

NO CHILD
BORN WITHOUT
A CHANCE



Save the Children

A VISION FOR A SOCIETY WHERE **NO CHILD IS BORN WITHOUT A CHANCE**

We have a vision for Northern Ireland where no child is born without a chance. Every child has potential. They just need a chance. Together we can help children shine.

For Northern Ireland to thrive, poverty has to be consigned to history. Its continued presence in our society is a moral shame. It limits economic growth and the social cohesion of our society. To build a society of opportunity and social mobility, we must fight inequality.

Only by ending the educational underachievement of children in poverty and boosting families' incomes can progress be made towards a prosperous Northern Ireland.

Ending child poverty and socio-economic disadvantage should be at the heart of the Executive's Programme for Government from 2011 to 2015. Future governments should only judge themselves successful if they've progressed towards the target to eradicate child poverty by 2020.



CHILD POVERTY IS A **SCAR** ON NORTHERN IRELAND

It is vitally important to invest in eradicating child poverty. Growing up in poverty can have a damaging and lasting impact on children.

It kills childhoods and prevents children from reaching their full potential

Poverty affects every aspect of children's lives, from their health, housing and education to the wellbeing of their family.

It stops Northern Ireland from being a fully productive society

Children who grow up poor are more likely to leave school without qualifications and have lower employment chances.

Poverty is costly and wasteful

It is shocking and inexcusable that one in four children is growing up in poverty which equates to over 100,000 children. And this number has stalled since 2004/5. Worryingly, the Institute of Fiscal Studies predicts that on the basis of current policies there will be a rise in levels of child poverty between 2011 and 2013.

The poorest families should neither pay the price for the economic crisis nor bear the brunt of the cuts.

A measurable child poverty plan and Programme for Government

The first Child Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland is a step towards achieving our vision of a society where no child is born without a chance. But much more needs to be done. The Executive must agree interim targets, measurable objectives and additional actions that will achieve the outcomes. These targets must be reflected in the PSAs in the next Programme for Government.

Childhood only happens once. Now is the time to intensify action and give every child the chance to shine.

OUR CALLS

**Every child has potential. They just need a chance.
Together we can help children shine.**

This booklet sets out the key actions the Executive must take over the next four years if it is to meet its obligations to children living in poverty.

We're calling for all parties to support three key commitments:

- 1. Tackle severe child poverty within the child poverty action plan and Programme for Government**
- 2. Break the link between poverty and educational under-achievement**
- 3. Commit to ending persistent child poverty which is linked to the legacy of the conflict**



TACKLING **SEVERE CHILD POVERTY** SHOULD BE THE TOP PRIORITY FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT

As part of strategy to end child poverty, there is need to focus on the very poorest children and young people. 40,000 children across Northern Ireland live in severe poverty.

We welcome the Executive's agreement to measure severe child poverty. However action is needed to mitigate the effects of welfare and budget cuts, jobs losses, inflation and a lack of support for low income families.

The next government should take a number of steps to maximise household resources:

1) Jobs to raise a family on

- The majority of children in severe poverty live in workless households. Therefore it is vital to create more jobs for low income parents.

2) Remove structural barriers to sustainable employment

- Implement a new early childhood education and **childcare strategy** to ensure quality, affordable and accessible childcare to benefit child development and support parents into education, training and work.
- Pay a **living wage** – the public sector should lead by example with a Living Wage similar to London and Scotland. All employers should be encouraged to pay at least a Living Wage and provide better training opportunities to boost parents' skills and employability.
- Pilot a generous **Earnings Disregard** as a model for the rest of the UK. Setting the earnings disregard at a higher threshold than the current GB level would allow parents to work in mini jobs and keep the additional income.

The Executive should take significant steps to provide financial support and advice to families

- Maximise increases in take-up of benefits and tax credits.
- Implement a Financial Inclusion and Capability Strategy to provide a framework for improved financial literacy and access to advice and information.

The Executive should tackle the poverty premium

One aspect of poverty is that the poorest families pay more for basic goods and services. This unfair 'poverty premium', equates to £1300 per year. It is mainly low income families who are unable to access favourable payment terms for necessities such as energy bills, insurance, credit and basic household goods.

- Protect children from fuel poverty with social tariffs and the regulation of oil.
- Ensure access to affordable credit for low income families.

Severe poverty means a couple with two children surviving on less than £12,000 a year, or a lone parent with one child on less than £7,000.

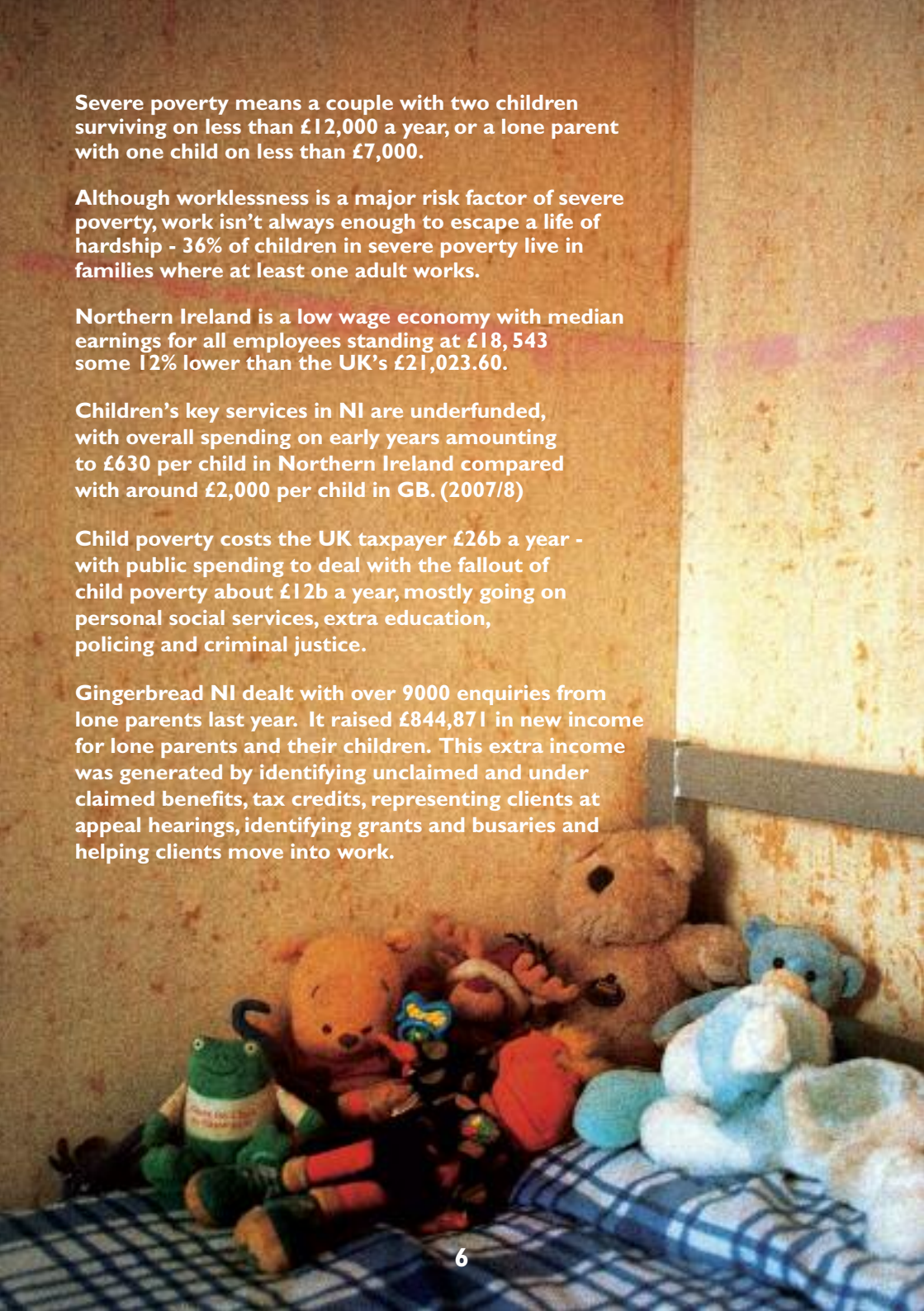
Although worklessness is a major risk factor of severe poverty, work isn't always enough to escape a life of hardship - 36% of children in severe poverty live in families where at least one adult works.

Northern Ireland is a low wage economy with median earnings for all employees standing at £18,543 some 12% lower than the UK's £21,023.60.

Children's key services in NI are underfunded, with overall spending on early years amounting to £630 per child in Northern Ireland compared with around £2,000 per child in GB. (2007/8)

Child poverty costs the UK taxpayer £26b a year - with public spending to deal with the fallout of child poverty about £12b a year, mostly going on personal social services, extra education, policing and criminal justice.

Gingerbread NI dealt with over 9000 enquiries from lone parents last year. It raised £844,871 in new income for lone parents and their children. This extra income was generated by identifying unclaimed and under claimed benefits, tax credits, representing clients at appeal hearings, identifying grants and busarries and helping clients move into work.



THE EXECUTIVE SHOULD BREAK THE LINK BETWEEN **POVERTY AND EDUCATIONAL UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT**

It should be the top priority of all political parties to stop deprivation being a barrier to educational achievement. Childhood only happens once. We must prevent multi-generational poverty by ensuring all children have access to a quality education that enables them to reach their potential. Education and skills are key drivers of productivity and prosperity.

The widening achievement gap between poorest and richer students is a significant barrier to economic growth and ending child poverty.

The next government should:

1) Focus on closing the education attainment gap

- Target additional resources to pupils living in poverty.
- Ensure schools are held accountable for extra funding and closing the attainment gap.
- Make an early start – set targets for primary schools to close the performance gap and all schools should be judged by how much they narrow it.

2) Invest in high quality early childhood education and care

The attainment gap can be identified as early as twenty-two months. Investment in accessible, affordable and high quality childcare and early education is better for children's life chances and more cost effective.

- Implement an integrated early childhood education and childcare strategy that includes a focus on maternal health and the home learning environment.

3) Help the poorest parents to support their children's learning

Engaging parents with their children's learning – particularly in the home – is key to raising children's performance in school. At key transitions, the most disadvantaged parents should be able to access help so they can develop the knowledge and confidence to support their children's learning.

- Identify and raise awareness of an accredited list of evidence based techniques and programmes that schools can implement.

4) Tackle the hidden cost of education

Which can total hundreds of pounds per child for uniforms, sports kits and equipment, text books, school trips, school meals.

- In 2009 only 29.7% of children entitled to free school meals (FSME) achieved 5 GCSEs A* to C, including Maths and English, compared to 63.6% non FSME students.
- Over 20% of children do not attain the standards in literacy and maths expected when they leave primary school.
- Statistics from some of the most disadvantaged wards in Belfast show that more than 80% of young people are leaving school with no or low qualifications – at a time when the EU has a 2020 target of 40% entering higher education.
- According to a GB report, education is a ‘matter of life or death’ – after research showed that 15% of young people not in education, employment or training had died within 10 years of leaving the education system.
- In 2010 there were 46,000 young people, aged 16-24, not in education employment or training in NI.
- Pupils’ social and economic circumstances, and mothers’ education, are the most important factors explaining their educational results. Only around 14 per cent of the incidence of low achievement is attributable to school quality.



CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT TO HELP END **PERSISTENT CHILD POVERTY**

More than 1 in 5 children here lives in persistent poverty, double the GB level, due largely to the legacy of the conflict. The areas of highest deprivation correlate with neighbourhoods that suffered most during the Troubles. Research shows that sustained integrated services, early intervention and a continuum of support provide a value for money solution that achieves the best outcomes for children.

This gives us the best chance of tackling persistent child poverty and the scandal of high numbers of young people with mental health problems and alienation from education, training and employment.

The next Executive should realise the potential of integration like children's services planning, community planning and Neighbourhood Renewal to:

- Give children and young people a voice in shaping their communities.
- Provide the vital continuum of sustained support, stretching from high quality early years, teaching, family support, youth services, to mothers' education, childcare, play and leisure provision.

Child Rights

Growing up in poverty prevents children from having their rights met. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should be the guiding framework for developing policy ideas and solutions to issues affecting children.

Article 27 of the UNCRC states that children have a right to a decent standard of living. The government has promised to keep this right for children in Northern Ireland.

As part of monitoring to end child poverty, we ask the Executive to endorse children's budgeting and child rights impact assessment, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its most recent Concluding Observations in 2008. The Welsh Assembly Government has already agreed to child poverty impact assessments and to children and young people's budgeting statements.

Northern Ireland could take this a step further by exploring the options for creating a Department and Minister for Children and Young People. A dedicated committee for children and young people would be required to scrutinise the work of the new department.

Save the Children would be happy to contribute to a child poverty expert group to help realise the vision of a more equal, peaceful and prosperous society, where no child is born without a chance.

WHAT **WE** DO

In Northern Ireland, we're working with children and young people and their families to bring about the changes needed to end child poverty.

We work directly with children and parents living in poverty to enable them to develop their skills and lift themselves out of poverty.

We make sure that the views and experiences of those directly affected by poverty are not ignored

We put pressure on politicians to adopt policies and programmes to transform the life chances of the poorest children.

Families and Schools Together

We are collaborating with the internationally renowned family support programme, Families and Schools Together (FAST). FAST, developed by Professor Lynn McDonald (Middlesex University) is a voluntary programme, which helps children perform better at school, at the same time strengthening families and communities. We have introduced FAST for the first time in Northern Ireland to families with children aged between three and five. We intend to establish 400 new FAST groups across the UK by 2014, reaching 40 000 children and parents.



Speaking Out Against Poverty

Speaking Out Against Poverty is an innovative grassroots programme. Each group of 15 children, young people or parents run their own change project in their local area that addresses one or more aspects of poverty. For six months, they engage in a series of activities to share and build their knowledge and understanding on issues important to them in their local community, and create change in that same community. Not only does this improve their lives, but also the lives of the wider community.



Ambassadors

The children and young people we work with have the opportunity to become young ambassadors. We help them to have a voice in their communities, and at local and national levels. Each year our ambassadors plan and deliver End Child Poverty Breakthrough Summits. This is an opportunity for them to present issues and solutions they have identified.



Eat, Sleep, Learn, Play – in development

We are developing a programme to focus on supporting children in the most desperate need, whose parents meet a low income threshold, who have had a baby in the last year and have a need for equipment within the home. We will provide the family with a material grant, such as a cooker, new bed or educational toys, and also offer support and advice on their benefits.



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WE CAN HELP CHILDREN SHINE.

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Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives.
We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

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