



MANAAKITIA A TATOU TAMARIKI

**CHILDREN'S  
COMMISSIONER**

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## **Important role of social work in child welfare**

The role of social work and social workers in child welfare is becoming more important to us as a society, rather than less important, Children's Commissioner Dr Cindy Kiro said today

In a speech to the annual Congress of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), being held in Christchurch today, Dr Kiro commended the work of social workers but urged them to play a more child-focused role.

Dr Kiro said the most important contribution that social workers can make to the welfare of children is to "recognise them, and prioritise them in actions as well as words".

"When crucial interventions are made by social workers the emphasis can sometimes slip into an overemphasis on adult issues. In too many instances, children are not being sighted or spoken to by social workers. This can be contrary to the welfare of children simply because children do not communicate in the same way as adults," Dr Kiro said.

"Adult issues should not predominate over children's issues as that effectively silences children's voices.

"The ANZASW's recently released Code of Ethics places considerable stress on social justice which includes addressing oppression and discrimination on the grounds of age. Such discrimination is as much an issue for children as it is for older people.

"This is not the responsibility of social work or social workers alone. Society has to face up to deeply entrenched attitudes and behaviours that impact children, especially those children who are marginalised by poverty."

Dr Kiro said that children needed to be more visible in the statistical indicators issued each year in the Ministry of Social Development's Social Report. "The risk is that children become invisible when insufficient information is collected about their circumstances," she said.

“There should also be more support to allow social workers to make earlier interventions. Research shows that the return to society is huge if intervention is made at an early stage in a child’s life and early in the life of problems that impact on children and their families.

“For child welfare to improve we need health professionals and educationalists on board. Most of all, we need families to step up – as so many are – to take their proper place as the guardians and nurturers of children.”

Dr Kiro’s speech was the inaugural address made in honour of Merv Hancock the first president of ANZASW when it was founded in 1964. Mr Hancock, now 82, lives in Palmerston North. Mr Hancock was also the founding director of Massey University’s Bachelor of Social Work degree and is being recognised for his lifelong commitment to establishing a sense of common purpose and professional identity for social workers.

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