take-up campaign, *Quids for Kids*.**

The Local Government Association (LGA) is now a member of End Child Poverty. As part of its child poverty project, LGA is planning a take-up campaign for welfare benefits and tax credits for families with children. LGA is working with a group of national partners and local authorities to prepare the year long campaign. We are encouraging local authorities to work through Community Legal Service Partnerships and with local voluntary organisations to increase benefits/tax credits for families with children. Such joint local approaches to take-up were commended in the recent report published by the National Audit Office, *Tackling pensioner poverty: Encouraging take-up of entitlements* (available at [www.nao.gov.uk](http://www.nao.gov.uk)).

Although *Quids for Kids* has been launched to

coincide with the introduction of the Child Tax Credit, the campaign guide will cover good practice for take-up work on the full range of benefits for children. It will be supplemented by an electronic tool-kit containing specimen leaflets, letter and practical project plans which can be adapted for local campaigning. We will be making 'LGA take-up project of the month' awards and encouraging take-up work to focus on two months of action: June and November.

LGA is compiling a database of local authorities and other local organisations who are already undertaking welfare benefits/tax credits take-up work or who are planning to do so next year. If you want to register as a contact and be kept in touch with the planned campaign as it unfolds – e-mail *Quids for Kids* at [benefits.take-up@lga.gov.uk](mailto:benefits.take-up@lga.gov.uk)

**Emma Knights, Local Government Association**

## Education and child poverty

**End Child Poverty and the National Children's Bureau launched a new publication, *Education and Child Poverty*, at a seminar addressed by Charles Clarke MP on 25 March.**

The briefing paper reveals that Britain continues to have one of the greatest class divides in education in the industrialised world; a socio-economic attainment gap is evident as early as 22 months and widens as a child gets older. In English, schools with under 8 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals see nearly 81 per cent of their pupils achieve the expected level at key stage 3. The equivalent figure for schools with over 50 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals is 39 per cent. Similarly, poor children are still one-third as likely to get five good GCSEs as their wealthier classmates.

The causal relationships are complex. Poor children are less likely to flourish at school. School leavers with poor educational attainment are more likely to become poor adults, and, in turn, their own children are more likely to be brought up in poverty. But the paper also demonstrates that the relationship between poverty and education is not immutable – some poor children excel in school.



Charles Clarke MP addressing participants at ECP's Education and Child Poverty seminar.

Speakers at the seminar, held in central London, included Paul Ennals, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau, who presented the briefing paper and examined the research evidence in this area, and Vanessa Wiseman, headteacher of the Langdon School in Newham, East London who provided a 'view from the chalkface'.

**For a copy of *Education and Child Poverty*, contact Claire Kober on 020 7843 1913.**

# Evaluating the Children's Fund

**Emily Blay of the Children's Society evaluates the organisation's work with the Children's Fund one year on.**

When the Government announced the Children's Fund it was hailed as an opportunity to tackle children's experiences of poverty in their local communities and create a culture of participation of children and young people.

The Children's Society committed itself to taking on Children's Fund work, to date over fifty of our projects have involvement in the Fund. So we decided to ask, one year on – has the rhetoric matched the reality?

Through an external researcher we sought to explore the early experience of our projects involved in the Children's Fund. Questionnaires and interviews took place in the summer of 2002 and effectively gathered grounded information about the first wave of local funds, together with some early experience from the second wave, and the developmental stage of the third wave.

The research has highlighted a number of significant areas: the reality of partnerships; the lack of capacity building in the fund; the involvement of children and young people and the tensions around the timescales of the Fund.

Respondents were also asked what lessons had been learnt about the Fund as a means for tackling poverty. Most had no comment but the few comments made were critical and not encouraging. Respondents noted that the focus on geographical boundaries made no sense. This relates to one of the strongest insights from the evaluation of local government anti-poverty work – that targeting anti-poverty work in terms of geographical boundaries only brings many problems, not least that many poor people lived outside boundaries of 'poor areas' defined by local authorities.

The research has provided an interesting set of insights into the development of the Fund locally. The first observation clearly is that it is indeed early days and the position reflected here may change or, is changing. It may be that the work done in the early stages may help to generate an awareness of the need for a culture of participation of children and young people and that this will take root over the life of the local Children's Funds. However, the converse view is that unless the culture of participation of children and young people is embedded at the earliest stage, it will be more difficult to support it later on, particularly where powerful partners are somewhat resistant to it.



The Children's Society remains committed to our work with the Children's Fund as a means of engaging young people in their communities. We have planned a second stage of the research, beginning later in the spring, so that we can reflect on how the position has changed. We have also engaged a number of young people to develop a strategy for the organisation and a series of aspirational principles. One young person, age 11, commented on the Fund and said:

*'If they listen to us then we might get a better park...but they're always asking and never doing'*

A full report will be available in the summer.

For more information please contact Emily Blay in the External Affairs Unit (email [EmilyBlay@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:EmilyBlay@childrenssociety.org.uk)).

**Emily Blay, the Children's Society**

## Weighing up the rights and responsibilities agenda

**Kate Stanley of the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) takes a closer look at the Government's rights and responsibilities agenda.**

One in three people consider that anti-social behaviour has a negative impact on their quality of life. The Home Office White Paper on tackling anti-social behaviour, published last week, is categorical on its cause:

'Fundamentally, anti-social behaviour is caused by a lack of respect for other people.'

Which makes the big question: can you enforce respect? Or, at least, can you make people behave in a way that is more respectful of others? The Government thinks you can. One of the methods that it proposes using to achieve this is extended to the conditions that people have to meet in order to receive welfare benefits.

For example, the Government is planning to consult on whether to give local authorities the power to withhold payments of housing benefit to tenants where the authority believes this is the most effective way of tackling tenant's anti-social behaviour. Housing benefit was designed as a tool to enable those on low incomes to pay for their housing. This proposal would see it used instead to try to change their behaviour.

It is interesting to note that the Government is proposing only to give local authorities the discretionary power to use this tool rather than making it an integral part of a national strategy. It could be argued that this suggests a lack of confidence in the principle behind the proposal. After all, if the Government was confident that this would be an effective method of combating anti-social behaviour without too high a price, surely they would wish to see it used everywhere.

Over recent years we have seen a shift in the idea of what the welfare system can achieve. We have seen it move from a system of entitlement on the basis of need, towards a more active system which encourages people to take up opportunities to

protect themselves from disadvantage, such as the requirement to actively seek work as a condition of eligibility for unemployment benefit. That is, people are expected to fulfil their responsibilities for themselves and for others in order to claim the right of protection from risk in the form of benefits. The White Paper says:

'Our aim is a society where we have an understanding that the rights all enjoy are based in turn on the respect and responsibilities we have to other people and to our community.'

Now the Government is looking to extend this idea further and the housing benefit proposal is just part of a wider interest in extending the conditions on people receiving welfare benefits. Last year proposals were floated to dock the child benefit of parents whose children play truant from school or display other forms of anti-social behaviour, though these have since been shelved. The £500 Sure Start Maternity Grant is payable to those on low incomes on the condition that they have consulted a health centre to get advice on their baby and in this way seeks to reinforce actions deemed to be good. And people receiving

incapacity benefits will soon have to attend a series of compulsory work focused interviews in order to be eligible for the benefits.

This approach to welfare has been pioneered in the United States. In the US there are strict work requirements for adults receiving welfare, including lone parents. It is claimed that the best programmes can raise the employment of single mothers' by as much as a quarter and their income by a half, compared to the control group. Some states demand that parents in receipt of welfare keep their children in school under rules similar to those that were proposed here. Some states also require that parents get their children vaccinated as a condition of welfare receipt.

These proposals represent a much more explicitly moralistic approach which is clearly about changing people as well as the structures around them. Some



have suggested that this means side-stepping the causes of social problems and penalising certain behaviours rather than identifying why it is happening in the first instance.

There are some fundamental questions we should now be asking: Should we be using the welfare system to change people's behaviour by reinforcing behaviour deemed to be good and sanctioning that deemed to be bad? Do we object to or reject such ideas in principle, but have concerns about how they will pan out in practice? Here we would do well to learn from the experience in the US in order to see if you *can* use the welfare system in this way. We also need to develop our own evidence base to better understand what might work in seeking to change people's behaviour. On a practical but very real level we also need to consider what happens to those who do not respond to sanctions. The possible social consequences cannot be ignored. Are conditionality rules likely to worsen the positions of those most vulnerable and disadvantaged? And how about those who are not claiming benefits, so cannot be sanctioned like claimants, how are their responsibilities to be

enforced?

Finally, and crucially, we also need to ask how the rights and responsibilities of adults relate to those of others, such as their children. If parents have their housing benefit withheld as a result of their persistent anti-social behaviour they may find themselves in rent arrears, for example, with eviction possible. How will this impact the right of their children to a secure home?

There can be no doubt that anti-social behaviour is a blight on the lives of many and that we must take steps to tackle it, but extending the conditions attached to welfare benefits appears to be an approach fraught with challenges and we must examine it carefully.

### Kate Stanley, IPPR

The Institute for Public Policy Research is undertaking a research project to explore the use of extended 'conditionality' in welfare reform. For more information contact, Kate Stanley at k.stanley@ippr.org or on 0207 470 6107.

## Still missing out?

*Still Missing Out? – Ending poverty and social exclusion: messages to Government from families with disabled children* by Neera Sharma.

*Still Missing Out?*, a new report published by Neera Sharma highlights the plight of disabled children and their families and shows that many of them are still missing out on the basic necessities to lead an ordinary life.

Most poor families do not have a disabled child, but most families with a disabled child do live in poverty. The families we interviewed told us of a range of problems that made life much more difficult for them than having a child without disability.

Some could not work because they couldn't find suitable childcare for their disabled child. Those who did work struggled with the cost of childcare and with having sufficient income. It costs three times as much to look after a disabled child than it does a non-disabled child.

If the Government is to end child poverty, it will need to tackle the causes of poverty and social exclusion by providing suitable childcare for disabled children,

accessible housing, and the support needed by those who are working or for parents who wish to find work.

Parents with disabled children are struggling to find funds to cover the basic costs of such items as fuel bills, bedding, transport and special toys and equipment; benefits are inadequate and many families are misinformed about what they are entitled to.

The stresses of family life mean that many children are in lone parent families, which increases hardship, and for minority ethnic families there are cultural and language barriers.

One parent summed up the feelings of many others when she said:

*'Please just come and see what my life is like for a week and tell me you can cope with all this gobbledegook as well as coping with this from day-to-day.'*

### Neera Sharma, Barnardo's

Price £5.00 plus postage and packing from Barnardo's Childcare Publications  
Tel: 01268 520224, Fax: 01268 284804

# END CHILD POVERTY

## once and for all

Not one child in the UK lives in poverty – 3.8 million do. The UK has the fourth largest economy in the world and yet we have one of the highest levels of child poverty of all industrialised countries. In fact we have the highest level of child poverty in the EU.

Children born into poverty have a lower birth weight, higher infant mortality and poorer health. As they grow up they are less likely to stay on at school and will have fewer qualifications. In adulthood they will be lower paid, experience unemployment and they are likely to die younger.

The Government has pledged to end child poverty within a generation, to halve it by 2010 and quarter child poverty by 2004. The UK Government is also committed to implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which Article 26 specifically gives 'every child the right to benefit from social security'.

End Child Poverty has been formed by 12 leading charities to:

- ◆ **keep this and every future Government to the pledge to end child poverty by 2020**
- ◆ **forge a commitment between and across the public, private and voluntary sectors to end child poverty by 2020**
- ◆ **agree a set of standards against which to measure progress and promote policies to end child poverty by 2020.**

Ending child poverty means we must act on income poverty, but it also means tackling health inequalities, poor education outcomes and lack of employment, affordable housing and support for families.

Ending child poverty requires all of us, government, politicians, public sector, business, trade unions, faith communities and charities to tackle the destructive effect of poverty that is evident in many parts of the UK. It needs specific and continuous attention from all of us to ensure we end child poverty, once and for all.

### ECP Founder members

Barnardo's  
The Buttle Trust  
Children's Rights Alliance for England  
The Children's Society  
Child Poverty Action Group  
Family Welfare Association  
NCH  
NSPCC  
National Children's Bureau  
National Council for One Parent Families  
NCVCCO  
Save the Children

**If you want to end child poverty then find out more at:**

**End Child Poverty**  
**8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE**  
**Tel: 020 7843 1913/14**  
**Email: [info@ecpc.org.uk](mailto:info@ecpc.org.uk)**  
**Website: [www.ecpc.org.uk](http://www.ecpc.org.uk)**

We welcome articles, letters and news of reports, publications or events connected with child poverty in the UK. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee their inclusion. Please phone or email to discuss any items which might be appropriate. We reserve the right to cut and edit contributions as appropriate.

The views expressed are not necessarily those of End Child Poverty.