



Poor Shouldn't Pay Penance for their Disadvantage, Says Family Action

"It's not a sin to be out of work and poor and disadvantaged. The parents we work with are struggling to find jobs because of disadvantages like mental health, undiagnosed learning difficulties and a poor education. We need to see more details of the sanctions but would be concerned if they were forced into work even on a temporary basis without adequate support. Support for vulnerable families means help for parents with organising their homes, effective parenting and getting skills and when they receive this from us we can move them into volunteering and work. They certainly shouldn't have financial support taken from them and their children if they don't take up an arbitrary job offer. Up to 2 million children on the DWP figures will be at risk if their parents can't find work.

The existing sanctions regime creates sufficient incentives to actively seek work, and to take job opportunities when they are offered. Further toughening of sanctions for jobseekers would be unnecessarily punitive, and would not tackle the key issues of job availability, and the provision of holistic support which many of our service users need to make employment sustainable.

"There also seems to be an expectation generated by these proposals that the voluntary sector will provide volunteer placements for those at threat of benefit sanctions. In the first place, we're very concerned about the impact on those who volunteer only because of sanctions on our volunteering culture. In the second place volunteers are not cost-free for charities. We estimate that once we CRB check, train, and supervise volunteers and pay their travel and lunch expenses each volunteer costs us up to £5000 a year. At the same time the Transition Fund for charities affected by the recession only runs to £100 million and medium-sized charities like Family Action will not be eligible in spite of losing contracts during the cuts."

Ends

Notes to Editors:

Family Action has a welfare benefits specialist, Sam Royston, available to talk about the impact of these changes. If you'd like to interview Sam please get in touch. Family Action may also be able to provide case studies who will be affected by the welfare changes announced today. For further information please contact Anthony McCaul, Senior Media and Campaigns Officer on 0207 241 7632 or 0781 309 2040 or email anthony.mccaul@family-action.org.uk

Family Action:

Family Action has been a leading provider of services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families since 1869. We work with over 45,000 vulnerable families and children a year by providing practical, emotional and financial support through over 100 community-based services across England. Additionally in 2009-2010 we distributed 4,218 grants totalling over £1,104,883 to families and individuals in financial hardship throughout the UK. Family Action won the 2009 Charity Awards Foundation award for effectiveness and jointly with CAB, Gingerbread and our sponsors Barclaycard the 2010 Third Sector Award for best corporate partnership for Horizons, an integrated welfare advice, training and educational grants package for lone parents. Find Family Action on the Web at www.family-action.org.uk.