4 April 2018

To the Social Services and Community Committee,

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the 2018 Child Poverty Reduction Bill.

DPA wish to appear before the committee to speak to our submission.

**Disabled Persons Assembly NZ**

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**Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ**

The Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a pan-disability disabled person’s organisation that works to realise an equitable society, where all disabled people (of all impairment types and including women, Māori, Pasifika, young people) are able to direct their own lives. DPA works to improve social indicators for disabled people and for disabled people be recognised as valued members of society. DPA and its members work with the wider disability community, other DPOs, government agencies, service providers, international disability organisations, and the public by:

* telling our stories and identifying systemic barriers;
* developing and advocating for solutions; and
* celebrating innovation and good practice.

**Child Poverty Reduction Bill**

The Disabled Person’s Assembly support the intent behind the introduction of the Child Poverty Reduction Bill. We see child poverty as a major issue for New Zealand and one that requires urgent and considerable attention. The status quo in New Zealand is at odds with a country that purports to place value on fairness, egalitarianism and a ‘fair go’. However, we are concerned that there is no explicit reference made in the proposed Bill to the particular experience of poverty among disabled people and their whānau.

Our primary concern is that, without specific consideration being given to the experience of disabled people, their experience will not be accounted for in measures of child poverty and they will continue to be rendered invisible. This will in turn mean that any proposed solutions will fail to respond to the needs of disabled people and their whānau.

It is clear that disabled people and their whānau experience disadvantage in society. What is not clear is the full extent of their disadvantage, or how exactly it manifests across groups. There is a urgent need for data and measurement of the experience of poverty for disabled and their whānau.

**Disabled people and social outcomes**

Disabled people’s social outcomes are worse than those of their non-disabled peers across the board. Disabled people fair worse in measures of education, health, employment, social inclusion and participation. Disabled people also experience stigma and attitudinal barriers.

Disabled people have fought for greater inclusion but there is still much work to do. For example, the move towards a more inclusive education system in the last two decades has arguably supported disabled children and their families to envision lives in which they are fully included in society. However, much of the work involved in ensuring their full inclusion continues to fall to families (Good et al., 2017).

Many parents are also advocates and carers for their disabled children. The vast majority of this labour goes unacknowledged and unremunerated. The material impact of this on families can be seen in the fact that many of them have one parent in work and approximately 14% are benefit dependant (Child Poverty Action Group, 2016).

The example of family funded care however can be seen as evidence that acknowledging the labour on the part of families that goes into supporting disabled family members as well as offering them a modicum of financial security are both critical in ensuring positive outcomes for disabled people and their families. Those families who receive payment for the care of their disabled adult family members under the Family Funded Care report that financial acknowledgement of the work they do has increased the well-being of them and their family members. The number of families that experiencing this positive impact is constrained by lack of uptake and many more families could be benefiting from this support. In addition, families have reported that the benefits to them would be increased by a higher rate of pay (Carswell Consultancy, 2015).

**The social position of disabled children and young people**

The first New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001), which set the scene for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, made clear and specific reference to outcomes for disabled children and youth. In line with the Universal Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the 2001 Strategy states that disabled children and youth should enjoy full and active lives, in conditions that prepare them for adulthood and that:

– ensure their dignity

– affirm their right to a good future and to participate in education, relationships, leisure, work and political processes

– recognise their emerging identities as individuals and reinforce their sense of self

– promote self-reliance

– recognise their important links with family, friends and school

– facilitate their active participation in the community.”

The 2001 Strategy also emphasised valuing whānau and that the Government “acknowledge and support the roles, responsibilities and issues facing family, whānau and those who support disabled people.”

Since 2001, these aspirations for New Zealand’s disabled young people have been reiterated through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified by New Zealand in 2008 and the 2016 update of the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Despite New Zealand’s stated commitment to improving outcomes, families continue to struggle to uphold their children’s rights, for example to attend their local school and to receive adequate support across all areas of their lives. With 42.3% of young disabled people not in employment, education or training, it is evident that the majority of disabled young people are not being fully supported to contribute to society (Statistics New Zealand, 2017).

Disabled children and young people have the same aspirations for their futures as their non-disabled peers. When asked, young disabled people report wanting social and educational opportunities on par with their peers (McArthur and Kelly, 2004, Holt 2010, Sanderson, 2011). However, a deficit approach still pervades much educational and social policy about young disabled people, which results in social exclusion and a lack of opportunity for many disabled youth.

**Disability Data and Child Poverty Reduction**

There has been a consistent lack of disability related data from which a comprehensive picture of disabled people’s lives can be drawn and reliably used to inform policy. Without consultation with the disability community, the New Zealand Disability Survey has been is now woefully infrequent. There are also concerns among the disability community about the kind and quality of data collected on disabled people in the most recent census. By the admission of Statistics New Zealand the Washington Short Set was not intended to be a comprehensive measure of child disability. There are also concerns that it fails to account for a number of invisible and psychosocial impairments. This will mean many members of the disability community will not be reflected in the resulting data on the disabled population.

The general lack of data available on disabled population also means that there is currently no data source on disabled children which would properly fulfil the Bill’s requirements.

**DPA’s recommendations**

The Disabled Person’s Assembly strongly recommends that the Child Poverty Reduction Bill include explicit reference to disabled children and their whānau.

The Disabled Person’s Assembly recommends that the Bill enables development of data and measurement of child poverty data across a number of demographics.

The Disabled Persons’ Assembly endorses the Children’s Sector Joint submission on this Bill.