Economic justice and social policy in Aotearoa New Zealand

A special issue "Child protection, the family and the state: Critical responses in neoliberal times" published in 2016 in this journal held a collection of articles with a focus on children's policy. In that issue, Mike O'Brien (2016) considered the ideological roots of contemporary policy for children and families at highest risk of poor outcomes. He noted that "ideologically, the issue is framed in individual, market driven terms. This framing means that the economic and structural forces which create and sustain the poverty and inequalities which shape the lives of those families and communities are ignored" (p. 12). We have had a change of government, but we have also faced the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Research has been appearing over this year that points to some of the effects of Covid-19 on family income and food insecurity (see, for example, these open access reports, Humpage & Moore, 2021; Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021). In thinking about the last two years, the lack of any substantial advancement of incomes and support for families, we might well ask "What has changed?" Looking back at the journal over the last five years, an issue with a focus on social policy and social justice is well overdue. We are pleased to include, in this issue, articles that explore policy matters and encourage social work practitioners, educators and researchers to share their projects and viewpoints with the journal's readership.

This issue of *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* begins with a special section on economic justice, co-edited by Anaru Eketone (Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato) and Marissa Kaloga from the University of Otago. Marissa Kaloga introduces this special section with a Commentary, "Social work and economic justice in Aotearoa New Zealand." Kaloga notes that, in

Aotearoa New Zealand, both income and wealth inequality have reached historically high levels. Inequality research has demonstrated a causal link between inequality and a host of social and health issues that, while they impact society as a whole, affect the nation's most marginalised populations to an increasingly greater degree. Social work has generated only limited research in this area. Kaloga asserts, "[a]s a profession of action, we cannot only wrestle with the 'alligators' alongside families in poverty without being equally attentive to the 'swamp' of income and wealth inequality." A multi-disciplinary Economic Justice Forum was hosted at the University of Otago in 2020 to explore these issues. Kaloga's commentary provides an overview of the concepts, history, and current opportunities for advancement of economic justice for Aotearoa New Zealand social workers. The commentary addresses three themes. The first section focuses on key concepts in economic justice, including distributive justice, income inequality, and wealth inequality. The second section presents the proceedings of the forum which aimed to establish a research agenda for social work and economic justice and, lastly, Kaloga includes a call to action for social workers.

Food insecurity in Aotearoa New Zealand is a major element of economic injustice but there has been limited quantitative evidence concerning those in greatest need of support, which limits policy and practice decisions. Helen Robinson, Kelsey L. Deane, Allen Bartley, Mohamed Alansari, and Caitlin Neuwelt-Kearns report on a quantitative study entitled "Shining a light on food insecurity in Aotearoa New Zealand: Modification of the food security scale for use with individuals who have extreme food security needs." Robinson et al. modified Parnell and Gray's (2014) Aotearoa

New Zealand based food security scale to better capture the severity of food insecurity for individuals living in poverty and used a questionnaire to collect data from people seeking help from foodbanks in Tāmaki Makaurau. The study authors note that, "at the severe end of food insecurity gender and ethnic subgroups appear to suffer at similar levels", but they caution this does not suggest that different approaches are not required to best meet the needs of different groups. Robinson et al. call for further research to ascertain how similar levels of food insecurity may produce differential effects on wellbeing outcomes for different demographic groups.

Housing unaffordability is the focus of Michael Webster's article "Human rights and housing unaffordability: Applying policy practice engagement to a wicked problem." Housing insecurity is a major problem that social workers encounter on a daily basis in their practice, mostly related to scarcity and unaffordability. Webster notes that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by Aotearoa New Zealand, identifies housing deprivation as a human right of relevance to social work. In this exploratory study, data were collected via semi-structured interviews with eight experts in housing affordability including: public sector economists; a private sector economist/developer; two public sector urban planners; one public policy advisor; one non-governmental policy analyst; and a private sector housing strategist.

 Social work is mandated to "engage in action to change the structures of society that create and perpetuate injustice" (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019, p. 7). Accordingly, along with presenting the findings of the study, Webster examines the potential for change in the context of the housing unaffordability crisis through the Policy Practice Engagement [PPE] framework (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2015). The PPE offers a conceptual framework to examine *why*

and *how* social workers should engage in policy practice. This article proposes that, by applying the PPE framework, social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand will be enabled to engage with policy advisors and decision-makers responsible for the complex problem of unaffordability.

In "Assessing the Labour Government's new procurement approach through a Māori economic justice perspective," Katharina Ruckstuhl (Ngāi Tahu), Sequoia Short (Ngāti Apakura) and Jeff Foote examine "social procurement—the intentional generation of social value through an organisation's procurement and commissioning processes"—is being adopted globally and in Aotearoa New Zealand as progressive social policy. Some of the issues that lie behind calls for economic justice, such as economic opportunity, rights for vulnerable workers, and unemployment, may be addressed through social procurement. While Māori may also benefit from this, there are other factors that should be considered from a Te Tiriti o Waitangi perspective. In this research brief, Ruckstuhl et al. outline the context of the government's current initiatives, drawing on policy and research literature as part of a scoping study aimed at developing a Te Tiriti approach to social procurement. The authors conclude by noting the opportunities for economic justice for Māori, but also highlight some of the caveats. The authors question whether there is a level playing field in the social procurement process and note that there is an argument that self-determined Māori economic development has been held back due to failure to fully honour Te Tiriti.

Irene Ayallo's article entitled: "Intersections of immigration law and family violence: Barriers preventing ethnic migrant and refugee background women from obtaining Immigration New Zealand's Family Violence Visa" explores the underutilisation of the visa available for women who are victim survivors of family violence. The visa separates the visa status of survivors from that of their perpetrator, enabling

them to leave a partner without fear of deportation. Ayallo first outlines the descriptive data on the use of the visa, then outlines the possible reasons for the low uptake of this visa despite its apparent availability to meet the needs of this specific group of women. She points out that women from migrant and refugee backgrounds face distinct circumstances that shape both their experiences of violence as well as the barriers to visa access. The process of migration and settlement can exacerbate both violence and women's social isolation; there is the possibility of multiple perpetrators; transnational abuse can occur; and women's vulnerability to control is heightened because their visa status is linked to their partner's. There are also "extant cultural values and practices that may hinder help-seeking in situations of domestic violence" that play a role in limiting the use of the visa.

Problems relating to the need to provide evidence of the abuse, as well as the financial vulnerability of women leaving such relationships must both be addressed for the visa to meet its worthy objectives. The circuitous logic of bureaucracies is also at play, for example, the need to receive a benefit to qualify for legal aid, but without residency, even low-income migrants cannot qualify. Without legal aid, applying for protection orders is too expensive, yet a final protection order is one of the few acceptable methods to evidence the abuse, and evidence is required by Immigration New Zealand when assessing the application for a family violence visa. Women stuck in these kafkaesque rabbit holes often surmise there is no other option but to remain in violent relationships. There are also difficulties meeting other requirements for the visa, for example the person must be in a relationship with an Aotearoa New Zealand resident or citizen, yet the majority of the violence is perpetrated by people also on temporary visas. This appears to undermine the purpose of the visa and certainly its accessibility. Ayallo concludes more research on women's own

experiences of applying for the visa is needed to understand how they navigate these complexities and address barriers to its uptake. It appears policy advocacy relating to its obvious deficiencies is also required.

In "Community resilience demonstrated through a Te Ao Māori (Ngāti Manawa) lens: The Rāhui" Leila-Dawn Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Ngā Puhi, Whānau-ā-Apanui) and Jeanette Hastie (Ngāti Ranginui) report on a research project about a small rural community utilising the Te Ao Māori (Ngāti Manawa) understanding of Rāhui as a means of decreasing the possibility of negative impacts for their mostly Māori population during the Covid-19 pandemic that was first experienced in March 2020 in Aotearoa New Zealand. This mixed-methods study identified how Ngāti Manawa of Murupara employed Rāhui as a "mechanism of resilience" in order to keep local residents safe and well during, and beyond, the Covid-19 lockdown by setting up checkpoints on the borders of their rohe and restricting both vehicle and human traffic into Murupara. The authors found that support for the Rāhui was significant with input from five hapū leaders and a community survey revealing a sense of safety that the checkpoints offered to a vulnerable and mostly Māori rural area.

In a Viewpoint piece, "Asians in Aotearoa New Zealand: A population of interest for social work", Hagyun Kim makes a case for improved content, including relevant knowledge and skills in the social work curriculum in relation to working with Asians in Aotearoa New Zealand. Kim argues that some Asian people seem to have limited access to the benefits of an inclusive society, resulting in social isolation and marginalisation. This requires social workers to "attend to Asians' life challenges, justified by key principles of human rights and social justice".

Participation in, or facilitation of, Family Group Conferences (FGCs) and *hui-ā-whānau* (family meetings) require core competencies in Aotearoa New Zealand (New Zealand

Association of Social Workers, 2019; Social Workers Registration Board, 2016). Social work students are expected to graduate with the cultural competence necessary to work ethically with *whānau Māori* according to the bicultural practice principles of Ti Tiriti ō Waitangi. Cultural competence includes skills in the facilitation of joint decision making and the use of Māori engagement principles, all of which are fundamental to both traditional and professional practices of *hui* (meetings). In a Practice Note, "Disrupting Family Group Conference practice in Aotearoa New Zealand: A learning project", Raewyn Nordstrom (Ngāti Hine, Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Whakaue and Tainui) and Deb Stanfield draw on Māori and Western pedagogies to describe a learning strategy developed over a period of four years with social work students. The Reality FGC Project began as a way of assisting students to develop skills and apply theory to practice, and unexpectedly became an opportunity to, reflexively and iteratively, consider the role of social work education in re-thinking FGC practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Finally, we have two book reviews. Dalice Prebble has reviewed Mathew Gibson's *Pride and Shame in Child and Family Protection: Emotions and the Search for Humane Practice* (Gibson, 2019) and Liz Beddoe has reviewed Paul Michael Garrett's *Dissenting Social Work: Critical Theory, Resistance and Pandemic* (Garrett, 2021).

Despite the challenges faced by authors, reviewers and authors over 2021, we have been able to publish four issues with 23 full-length articles, two research briefs, four commentaries, seven viewpoint pieces and numerous reviews. This would not be possible without the hard work of many. Plans are in place for an issue of *Tu Mau* and a special themed issue on "Dissent in Social Work". On behalf of the Editorial Collective, I wish everyone a refreshing summer break. Keep safe and we will welcome your contributions in 2022.

Liz Beddoe

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