



# **FAMILY POLICY**

## **Supporting Parents & Children**

## **Vision**

United**Future** has always believed that the family is the core unit of our society and is the place where all values and skills for living harmoniously in a modern society emanate from. This policy specifically relates to families with dependant children and far from being exhaustive, is simply addressing areas that are not covered in policy.

## **Issues**

- Children are more likely these days to experience a number of different family arrangements than in the past.
- Fatherlessness is regarded as the biggest predicator of delinquency in youth
- Parents are older
- An increasing number of children are being raised by family members other than their parents
- More pressure for parents to work (61% of two-parent families have both parents working)
- Lack of core parenting skills in society.

## **Policy Principles**

- There have to be relevant measures across all government sectors to monitor family success in quality of life indicators.
- Family resilience is reliant on both the internal skill set and asset base of the parents and the health of the local community in which they are based, therefore policy needs to be focused on both individual family and community outcomes.
- Policy should be based on credible research and robust consultation, and the use of trials/pilots.

## **What we have done so far**

- Established the Families Commission to do research and supply evidence based advice to government and the NGO sector on policy development.
- Pushed to establish family credits in Working for Families.
- Inquiry into house affordability by the Commerce Committee, which United**Future** supported.
- From 2010, Kiwi Saver will be able to be used as a deposit subsidy for a house, up to \$5000 person or \$10,000 for a couple, provided their income is under a yet-to-be-decided cap. Kiwi Saver also includes a mortgage diversion scheme proposed by United**Future**.
- Increased the Unsupported Child Benefit to match the Foster Care Allowance in Budget 2008, so that grandparents raising grandchildren get the same as foster carer rates.

## **Policies-overview**

United**Future** ensures that all our policies are supportive of parents and children. However those listed below specifically target the health and well-being of the relational family unit and the choices parents can make regarding the care of their children and their work/life balance options.

## **Policy Areas**

### **1. Relationship and Parenting Education**

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Include relationship education as part of a holistic life-skills curriculum at secondary school. The aim is to ensure that secondary education is focused not just on knowledge, but also its everyday application. Students should be equipped for successful interdependent living, not just for tertiary learning.
- Have Relationship Services run a broad education campaign in the media, giving people the tools to improve their relationships. The aim would be to encourage people to invest in their relationship and add to their relational tools.
- Fund marriage preparation courses
- Improve access to parenting programmes for a wider range of parents and parenting seasons.
- Provide subsidies to parent educators, relationship counselors and relationship course providers to reduce cost and improve access for clients

### **2. Resources for a safe, nurturing environment**

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Introduce income splitting for couples with dependent children. Each partner is taxed as if they had earned 50% of the household income with a significant reduction in income tax. It attributes equal value to the different roles each parent plays, whereas our current tax system does not recognise the stay-at-home parent's contribution.
- Introduce one-stop shop family service centres to meet community needs in a coherent and family-friendly way. A one-stop family service centre would offer parents information on opportunities that exist for them and their children. Centres would provide services demanded by the community, such as:
  - health checks;
  - early childhood education and care options,
  - relationship counselling;
  - Working for Families entitlements, other benefit information and budget advice;
  - parent education opportunities and support.

Both government departments and community organisations could be based in some way at the centres.

- Support the ongoing funding and development of the longitudinal programme, "Growing Up in New Zealand" and the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study and the Christchurch Health and Development Study.
- Overhaul the child support system so that it is flexible enough to reflect the complexities of raising children when parents are separated and both parents contribute to the care of their children. Calculations may need to consider the income of both the custodial and liable parent, the cost of raising a child and the best way to measure care other than bed nights.

### 3. Character and Civics Education

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Ensure that character education programmes, also known as values education and life-skills education, are established in full consultation with parents and staff and operate in all of New Zealand's schools. Character education is about incorporating universal values such as honesty, respect for others and the law, tolerance, fairness, caring and social responsibility into a school's culture.
- Introduce civics and life-skills education into the curriculum, to ensure that kiwi students leave secondary school prepared for more than just tertiary education and employment. Ensure that they have an understanding of how to make good decisions, enjoy good health and how to participate in civil society as well as having an understanding about their country, its history, and how its basic institutions function.
- There are many issues affecting young people they experience exponential change over a short number of years. Sometimes this leads to Mental Health issues that often go undiagnosed and untreated. It is United**Future** policy to:
  - Ensure DHBs plan for secure facilities for young people's treatment.
  - Increase the number of counselors and social workers in schools.
  - Promote more social research to address youth related areas that need to change such as suicide, alcoholism, bulimia etc.

### 4. Children with Disabilities

United**Future** understands that parenting children and young people with disabilities brings many strains and stresses, these are complex areas but we will:

- Introduce a Caregivers Allowance for those currently providing unpaid support;
- Ensure that sufficient and appropriate respite care is available in every region;
- Consider the need for client-centred funding models;
- Establish advocacy services so that parents have more energy to give to parenting rather than chasing entitlements;
- Ensure that meaningful consultation occurs with carers and clients when services are audited; and
- Address workforce planning, pay rates and qualification issues for people in this sector.

### 5. Separating Families and the care of children

Close to one in three children in New Zealand are growing up in a house without both their biological parents. Some children have never lived under a roof with both their parents. Many other children and parents have had to adjust to family life after separation and divorce. A significant number of grandparents have also found themselves raising children that their own children have been unable to parent themselves, for various reasons.

United**Future** will:

- Amend the Care of Children Act to make explicit the presumption of shared care when determining the care arrangements for children when parents separate. This would be predicated on the assumption that both parents are competent, and that it is in the child's best interest to continue to have regular contact with both parents after divorce or separation.
- Support all moves to introduce mediation services into the system to reduce the need for lawyers and judges when settling disputes.
- Hold a full review of the Family Court system with a view to make it less adversarial and legalistic, and stop delays.
- Allow for DNA paternity testing to determine parentage when a person is unsure whether they are the biological father.

United**Future** knows that many grandparents, forced to look after their grandchildren or whānau, provide a selfless service that is of great benefit to society and the children themselves and that this contribution should be acknowledged accordingly in terms of assistance available. These New Zealanders are fiercely independent and loathe asking for help, or demanding handouts from the government. Thus we will:

- Continue to pressure the Government to raise carer rates for grandparents to that enjoyed by foster parents, including additional assistance and support. This may be respite care, grants for sports gear, legal aid and other such expenses or other help in areas to be determined by grandparents themselves.

## **Child Support**

United**Future** wants to see changes to the child support system, to look at ways in which the system can be made fairer and enable and encourage both parents to stay involved in the lives of their children.

United**Future** leader and Minister of Revenue Peter Dunne has recently ordered a review of the child support scheme to make it more responsive to factors such as shared care, the income levels of both parents and the costs of raising children.

"It is timely to reassess the formula, to ensure that it is flexible enough to reflect the complexities of raising children when the parents are separated and both parents contribute to the care of their children," said Mr Dunne.

"I have asked my policy officials to examine a number of options for updating the child support system to deal with these and related concerns."

## **Family Finances**

United**Future** wants to let families keep more of their income in their take home pay. As the family is generally the economic unit and not the individual earner of a family, United**Future** would introduce income splitting.

We would cut taxes so that:

- income up to \$12,000 taxed at 10%
- income between \$12,001 and \$38,000 taxed at 20%
- income above \$38,000 taxed at 30%
- Introduce Income splitting for parents with dependent children

These tax cuts would cost \$4.5 billion.

Looking at the tax cuts alone for a family on \$45,000 a year, from 1 October this year, they will get a tax cut of \$33 a fortnight. Under United**Future's** plans, the same family would get a tax cut of \$45 a fortnight. Couple that with income splitting, and the tax cut rises to \$87 a fortnight.

A family on \$60,000 a year gets a tax cut of \$31 a fortnight from 1 October 2008 under Labour's cuts. Under our proposals, that would more than double to \$63 a fortnight and with income splitting they would get a tax cut of \$137 a fortnight.

For the family earning \$80,000 a year, they will get a tax cut of \$54 a fortnight from 1 October 2008. Under United**Future**, that would become a tax cut of \$130 a fortnight and with income splitting a tax cut of \$191 a fortnight.