I feel I can show that poverty is not a lifestyle choice by discussing three main issues. The first is the lack of jobs currently available in New Zealand, secondly the truth about how the poor spend their money and lastly that the benefit is not sufficient to feed, house and clothe a family.

New Zealand has been referred to as “the land of plenty” but with 155,000 unemployed New Zealanders as recorded by Statistics NZ in 2001, it is no wonder that people cannot get out of the poverty trap. It is not that the poor do not want jobs or have made a decision to live on a government benefit, but due to the lack of jobs, they are unable to acquire a secure financial income so do not have food security. With different circumstances come different problems and with this in mind it is impossible for anyone to make a judgment about a person’s life or decisions, so not only is it wrong for us to judge a person’s ability to keep a job, we must keep in mind that for some getting a job is extremely difficult due to skill level, young children and disability.

People often make the generalisation that the poor spend their money on gambling, fast foods, alcohol and other drugs but the reality is if they were to do any of this they would be unable to feed, clothe or house their families. The poor often find themselves stressed about the lack of food they have and their inability to provide food for special occasions. In a recent 2011 article on stuff.co.nz researcher Kristie Carter “found food insecure people had a significant 90% increase in risk of higher levels of distress” than people who did not suffer from food insecurity. This stress often leads to the use of cigarettes, booze, drugs, gambling or even an addiction.

In New Zealand a single person living on the benefit only receives according to Statistics NZ in 2011 $167.83 after tax a week. They don’t have enough money to buy sufficient food and they become under nourished. An article – Healthy eating hard for poor described how “40% of New Zealand households go hungry, skip meals or scrimp on ingredients because they are not food secure”. Eating takeaways may be one of the few choices they have to try and feed their family. High fat foods such as fish and chips supply cheap energy and fill you up; however they do lead to longer term health problems.

Constantly eating an unhealthy diet means people do not have the energy to search for jobs, and they become depressed and lose motivation and therefore become benefit reliant which is a technical term for someone who is no longer likely to gain employment in the future. If they had sufficient money to cover their basic needs more people would have the resources to get out and try to find work, which would lift them out of poverty.

Many low income families work long hours every day to provide for their families and therefore have little time, energy or money to prepare a meal for their families every night. Takeaways are quick easy, everyone likes them and do not require washing up.

Do we really want the part of our population who rely on the benefit to become as I have outlined earlier, under nourished and depressed? Do we really want to live in a community where there is no empathy for people who suffer from food insecurity? Or do we want a stable economy where all that are able to maintain a job can get one, where people have
enough money to provide *nourishment for their families* and themselves and where even people on the benefit can afford a birthday cake for a child’s birthday?