

## Hunger is/is not a problem for families in New Zealand

The belief that hunger is not a problem in New Zealand is not true; it is assumed because we are a well off country. There are people that are struggling and on benefits that don't know how to get off the on-going treadmill. This is supported by the fact that 7.3% of households in the 2008/2009 NZ Adult survey (1) have low food security. Considering that we are a pretty wealthy country this should not be the case. 1

People who are commonly affected by food insecurity are the ones that are unemployed or on a low income or have larger families meaning it is more difficult to afford to feed them. Many of the families are forced to use food banks which provide a limited range of foods. 20% of New Zealanders are facing some degree of hardship. (1) This means one in five people go without the basics that most New Zealanders take for granted e.g. can't afford fresh fruit and vegetables. This can lead to families becoming obese as the foods they are living off are high in fat and salt e.g. fast foods such as fish and chips. 2

Most families have household bills they have to pay before they buy food. Rent is the most important outgoing and takes up about half a family's weekly pay. Bills tend to be a fixed amount and have to be paid whereas food is a flexible amount and will be bought with whatever is left over. In a low income household there is little money left over for purchasing food. 'Families that live on a low income have to budget very carefully about how they spend their money and food is one thing that can be cut back.' (2) After all the bills have been paid they still struggle to find enough money for food so they have to either eat nothing or choose foods that will fill the family up such as fish and chips or just chips. 3

Some people believe that these people can always go to a food bank. This is not always a straight forward solution because most people find it very embarrassing to seek help from the food bank. 'I am very embarrassed but we have to use food banks for the children's sake. I always send my husband.' (3) 4

There is a limit to going to food banks as they rely on donations to supply food but often have very limited fresh food such as vegetables and fruit or meat. 'Close to 12% of all households are now having to seek help from food banks including people in paid work.' (3) This shows that people that are in employment are sometimes receiving such low wages that they cannot meet their basic living costs of rent, phone, transport, electricity etc. 5

Unemployment has risen – 'in January 2013 the New Zealand unemployment rate was 6.2% when in 1985 the unemployment rate was 3%.' (4) An issue with unemployed or low income households is that people are often not well educated and lack qualifications which make getting jobs more difficult. People on low incomes may be working more than one job or long shifts... 6

An issue with low income households is that people may not be well educated in nutrition or have a range of cooking skills... If people are working late or are shift workers buying takeaways reduces the stress for the parents as they can be eaten straight away and could be cheaper than buying fresh ingredients and then having to cook the meal. There is less wastage as perishable foods like fruit and vegetables go off if not stored properly and low income households do not always have storage facilities or equipment needed to cook some meals. 7