

The Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty: Priority 4 – Food In Schools

We recommend that the government design and implement a collaborative food-in-schools programme, commencing with decile 1 to 4 primary and intermediate schools.

Living in poverty can be a barrier to learning at school. Poor children often come to school hungry, which affects their ability to learn. A Ministry of Health survey found that 20.1 percent of New Zealand households with school-age children did not have enough food for active and healthy living. This percentage significantly increased for Pasifika and Māori families, large families, and those from the lowest socioeconomic groups (Parnell et al., 2003 in Yates et al., 2010). Children in low-income households are also more likely to have higher cholesterol intake and eat fewer healthy foods than their peers in higher income households (Smith & Brown, 2010). Organisations like KidsCan, Fonterra and Sanitarium currently provide food in some New Zealand schools. However, we believe that central government has a responsibility to provide leadership and resources to assist schools through a national strategy for food in ECEs and schools in low-decile neighbourhoods.

Action Statement from Workshop focus group:

Next steps towards a collaborative food-in-schools programme

- To progress work in this area, the Office of the Children's Commissioner have worked with various stakeholders to develop a framework within which schools and ECE services would design and implement their own collaborative programmes, within the bounds of best practice and supported by co-funding from business, philanthropy or Government, or all. Initial modelling shows that it could be implemented nationally at a cost of under \$10m per annum to the major sponsor, and leverage similar amounts from business.

- The key elements of the framework are
 - Optional for all schools and ECE services
 - The development of a wide range of best practice guidelines on (for example) nutrition and food preparation; cultural competence; delivering a programme without stigmatisation; avoiding dependence; engaging with business; embedding literacy and numeracy; and using food in the curriculum
 - Coordination support for schools and ECE services, to ensure that teachers are not diverted from teaching and learning, and that businesses are not inundated by calls from 8,000 individual schools and ECE services
 - A partnership fund which would either fully or partially match the contribution a school or ECE service has raised from the community and business, using a sliding scale based on decile rating (so lower decile schools or ECEs would get a greater Government contribution than higher decile schools or ECEs).
- This framework promotes school, family, community and business engagement. The creation of the coordinator role is to ensure that teachers' involvement in any food programme is only in those elements that can have direct educational benefit. The positioning of the programme as having educational benefits reduces stigmatisation. In order to avoid dependence, one of the requirements a school or ECE would need to meet before accessing funding is that they have mitigated it.
- This framework has been presented to the Government, with a decision likely to be made soon. Once an announcement is made The Office of the Children's Commissioner will then assess its role and what actions are required by the Office to progress this work.

Further Actions Identified by the Focus Group:

- Ensure that the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child underpins the Food in Schools Programme.

- To ensure consistency and sustainability the Government to underwrite a national system of provision and distribution for food in schools.
- As a further backstop, establish sustainable national partnerships with businesses at the highest level who are willing to commitment to supporting food in schools over the long term.
- Food in schools should be universally provided with programmes including mechanisms to help ensure that children don't miss out. Further exploration of the responsibility of School Boards of Trustees in assessing food security needs is required.
- Carry out local base lines such as those carried out by Child Poverty Action Group in Whangarei and Waikato in order to inform and support local discussions.
- Don't re-invent the wheel, utilise existing models such as Kidscan.
- Ensure that principles of community development are included in the Terms of Reference of a Food in Schools programme.
- An organisation such as the Office of the Children's Commissioner to ensure that there is good representation of key people such as Principals, NGOs, Iwi, Health Educators Association New Zealand and community members involved in the on-going design, development and implementation of food in schools.
- Support community run programmes by developing best practice guidelines.
- An organisation such Inspiring Communities or the Office of the Children's Commissioner to create a virtual "community of practice" hub of information and best practice where people can share their ideas and experiences with one another, think deeper about what they are trying to achieve and focus on improving what they are doing.
- To ensure that food in schools in non-stigmatising for children the Office of the Children's Commissioner could work with the Ministry of Youth Development and other stakeholders to develop best practice guidelines for involving children and young people in the design and implementation of food in schools.
- Re-distribution of local food. Approach growers and obtain advice from Auckland City Mission about distribution.