

just actions

Some kids are not getting a decent education



Caring for people, transforming lives, reforming society by God's power



'Ask me my three priorities for Government, and I tell you: education, education, education.'

Tony Blair

'Indeed, what can destroy family life and values is losing a job that provides the capacity to support your family or being unable to find affordable housing, quality health care, or educational opportunity for your children. Conversely, steady employment at a liveable family income, access to health care, a path to homeownership, and the chance to send your kids to good schools can lay the best foundation for solid and successful family values.' (Jim Wallis, *Sojourners* editor)

Education is an important means for gaining work. The Employment Plus programme of The Salvation Army recognises the vital connection between education and increased work opportunities. It therefore seeks to provide educational upskilling as a social service.

Conversely, lack of education can limit job options. For families, this can result in a low-income potential, creating difficulties in accessing the housing market and placing stresses upon the family. Lack of education can create intergenerational disadvantage, with succeeding generations also forced to leave school early to bring in extra income for the family.

Re-thinking the stakes: get together and discuss

- 1 'More money is put into prisons than into schools ... What is more precious to us than our own children? We are going to build a lot more prisons if we do not deal with the schools and their inequalities' (Jonathan Kozol). What is your response to this comment?
- 2 How can we show our commitment to equality of education for *all* socio-economic groups in our local community? Which kids are missing out?

Re-actions: what can we do?

- 1 'If you can read this, thank a teacher' (Anon). Become a teacher, or find ways to share your literacy and knowledge with others, such as helping as a volunteer in a class reading programme, reading stories to pre-schoolers, or helping speakers of other languages learn English.

While politicians recognise the priority of focusing on education, the OECD points out that this 'slips down the policy agenda' as other priorities take the place of investing money into such educational needs as early childhood education (ECE) or primary schools. However, such investment reaps long-term social rewards. The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) points out that for every \$1 spent in high-quality ECE, there is a \$13 return because these students become more successful at school and move into productive employment.

To be 'without any qualifications' is one of the nine indicators of deprivation on The New Zealand Index of Deprivation. Social justice involves looking to see which kids are missing out on qualifications and asking questions such as: *Where do they come from and how can the statistics change for the good? How are we spending our tax money?* For example, \$400 million was recently slashed from New Zealand ECE funding, affecting 93,000 children (NZEI, 2010).

Who are these 93,000 children and how will this will affect them? Are we making adequate long-term investment in all our children? Are we seeing education as a key to eradicating poverty?

- 2 Help to tutor students in your field of expertise, perhaps one in which you have gained qualifications.

Resources for re-formative worship: take a fresh look

- 1 Find out about The Salvation Army Employment Plus. Go to www.salvationarmy.org.nz/eplus
- 2 Find out about Salvation Army Early Childhood Education Centres. Go to www.salvationarmy.org.nz/ecec
- 3 Find out about pre-school services in your community (refer to www.salvationarmy.org.nz/preschool and www.mainlymusic.org.nz)
- 4 Watch social justice advocate Tony Campolo speak on education and faith www.youtube.com/user/EvangelicalAlliance