

## **Dialogue – The Changing Face of Food Banks**

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Like the Salvation Army, quoted in today's article - "Emergency food grant costs rise 75pc" - Auckland City Mission has also seen evidence of the increased pressure on low-income families.

The City Mission's social services have experienced a 50% increase in demand for food parcels in the first six months of this year, compared to the same period last year.

Food banks are a last resort for people in desperate need and, over recent months, more people are asking for help for the first time in their lives. It isn't personal crises driving these people to the food banks, it's the economic crisis - and it's hitting hard. Wave after wave of people are turning to charities for the first time to meet their everyday needs.

The first wave of new faces includes cleaners and labourers. There are many families in Auckland who get by because mum or dad has a part-time cleaning or labouring job. As individuals and companies have trimmed their expenses and the building industry has slowed down, those jobs have disappeared. Such jobs don't pay much, but when the main earner in the house is earning the minimum wage, the few dollars extra earned is the difference between three meals a day and taking a child to the doctor.

The second wave of new faces were single people. In the inner city, there are plenty of single people living from pay to pay. Many are young and have student loans or credit card debts, but they're getting by. Then they lose their jobs and have to wait for a benefit. They are too optimistic about getting another job and often don't know where to seek help. By the time they ask for help, they are behind in their rent, facing eviction, unable to buy necessities.

There's now a third wave - couples who were doing well, two income families, considered good money managers. In a household with two minimum wage jobs, one income often goes to pay the rent or the mortgage, the other to cover everything else. When one or both jobs are lost, the speed at which these families move from proud to desperate is frightening.

Generations of families have been affected by the recession. There are plenty of elderly couples who have lost their savings. They're now less able to manage their own expenses and certainly not in a position to help their children and grandchildren if they get into difficulties.

It's not easy to ask for charity. It's a difficult shift in thinking. For so long many have believed that people asking for charity were not trying to help themselves - that they should take personal responsibility and get a job. The deepening recession has changed that thinking.

Many people will only let you know they are in trouble when they have got to the point where they cannot see how they can go on. A food parcel gives everyone a breather - providing enough food to feed everyone in the house for about eight days. In that time, benefit entitlements can be sorted; budgets can be re-worked; landlords, utility suppliers, banks and loan companies can be negotiated with.

It's hard, it's often humiliating, and it's happening to people who never thought they would need help.

We're not expecting things to get better soon. These are tough times. The best investment we can make now is to look after our most vulnerable.

ENDS

Emailed to Simon Collins and Newsdesk . NZ Herald  
And to Morning Report.