

# **NZCCSS Poverty Indicators Pilot Project**

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## **WHO IS NZCCSS?**

New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services<sup>1</sup> works for a just and compassionate society in Aotearoa New Zealand. In seeking to fulfil this mission, we want to present a vision for NZ society and then to advocate for appropriate policies, services and resources to bring about that vision.

An element of our work is advocating on behalf of the poor. This is based on the practical experience of Christian social service agencies and the interaction with people who use their services. Collectively, our members have around 600 social service delivery sites in all areas of the country. These provide a range of services - from foodbanks to employment services, from services for children to services for older people. Our agencies are, therefore, in the privileged position of being part of the lives of people who are often left on the margins of our market society. It is a position in which numerous stories are recounted about the struggles (and some successes) of learning how to make ends meet. This type of information has been invaluable to directing our research.

Hearing these stories brings with it a responsibility and a motivation to bring about the reduction of poverty in this country. This is one of the visions of NZCCSS. We have, therefore, sought to combine people's stories with research around key dimensions of poverty such as foodbank use and housing cost. We have produced a number of reports that monitored the impact of economic and social policy changes on clients of Christian Social Services and on New Zealand society generally. On the basis of these reports, we have advocated for the government to acknowledge the hardship facing many low-income New Zealanders and for changes to policy and practice.

## **THE POVERTY INDICATORS PILOT PROJECT**

Often in the past, research on poverty issues, by us or by other social service organisations, has not been acted upon or has been dismissed as not being rigorous enough. However, the election of the Labour/Alliance Government has meant that issues around poverty and the needs of low-income families are receiving attention in a way that has not been evident in recent years. Rather than having to prove to government that poverty and inequality exist in NZ, and

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<sup>1</sup> NZCCSS represents the social services of the Anglican Church, the Baptist Union, the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Salvation Army.

is becoming worse, we are now in an environment in which solutions are being sought, developed and implemented. Quality information is therefore needed to base these policy decisions on.

It became evident to NZCCSS that

- a) we need to become better informed about what was changing at a local level on a more regular basis;
- b) we continue to need to have a credible base of information from which to advocate for practical solutions from, and
- c) the general public, rather than government, should be the main target in terms of raising awareness and understanding about poverty and society's responsibility to those that are poor.

In order to address these points the NZCCSS Poverty and Housing Policy Group has developed the Poverty Indicators Pilot (PIP) Project project over the past 18 months. The attached diagram outlines the process the Policy Group has followed in an attempt to ensure that the final product will be worthwhile.

### **Defining the Project framework**

This project aims to:

1. strengthen NZCCSS and its members data-gathering processes,
2. obtain regular and reliable information on poverty trends,
3. use this information to more effectively inform the public about poverty issues.

Throughout the initial discussions the Policy Group made a number of decisions that helped determine the scope of the eventual project. These included:

- **Playing to our strengths** by using our connection with local/on-the-ground providers and their relationships with clients rather than go for a big project that requires a large amount of resources (e.g. a national measure);
- **Obtaining participant input** as soon as practical and having opportunities to build relationships with those involved;
- **Using more effectively the information** that members already routinely collect rather than
  - (a) going out and collect information from a variety of non-NZCCSS sources, or
  - (b) getting members to change their systems dramatically;
- **Starting small** so we can find out what data is already collected and trial ways of reporting this information;
- Aiming the **final report at the public** while keeping in mind the need to have a mechanism to keep government on track, now and for the future.
- **Fitting in with other** poverty measurement initiatives when possible. Realise our information is only part of the wider jigsaw attempting to measure, monitor and alleviate poverty. We hope that this project will be seen in context alongside the Poverty Measurement Project and the Local Government Indicators Project.

### **Choosing the Sites**

Twelve organisations, spread across the six member denominations and throughout NZ, were invited to consider being part of this project. They were chosen on the basis that they met the following criteria:

- provide a foodbank or budgeting services;
- already have a data collection process in place;
- have the capability of consistently reporting on that data, every three months, for at least two years;
- complement other organisations invited according to size, location and denomination

Eight organisations agreed to be part of the project and have been involved from an early stage to help shape the project and choose the list of indicators (see attached map for the cities in which the sits are located).

### **Choosing the Indicators**

The aims of the project meant that the indicators chosen needed to:

- Be relevant in revealing changes to poverty in New Zealand
- Be understandable for the general public
- Be consistent and reliable so they can be used for on going advocacy.

In addition, project participants were consulted to identify the types of information that they already collect or could collect – i.e. to make sure the indicators were cost-effective and collectable. This meant we restricted our indicators to three main areas - Employment, Income and Housing.

According to this set of criteria, and after much debate, indicators were selected (see attached list) and divided into two main categories:

- A) summary information on total demand and supply for services, and
- B) standard individual client information that details the demographic characteristics, housing, income and employment information for people who have used the service over the time period.

It is hoped that the information that is gathered will provide an important indication of the impact of changes such as income-related rents for state housing or changes to policy or practice in terms of benefit entitlements.

### **Trial**

For most agencies, the data requirements have meant changes to their interview practice and systems. NZCCSS is very grateful for the efforts of the agencies in doing this, as we acknowledge that they are already coping with busy workloads on tight budgets.

For this reason, we have not asked the agencies to all do the interview and data-collection process in the same way, but to develop a system that works best for them in order to get the required information to NZCCSS for analysis. The important thing we have emphasised is to collect the information in a consistent way from period to period so as to be able to compare trends. A two-month trial over September and October was put in place to help iron out any system difficulties.

During November 2000 a review of the trial will occur which will involve -

- a) looking at the change in workload that the project has created for organisations and NZCCSS;
- b) discussing ways to improve data collection and reporting (e.g. the categories used);
- c) whether participating agencies will be willing to commit to the project for the next two years.

This may lead to simple refinement, an expansion or a complete re-think about the value of the project.

### **Analysis and Reporting**

The data collected will form the basis of a quarterly report that monitors poverty trends at each of the sites. Part of the report will also include some commentary on other reports or information on poverty issues that have been released over the quarter, so it will be put in context

In addition, there will be room in the report for each agency to provide:

- comments about what trends they see occurring in their region,
- details on any changes made to their service that might affect reporting.
- any relevant case studies / client stories

This will help to strengthen the regional flavour of the report and maintain a link to people's actual experience of poverty.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH**

NZCCSS considers the PIP project to be a tool that can give us a better indication of what is going on for our members' clients. This will provide a sounder basis for pursuing Council's advocacy work and help to identify key poverty issues for further research. However, it is more likely to answer the "what" question rather than "why?"

It is intended that this research will also impact others. For example

*Clients* – having more information about clients enables organisations to better assess benefit entitlements and to advocate on their behalf so that they get the best deal available to them.

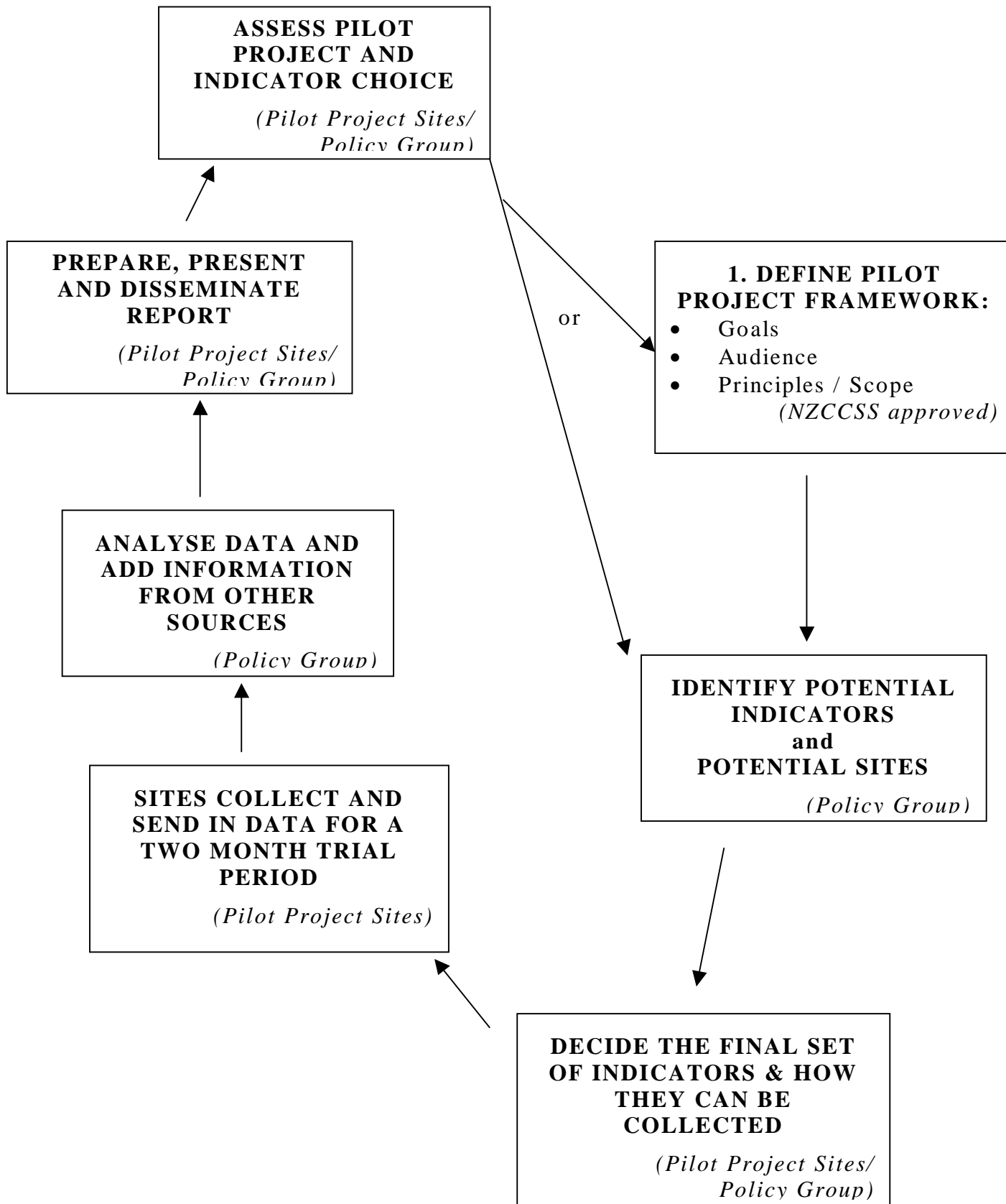
*Christian social services* – information gained will help providers to measure the impact of their services over time, or how they can alter services to cater for the people using services.

*Public* - continually putting statistics and stories in front of the public to raise awareness that poverty does exist and that there are things that can be done to change this situation

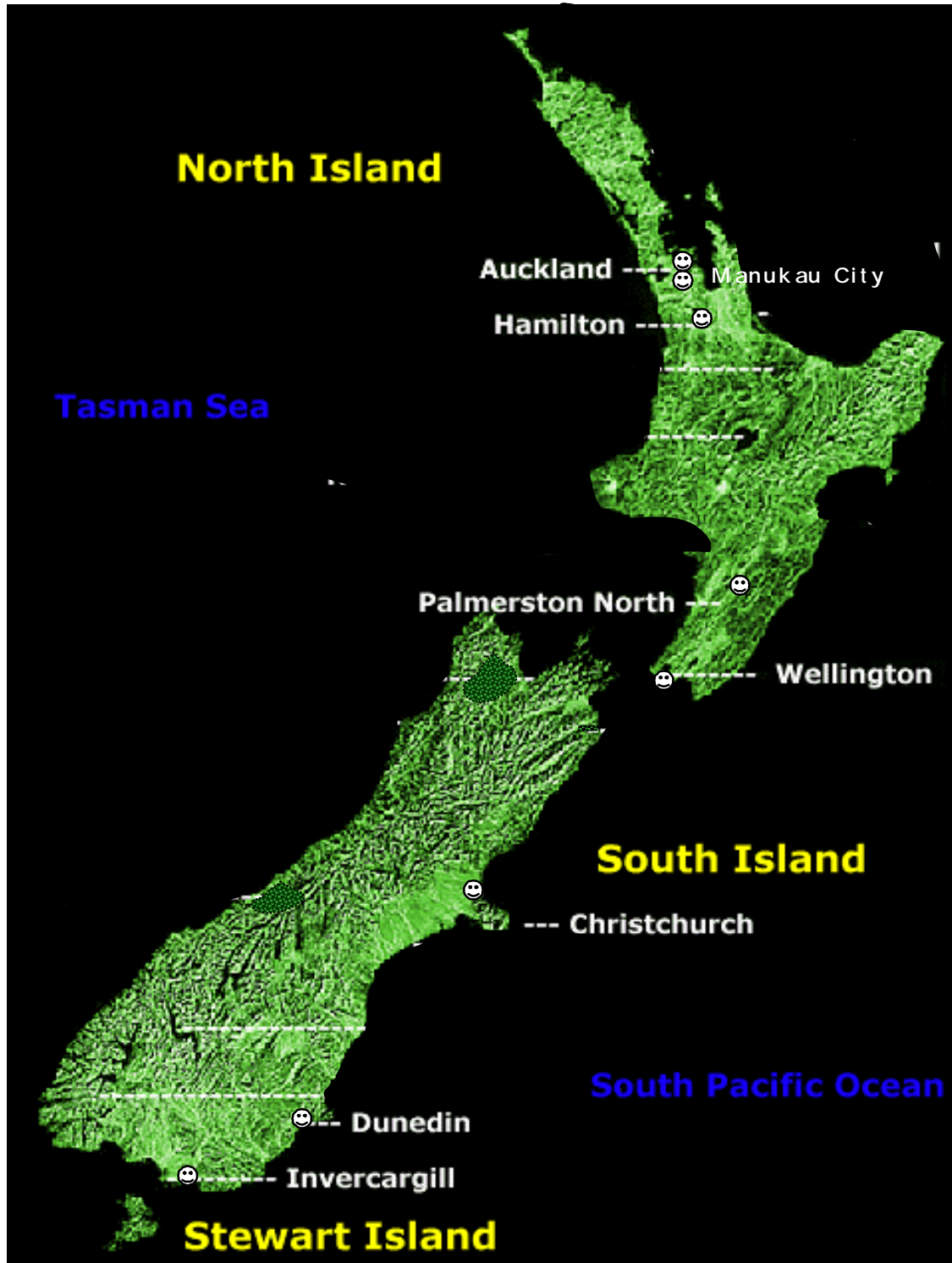
*Government* – keeping the government informed about issues facing low-income earners provides a basis to push for change in policy and practice, and to encourage government to improve their research on poverty issues.

The PIP Project is very much a work in progress and the results a long way from becoming reality but hopefully, this research alongside other voices from the community will enable change to our society. A change that reduces poverty and inequality in Aotearoa NZ.

# PIP PROJECT PROCESS



CITIES OF PARTICIPATING SITES



## **INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED QUARTERLY BY EACH ORGANISATION**

### **A) Summary Information for the service(s) provided over the past three months**

(see Example of Service Detail Format attached)

- 1. Total number of applications, broken down by service type**
- 2. Total number of applications actioned, broken down by service type –**  
e.g. number of foodparcels distributed, number of people completing budgeting course, advocacy, referred to another agency, counselling, none etc.
- 3. Total number of people assisted, broken down by less than 18 year olds and over 18.**
- 4. Total number of times that people gave the following categories as the main reason for seeking assistance:**  
Emergency, Benefit, Income / Debt, Housing, Health, Employment, Justice/Courts, Family/relationships, Other
- 5. The number of times the following agencies referred an applicant to your service:**  
self referral, friend/relative, WINZ, Other govt. agency, CAB/ Information Service, Budget service, Community Social Service, Health Service

### **B) Client Information as at the end of the month**

(see Example and Format of Codes attached i.e. raw data to be provided in excel spreadsheet form to NZCCSS. One line per client based on status as at the end of the month i.e. last time they visited)

#### **GENERAL**

- 1. Your agencies identifying number for the client**
- 2. Client's suburb (optional)**
- 3. The number of times the client used the agencies services over the three-month period.**
- 4. Client Characteristics:**
  - **Gender:** Female, Male
  - **Household Type:** Couple, Couple & Children, Extended 'family' Single, Sole Parent
  - **Age Range:** Under 18, 18-24, 25-39, 40-65, Over 65 years old
  - **Ethnic category:** Pacific Island, Maori, Asian, Pakeha New Zealander, other {*can be more than one ethnic group*}

#### **HOUSING**

- 5. Client's current housing status, broken down by:**  
State Rent, City Council rent, Private Rent, Own, Board, Family/Friend's Home, Emergency, Temporary (Garages, Caravans etc),
- 6. The weekly rent / board / mortgage for the residence**  
Best assessment of Actual Amount
- 7. Identify whether the applicant is behind on their housing payments.**

- 8. The number of people living at the same address as where the applicant lives.**
- 9. The number of bedrooms where the applicant lives.**  
Bedrooms are defined as actual number of rooms furnished as bedrooms or sleepouts, not the number of rooms in which people sleep in.
- 10. The number of times the client has moved in the past two years**

**INCOME:**

- 11. The best assessment / applicant's estimate of the Household's Actual Weekly Net Income (i.e. before any debt deductions are taken out)**
- 12. Identify whether the applicant or their partner is the main income earner**
- 13. The sources of household income:**  
Tick by four main categories Main Benefit Supplementary Benefit, Wage/Salary/Self Employed, Other and then if possible identify individual benefits by type.
- 14. Identify whether applicant is in debt, broken down by:**  
Tick by categories WINZ, Courts, Student Loan, Bank Loan, Family Loan, Other Loan, Debt collector, Other
- 15. Depending on 14 – Amount deducted per week by WINZ**
- 16. Identify whether applicant is in arrears with their utility bills**
- 17. Depending on 16 - Is utility services currently disconnected?**

**EMPLOYMENT**

- 18. The current paid work status of the applicant and partner broken down by:** Weekly Employed (>20 hrs), Weekly Employed (<20 hrs), employed but not on a weekly basis (e.g. casual), Unemployed for less than 6 months, Unemployed for more than 6 months, Not looking for work, Student, Retired, Running own home, Other
- 19. Identify whether employment for applicant and/or partner is permanent or temporary**
- 20. Identify whether applicant of partner is involved in voluntary/community work outside the home.**