

Towards a Living Wage – What will it take? Where are we at?

Economists continue to talk up the value of the Living Wage as an effective intervention that will ease the pressure of rising inequalities on families and communities. Thomas Piketty and Max Rushbrooke have both written books providing the analysis of the hard data and then there's marketplace support from employers who have walked the talk and implemented the Living Wage.

As the evidence mounts from Councils in the UK who have seen the cost neutral impact and the positive outcomes, more small business employers in NZ are interested and beginning the journey signing onto to become accredited under the movement's umbrella logo. For more information go to www.livingwage.org.nz

In Wellington, the Council voted to approve Living Wage as the standard for all contracts across the Council, recognising the investment in people would reduce staff turnover, help maintain stability for families and communities and reduce sick leave and recruitment costs. Here in Auckland, the battle has been between progressive Local Boards wanting to see all the contracts they manage being Living Wage compliant, and the Council's Chief Executive Stephen Town who has overruled these Board Chairs.

The Living Wage is now calculated at \$19.80 an hour, based on the cost of basic items for a modest weekly budget of 2 adults and 2 children. That is 68% of the average hourly earnings in NZ (\$29.01) It is enough to enable workers to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in society.

This is election year and the rising rents and rates as well as house prices just beginning to move again are all putting huge pressure on families and seniors. Many Council workers have several small contracts of just a few hours here and there having to travel twice a day to work or even more, and cover for other workers on temporary contracts. They have to rely on food banks to make it through to the next week after paying rent. Often they are subsidised by their parents, still living at home at aged 30 plus, while trying to bring up children. These are your library assistants, your swimming pool attendants, your rubbish collectors, cleaners and parks workers.

Across the Auckland region, candidates will be standing for election to Local Boards and the Governing Body of Council. The Living Wage Movement will be questioning these candidates on whether they support a move to make the living Wage mandatory for all Council contracts. All voters can participate in strengthening the campaign for a Living Wage by asking candidates whether they are prepared to support the Council paying a Living Wage. They can also ask themselves whether they want ratepayers to fund so many staff earning over \$100,000 per year.

The Living Wage Movement is made up of community/secular, union and faith-based groups who share a common sense of concern from a perspective of wanting to create social justice and ensure we have a safer and fairer society.

Anne-Marie Coury

Executive Member of ADCOSS/ member of The Living Wage Movement

President of Auckland Grey Power

