

ACT Families at Risk Policy

Goal

To break the cycle of poverty.

Families at risk in New Zealand will be supported to independence and dignity through a personalised, coordinated programme of support that meets their specific needs with targeted assistance.

Background

The present system of help is widely fragmented. At risk families currently receive government assistance in cash and kind from a number of different government agencies and departments. Spending is uncoordinated, impersonal, delivered by bureaucrats, and services are often duplicated. No single person or agency is accountable for total spend or for the outcomes achieved for the family. Therefore most families at risk, stay “at risk” despite large sums of government assistance.

Values

The values underlying this policy are core ACT values. We want to empower people to take personal responsibility for their lives. That is the only way that welfare can achieve its desired ends in this day and age. The welfare experiment in New Zealand has proved to be disastrous and damaging for a generation of low-income people. It has trapped them into government created poverty. It has robbed them of the incentive and the ability to look after themselves and their families. When we use our head as well as our heart, we can encourage self-reliance, dignity and independence from the state and its bureaucracy. We can break the cycle of dependence and all New Zealanders will gain, both socially and financially.

Principles

To break the cycle of dependence, we need to deal with the root causes of the issues facing families at risk

It is wrong to impose rules that make it rational for adolescents and adults to behave in ways that destroy their future

A commonsense approach to helping “families at risk”

- Promote the traditional family unit by removing disincentives in the welfare and taxation sectors.
- Encourage personal responsibility, self-reliance, a return to the workforce, up-skilling and continuing education.
- Introduce contestability and competition in delivery of mentor-based assistance.
- Improve accountability, reduce fraud and require means and asset testing.
- Ensure coordination and complementarity with health, education, superannuation, and law and order policies.
- Funding to come from better use of the currently uncoordinated departmental resources being spent in the social area.

Policy Detail

Mentor Programme

- The Social Welfare department will identify dysfunctional families with children that are at risk. Families so classified will be eligible for mentor support.
- The role of the mentor will be to diagnose the real problems facing that family and rehabilitate the family into full community participation and self-sufficiency.
- Mentors will work with a limited number of families to promote effectiveness through a concentrated, intensive rehabilitation programme. They will spend time with them and get to know their goals, aspirations and problems.
- Maximum discretion will be given to mentors to establish and run a programme suitable for each particular situation, with emphasis on securing work, providing childcare assistance, if necessary once parents are working, up-skilling/ further education, budget control, better housing and reduced crime, improved health and education for family members
- Mentors will be well respected members of the local community, with skills and experience in counselling, guidance, interpersonal relations, parenting and life skills. Mentors to high risk families will be highly trained.
- Mentors will be registered as individuals, although they may come via an Iwi or church for example

Outcomes Based

Results will be measured in terms of improvements in the family well-being and in their progress towards self-sufficiency.

Transparency

Families will participate in choosing their own mentor. A contractual, performance-based programme will be drawn up to ensure accountability and progress with contracts between and the state and the mentor, and the mentor and the family. There will be explicit goals, rights and responsibilities for all parties involved.

Funding

Mentors will work with the family and work out the best use of the money that is currently being spent on that family, free from bureaucratic rules.

Assistance provided will be based on the coordination of the resources currently spent on the family by various agencies. Incentives will be built into the funding to ensure outcome-based results and reductions in bureaucracy and cost to the taxpayers.

Obligation

Families deemed at risk who do not want to enter the programme will receive further assistance through goods in kind rather than cash.

All able-bodied adults from at risk families will be required to undertake "workfare" a weekly quota of community work in return for state assistance until employment is obtained.

If you believe that all New Zealanders will benefit from supporting families at risk to independence, not continuing the cycle of poverty, then **give ACT your Party vote**, for a moral and practical solution to the tough problems.