

**4 April 2018**

## **Submission on the Child Poverty Reduction Bill**

**To the Social Services and Community Select Committee (“the Committee”)**

### **Introduction: Personal Details**

1. This submission is from Eat Right Be Bright. Please note that the address and contact details for Eat Right Be Bright are supplied in the covering letter.
2. We wish to appear before the Committee to speak in support of our submission.
3. We wish the following to appear to speak in support of our submission:  
Clarissa Mackay, Rebecca Little, Cassie Slade, Samantha Devlin, Julia Batchelor-Smith

### **Eat Right be Bright: Who we are**

4. The aim of Eat Right Be Bright is to advocate for the Government to provide funds and resources for a daily, healthy and nutritious lunch for every child at school and in early childhood education (“ECE”) in New Zealand.
5. Eat Right Be Bright is a volunteer-led, community based group formerly known as Mother’s United Movement (M.U.M.). It was formed in late September 2017 by a number of women in Auckland, having met through their children, who were deeply concerned by the levels of child poverty in New Zealand. The number of women involved in the group, from a variety of backgrounds, quickly increased to 154 as of today’s date.
6. Please note that Eat Right Be Bright is not a formalised, incorporated organisation, trust or charity at present. It is entirely self-funded currently.
7. Eat Right Be Bright asserts that a centrally funded, universal, daily, healthy and nutritious lunch programme in schools and ECE is a child focussed policy which has the potential to contribute to:
  - a. A reduction in child poverty generally by raising income levels for families.
  - b. Tackle food poverty and insecurity amongst children directly via the provision of a meal whilst already in attendance at school/ECE.

- c. Reduce childhood obesity and malnourishment leading to a healthier generation of adults.
- d. Increase children's general health and cognitive development via the consumption of daily healthy and nutritious food leading to a healthier, better educated generation of adults.
- e. Enhance children's sense of well-being at school by the participation in and sharing of a meal with their peers on equal terms.
- f. All of the above would capture every child in need, wherever they are, whatever their circumstance, free from shame and stigma only if it is done on a universal basis.

## **SUBMISSION**

### **Eat Right Be Bright supports the aims of the Bill**

- 8. Eat Right Be Bright was founded in order to advocate for an end to child poverty in New Zealand through central, systematic, institutional change. We therefore support the aims of Child Poverty Reduction Bill ("the Bill") to encourage a focus across Government and society on the reduction of child poverty in New Zealand by:
  - a. Facilitating political accountability against a set of published targets.
  - b. Requiring transparent reporting on child poverty levels.
  - c. Creating a greater commitment by Government to address child wellbeing.

### **Further Comments: Children are more than numbers**

- 9. However, with this in mind as a starting structure for accountability, Eat Right Be Bright asserts that children living in poverty ought to be viewed as more than numbers and targets. They are children with dreams and hopes for their futures which rest on being able to access their health and education equitably and without being stigmatised in order to fulfil their potential in life.

10. Indeed, as a point of fact, children have a right to an education based on equality of opportunity and a right to health through access to nutritious food and knowledge of the same<sup>1</sup>. Obligations which are not being fulfilled by New Zealand currently for children living in poverty who, entirely outside of their own control, cannot access healthy and nutritious food in order to be in the best position to learn at school and have a healthy start in life.
11. The Bill therefore should go further and be bolder in its aim of embedding institutional change in society. It should provide the mechanisms for making this change.

### **Further comments: Universal School Lunch Programme required**

12. A centrally resourced universal, daily, healthy and nutritious lunch programme in all schools and ECE would be a powerful mechanism to:
- a. Enable every child, wherever they are, to have a healthy start in life with the right food filling their stomachs nourishing their minds, lives and spirit.
  - b. Fulfil their potential at school and, consequently, in life.
  - c. Without differentiating the 'haves' from the 'have nots', it overcomes children having to self-present as in need, any association as 'welfare food' or the stigmatisation of children taking part.

### **How would a school lunch programme lift children out of poverty?**

13. *Long term social protection investment and safety net*: 88% of countries around the world have national, centrally resourced school feeding programmes. These countries overseas have understood that these programmes have multiple benefits and are important tools to the most vulnerable. In some countries, school lunch is free for all<sup>2</sup>, making it akin to a universal child benefit. In others it is free for those children most in need whilst the rest pay, operating effectively as an income transfer<sup>3</sup>. School feeding programmes are seen as a vehicle to provide income support to families through the provision of food, that

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, Articles 24 and 28

<sup>2</sup> Eg Sweden, Finland

<sup>3</sup> Eg. USA, UK, France, Italy, Japan

contribute to learning by increasing children's access to education and maintaining their nutritional status and overall health. They protect children from the full impact of economic shocks. This has made school feeding programmes an attractive long term social protection investment as well as social safety nets.<sup>4</sup> Children in New Zealand have no equivalent social protection system but it is something that could be done.

14. *Raising incomes*: In New Zealand, Eat Right Be Bright estimates that it costs a family \$15-\$20 per child per week to put together a packed lunch<sup>5</sup>. The provision of a lunch to every child will therefore put a significant amount of money back into families' budgets and therefore raise income levels.
15. *Tackling food poverty/insecurity*: A daily lunch at school/ECE would ensure that every child has one complete, nutritious meal a day to fill their stomachs.
16. *Break poverty cycle*: A nutritious school lunch would therefore significantly contribute to a child's readiness to learn and ability to participate in their own educational process through better health leading to less absenteeism (sick days) off school, potentially better concentration and improved learning. Better health, a better education and increased productivity for a child along his or her lifespan is the key to breaking inter-generational poverty cycle. Indeed, the World Food Programme (the food branch of the United Nations) calculates that for every US\$1 spent of a state sponsored school feeding programme US\$3-\$10 is returned in terms of health and education<sup>6</sup>.

### **Why lunch not breakfast?**

17. It is frequency of healthy, nutritious food that seems to make the difference to a child's overall health and academic development.

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<sup>4</sup> State of School Feeding Report, 2013, World Food Programme, p1, ("the WFP Report)

<sup>5</sup> Based on estimates of costs of putting together their own children's lunchboxes by respondents to a casual poll posing the question, "How much do you spend a week on your kids' lunchbox?" of approx. 154 women involved in Eat Right Be Bright's online discussion forum.

<sup>6</sup> WFP Report, p67. Figures recently updated from \$1-\$3-\$8 in WFP Report to \$1-\$3/\$10 on WFP website [www1.wfp.org/schoolmeals](http://www1.wfp.org/schoolmeals)

18. Research looking at breakfast programmes in New Zealand found that, although it had a positive impact on short term hunger, children were not attending breakfast clubs frequently or consistently enough for it have an impact on their overall health and academic development<sup>7</sup>. The problems with breakfast programmes are that children are required to self-present (thus having to overcome feelings of shame and embarrassment) and to get early enough to school in the first place to have the breakfast.
19. The beneficial difference with a daily lunch provided to all, children are already at school and therefore getting a daily (i.e. frequent) health and nutrition boost.

### **Why does a school lunch need to be healthy and nutritious?**

20. *Food poverty and health*: Higher rates of diabetes, obesity, infectious diseases (including more colds, sore throats, stomach sickness, skin infections and headaches), fatigue, poor mental health, greater psychological stress and poor academic development are found where healthy food is less accessible.
21. *Impact of obesity*: Further, if you are an obese child you are 80% more likely to be an obese adult<sup>8</sup>. 31.8% of children are overweight or obese in New Zealand (Ministry of Health statistics) and obesity is now a major contributor to chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer which are the biggest killers in our society and biggest costs on the public health system. For example, the costs of obesity and type 2 diabetes alone approximate \$2.15bn and are projected to rise<sup>9</sup>.
22. *Impact of malnourishment*: But, where we have obesity we also have malnourishment. New Zealand is seeing an increasing number of obese but malnourished children. A third

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<sup>7</sup> "Effects of a free school breakfast programme on school attendance, achievement, psychosocial function, and nutrition: results of a stepped wedge cluster trial", Cliona Ni Mhurchu, Maria Turley, Delvina Gordon, Yannan Jiang, Jo Michi, Ralph Maddison, John Haddie, 2013, BMJ Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health,67(3)

<sup>8</sup> "Predicting adult obesity from childhood obesity: a systematic review and meta-analysis", M Simmonds et al, 2016, Obesity Review 17(2), p95-107

<sup>9</sup> "Report on cost of illness studies on long term conditions", Ministry of Health/PWC 2009, put cost of type 2 diabetes as \$1.31bn for 2016/17 set to rise to \$1.77bn in 2020/21. Auckland University in 2012 put the cost of obesity as up to \$849m.

of children admitted to Starship Hospital are malnourished to some degree<sup>10</sup>. Malnourishment makes it nearly impossible for a child to reach his or her full potential. It weakens their immune system, meaning they get ill more easily, have more days off school, missing out on their education. The New Zealand Nutrition Survey shows many children have inadequate intakes of nutrients, including vitamin A and iodine. For instance, iodine deficient populations can be up to 15 IQ points lower than those who are not<sup>11</sup>.

23. Poor access to healthy food leading to poor general health impacts on a child being able to access their education on an equal footing and therefore being unable to reach his or her full potential at school and in life. A daily, healthy and nutritious lunch at school and ECE has the potential to be a powerful mechanism to tackle these issues.

24. For example, school food programmes overseas have seen renewed interest and investment<sup>12</sup> in the last 15 years. Originally started in order to combat undernutrition in children at the beginning to mid-twentieth century, in many countries there is now a need to address the problems of overweight and obesity as well as a growing understanding of the wider role that food can play in health, tackling health inequalities and academic development<sup>13</sup>. School food programmes overseas are usually accompanied by health and nutrition standards which can be amended and changed to keep up to date with the health and nutrition issues of the populace at the time<sup>14</sup>.

25. Recent research into school meal programmes overseas where they have increased the health and nutrition requirements for the food served in schools has seen consumption of vegetables and fruit go up and junk food go down. In addition, studies found that the academic development for all children involved increased 3-5%, with the academic

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<sup>10</sup> "Number of New Zealand children hospitalised with malnutrition doubles as food costs bite", Kirsty Johnson, New Zealand Herald, 19 September 2017

<sup>11</sup> "Is it true that lack iodine causes brain damage?", World Health Organisation, May 2013

<sup>12</sup> For example, USA, UK, Japan, Mexico, Brazil have all recently updated or re-invested in their school food programmes.

<sup>13</sup> WFP Report, p24

<sup>14</sup> Eg, Sweden regularly updates school food health and nutrition guidelines to correct nutritional deficiencies being found in children.

development of children from lower socio-economic backgrounds increasing between 18-40%.<sup>15</sup>

26. Children in New Zealand do not currently enjoy the same rights as their global peers of access to daily, healthy and nutritious food via a centrally financed and resourced school food programme. It is however something that can be done.

### **Why does it have to be universal?**

27. *Food poverty and insecurity outside lower decile schools:* Children are going to school without bringing lunch or with an inadequate lunch at all schools, irrespective of the 'decile'. Only a universal programme will reach every child in need wherever they are.

28. *Removal of shame and stigma:* Everyone wants to see public funds put to the most effective use and to be directed to those most in need. However, as Sen states:-

"Any system of subsidy that requires people to be identified as poor and that is seen as a special benefaction for those who cannot fend for themselves would tend to have some effects on their self-respect as well as on the respect accorded them by others"<sup>16</sup>.

In particular, where food is concerned, the emotional impact on a child of going to school without lunch is massive and remains through to adulthood<sup>17</sup>. Many children prefer not to attend school at all rather than go to school without<sup>18</sup>. Food might be available at the school for the child to have or teachers (often from their own pocket) may supply a lunch to a child without one as discreetly as possible. However, this does rely on an element of a child having to self-present to an adult as 'in need' and overcome feelings of shame and embarrassment which are long lasting. In addition, in some cases where teachers have tried to discreetly provide a child with a lunch, it has been returned or refused because the

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<sup>15</sup> "How quality of school lunch affects academic performance", Anderson et al, Brookings Institute, May 2017. "Evaluation of Free School Meals Pilot: Impact Report" Department of Education, UK, Jan 2013 – a comparison of the impact of introducing more healthy food into current school meals programme and also impact of increasing established free school meal entitlement vs universally free school meals

<sup>16</sup> "Political Economy of Targeting", Amartya Sen, 1994

<sup>17</sup> Anecdotal evidence from adults whom Eat Right Be Bright have spoken to who experienced food poverty as a child.

<sup>18</sup> Anecdotal evidence from teachers involved in Eat Right Be Bright online forum or who have spoken directly to us.

child would rather go hungry than be exposed as in need.<sup>19</sup> The only way to overcome shame and stigma and ensure every child is reached is to provide a lunch to all children.

29. In addition by providing a lunch to every child at school and ECE, everyone has a stake in it, every child benefits from the health and academic boost, with children from lower socio economic groups gaining most<sup>20</sup> and the greater likelihood there is of food standards and quality being maintained.

30. Lastly, the power of children sitting together and participating and sharing in a meal together on equal terms can only be positive for a child's general wellbeing and feeling of being a full member of society. In all studies we have read, all children report feeling valued with the provision of a meal and teachers have reported a greater sense of social cohesion.<sup>21</sup>

### **Why does it need to be centrally funded by Government?**

31. In all of the 88% of countries around the world that have a school food programme, it is centrally funded and resourced. In New Zealand there is clearly a need for food in schools that charities (by and large), some businesses and a few schools themselves have laudably stepped into the void to cater to. Yet, these charities and businesses do not have the capacity to reach all children in need<sup>22</sup>, the need keeps growing<sup>23</sup>, and they cannot be expected to shoulder the burden of feeding children at schools in perpetuity.

32. *Not sustainable:* The current situation in New Zealand of school food is ad hoc and piecemeal relying mostly on food or milk being donated and time being volunteered, usually co-ordinated by a charity. There is a social investment business which also relies

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<sup>19</sup> ditto

<sup>20</sup> "School Food Plan", Dimbleby and Vincent, UK 2013, Ch 9

<sup>21</sup> See "Impact of a school meal programme on dietary intake of children aged 9-11years in a low decile school in South Auckland, New Zealand, N Walia, Massey University 2016. Also, School Food Plan, Dimbleby and Vincent UK 2013, Ch 11, p123

<sup>22</sup> Kidscan, Eat My Lunch for example supply lunches to children in deciles 1-4 schools. Teachers in the Eat Right Be Bright online forum tell us children arriving at school without lunch or with an inadequate poor quality lunch occurs in all deciles.

<sup>23</sup> Kidscan were informed by schools that 31,000 children in schools they supply to require food in 2018. In 2017 that number was 25,000 – conversation between Eat Right Be Bright and Kidscan in 2017.

on donations of food and volunteer time to provide a packed lunch to children in low decile schools whilst also making a profit. A very small number of schools have set up their own excellent school food programmes which use produce that has been grown onsite by children at school and involving them in meal planning and cooking but they still are not completely self-sustaining. They are all competing for the same donations of food from business and time from volunteers. All of them are vulnerable in an economic downturn in the probable event that businesses no longer wish to supply produce/food free of charge.

33. *Inefficient:* Some charities and social investment business deliver lunches to the same schools whilst also having schools on their waiting list. Without central organisation and co-ordination this is simply an inefficient use of resources.

34. *No monitoring or oversight:* On a concerning level, there is no oversight, regulations or accountability whatsoever as to the type or quality of food being provided by these charities, social investment business to the children in these schools. Any commitment to following health and nutrition guidelines is purely voluntary.

35. Children in New Zealand have a right to access nutritious food and to access their education on the basis of equal opportunity. These rights are not currently being fulfilled. Given they have this right, the food at school ought to be secured, permanent, monitored, safe and ethical; sourced with dignity, made with the dignity of paid labour and consumed with dignity. In this way, it is our strong view that values of respect for oneself, the wider community and environment are transferred from society to a future generation. This is what a universal, healthy school lunch programme could be in New Zealand if it is cohesive and centrally funded and resourced.

## **Recommendations**

36. The Bill is a positive instrument to bring focus and structure for accountability across Government to reduce child poverty in New Zealand.

37. However, children living poverty ought to be viewed as more than numbers and targets.

They are children with dreams and hopes for their futures which rest on being able to access their health and education equitably and without being stigmatised.

38. A universal, daily, healthy school lunch programme is a powerful mechanism in breaking the poverty cycle. It enables children living in poverty to be healthier into adulthood, to attend more, perform better and fulfil their potential at school and, consequently, in life.

39. Eat Right Be Bright therefore further seeks that the Select Committee also recommends that the Bill be amended to ensure that the Government provides funds and resources for a daily, healthy and nutritious lunch for every child at school and ECE in New Zealand.

**Eat Right, Be Bright**

**4 April 2018**