Preserving the ‘We are Beneficiaries’ Project

National Library of New Zealand
Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa
"I talked about how I lied to win NZ 23 years ago when I was a single mum with a little baby. I talked about what beneficiary life is really like so we could choose to make it better. I was named a criminal, a cheat, a thief, a 'bludger, a 'self confessed benefit fraudster.' So be it. There are the judgemental and the judged. I stand with the judged."

- Metiria Turei
We're a group of artists and beneficiaries demanding a more compassionate social welfare system in NZ. Read our report here: bit.do/WABreport

New Zealand

facebook.com/WeAreBeneficiaries

Joined August 2017

Pinned Tweet

WeAreBeneficiaries @WeBeneficiaries · 28 Feb 2018
Share your story - message us 3-5 sentences about:
• Your time in the welfare system, or
• What you wish the welfare system was like, or
• How you've been treated as a beneficiary

SHARE YOUR STORY
MESSAGE US 3-5 SENTENCES ABOUT:
• YOUR TIME IN THE WELFARE SYSTEM, OR
Our Story

We are a group of artists continuing the conversation Metiria Turei MP started - demanding a more compassionate social welfare system.

We asked artists who have been on a benefit in NZ (DPB, sickness, invalids, jobseeker, whatever) to draw a picture of themselves, and write a couple of sentences next to it about:
- Their time on the welfare system, or
- What they wish the welfare system was like, or
- How they’ve been treated as a beneficiary

We’re invested in keeping race and class at the forefront, but also recognise that it’s a pretty vulnerable thing to do - and given what happened to Metiria in the last few weeks, these conversations can have pretty dire effects when we do share - particularly for people of colour and indigenous people.

If you wanna be a contributor - as an artist who has been or is on a benefit, or as a person who wants to share a few sentences about their experience and have one of our artists draw you, then please send us a message.

#wearebeneficiaries
Examples of daily newspaper cartoons, from the New Zealand Cartoon Archive
WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

Every time I came out of work I felt shitter than when I went in. And I felt really sh*t going in. It's supposed to be a safety net when things get dire, but instead of a compassionate system it's a dehumanising one. Because they don't want you to want to come back.

-Saym.
people like to call the benefit free money
but anyone who's had to stretch nothing out over a week
only to have it snap two days too soon
knows that's a fucking fairytale
you work for that pittance
throw yourself at the feet
of some dead eyed
bureaucrat and beg
fill out so many forms
detailing your personal life
someone could write your biography
from their secrets

- Dominic *Tourettes* Hoey
"I remember sitting in the WINZ office feeling so anxious and ashamed and wanting to have solidarity with the other people in the waiting area. But we were all too afraid to make eye contact or anything - like if WINZ saw us being nice to each other, we would be more of a threat, more of a problem. Being managed into miserable, isolated, individual units. It destroys the social fabric that we actually need to survive. Fuck that."

- Mx. Joey Macdonald
#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

I wish our welfare system cherished whānau. I remember the heartache of changing my baby’s nappy on the toilet floor at WINZ because there were no facilities.

That was a rock-bottom moment for me - the shame, guilt and anger that being a mum wasn’t valued, and no help was on offer.

I’d like to see a welfare system that actually nurtures the welfare of everyone in Aotearoa.
#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

They cut off my disability benefit because "PTSD isn't curable so there's no point in funding therapy that won't fix you."
# WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

WINZ forced me to get a $2000 overdraft before they would help me and I’m still in debt.

I went in because I had just lost my job and they said I had to max out my overdraft before I could get any assistance. I thought it was weird but I didn’t question it. Several years later I’m still 2 grand in debt making overdraft payments every month.

- Anonymous
I was on a benefit when I was trying to start my career. Any time I started to get work, I felt like I got punished. It felt soul crushing. The system was degrading and complicated, yet completely sloppy too. And it’s even tougher now, and tougher again if you’re not a white guy.

The whole thing seems backwards to me. We take the people who most need our support and instead we demoralise them and make life harder for them. Why? It makes no sense.

-Toby
I want a welfare system that is incorporated into our own community, advocacy, and welfare organisations, so that it no longer exists as a gatekeeper to our ability to survive but as a service that supports & uplifts us and our communities. At the very least, it should no longer stigmatise, ignore, or force an unnecessary standard of proof on to our health, mental health, pronouns, children, types of relationships, or worth as human beings beyond our paid labour. I don't want to be terrified and disgusted before I even walk in the door.
“I was unemployed in the 90’s. The first thing I remember about the WINZ offices was the sound of an old lady crying. She explained, while sobbing, that her late husband had done the banking and she didn’t understand what she was being asked to provide. She was snapped at and sent on her way. All she needed was an ounce of respect and the person to tell her what to ask the bank teller for.

If a little old lady, trying to sort out her super was treated like this, dehumanised and humiliated, how would they treat me?

I complied meekly to everything they demanded, even when I knew they were wrong. I was terrified of what they would do if I didn’t.”

- GREVILLE
#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

POVERTY DESTROYS POTENTIAL AND EVERYONE BECOMES THE POORE RR FOR IT.

- VILIA
"My daughter needs counselling so I applied for a disability allowance. I got signatures from doctors and psychs, and filled in everything they needed. They short funded the cost of it by about $25 a week and I received no help with travel. When I asked why the lady on the phone told me I should just think about my daughter not going every week so I could afford it."
#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

"I want to see a welfare system that treats people as people, not just a file.

A place where people actually feel able to get the support they need to take control of their life.

And a place where we aren't reduced to tears every time we have to explain how we ended up sitting in this office."
Anonymous
#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

"If standing up against a cruel system threatens the establishment, then I want the establishment to feel threatened. Let's truly put people - all people - at the centre of everything we do."

- Marama Davidson
#WE ARE BENEFICIARIES

WeAreBeneficiaries @WeBeneficiaries - 7 Mar 2018
This International Women's Day we'd like to say a massive thank you to all the strong women who have stood up to create a more compassionate welfare system #wearebeneficiaries (Artist: Semira Davis)
Special thanks to Sam Orchard, all of the artists, and everyone who shared their stories.

For more information:
https://www.facebook.com/WeAreBeneficiaries/
https://twitter.com/webeneficiaries
https://www.instagram.com/wearebeneficiaries

https://natlib.govt.nz/records/39712914