



Proactive Release

Submissions on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

August 2019

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has released the following submission received during its public consultation on the child and youth wellbeing strategy.

Some of the information contained within this release is considered to not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

- Where this is the case, the information has been withheld, and the relevant section of the Act that would apply, has been identified.
- Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Key to redaction codes and their reference to sections of the Act:

- **9(2)a** – Section 9(2)(a): to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased people.

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Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy – Submission Template

This document is intended for individuals or groups who wish to make a formal submission on the child and youth wellbeing strategy.

Please complete this template and email it to: childandyouthwellbeing@dpmc.govt.nz

A guide to making a submission is available on the DPMC website <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>

Submissions will close on **Wednesday 5 December**.

Please provide details for a contact person in case we have some follow up questions.

Contact Name:	Dr Deborah Stevens
Email Address:	9(2) (a)
Phone Number:	
Organisation Name:	Centre for Science and Citizenship
Organisation description: (tell us about your organisation – i.e. who do you represent? How many members do you have? Are you a local or national organisation?)	The Centre for Science and Citizenship (CSC) is a registered charitable trust that operates nationally. Our primary programme of work is enQUIRING minds – ethics workshops with intermediate and secondary school students, with teachers and with community groups. These interactive workshops explore the intersection of new technologies with human value systems. Dr Deborah Stevens and Dr Lynne Bowyer are co-directors of the CSC. Deborah’s background is in science, psychology, education and public medicine. Lynne’s background is in education, philosophy and mental health.
Executive Summary: (Please provide a short summary of the key points of your Submission - 200 words)	<p>We agree that a strategy for addressing Child and Youth Wellbeing is crucial and acknowledge that such a strategy will be complex and multifaceted. We recognise that, like all good things, the changes required will take time and will cause discomfort for those who benefit from perpetuating the current structures. However, to make the changes necessary for “improving the wellbeing of all children”, the current structures and systems must be changed. If our current structures were working, we would not require the wellbeing strategy.</p> <p>Given the complexity of the changes needed, we have focussed our submission on three significant areas:</p> <p>Reformation of the economy to allow a stay-at-home parent for the first 1000 days of a child’s life.</p> <p>Development of a comprehensive and integrated family service, including provision of birthing and support services, and development of family community hubs.</p>

	<p>Restructuring of education to emphasise thinking, co-operation and values formation, as opposed to the current emphasis on recall of facts and the measuring, ranking and rating of students.</p>
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Submission Content

The development of a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy is timely.

Child wellbeing is the lynch pin of a number of consultation processes that are currently underway. Child and Youth Wellbeing are at the heart of how we structure education, how we attend to mental health issues, how we address abortion. All these issues are shaped by how we value our tamariki and rangatahi.

We recognise that the Wellbeing Strategy is an aspirational document, but we cannot let it stop there. Nor can the implementation of a new way of living and responding to child and youth wellbeing become a matter of box ticking, form filling and measurement. Although the concept of 'wellbeing' is difficult to pin down, we know what wellbeing looks like – and when it is absent – through the interactions we have with one another. Our time and energy are better spent in improving our ways of thinking and acting towards our children and their families. The efficacy of the changes we outline below, which focus on nurturing and holding our young people well, will be seen in the reduction of child abuse; a drop in the number of young people with mental health issues or within the criminal justice system; a decline in suicides numbers; and other related indicators.

The question is, how are we going to show that we value the caring and nurturing of children and young people? What ways of doing things must change?

The values of care and nurturing have traditionally been associated with the role of women. Although nowadays there are more men involved in these caring and nurturing roles, this tends to be in more affluent families where women have joined the high-paying competitive workforce outside the home. The home is still an undervalued space. Therefore, we strongly suggest that this child and youth wellbeing initiative begins with structuring the economy in a way that enables one parent to be at home full-time with their children for the first 1000 days after they are born. By doing so we are sending the message that we value caring and nurturing; that whanau is important; that being with children is an immensely significant role.

With the disintegration of the extended family, for example through geographical dislocation due to people having to leave their place and family of origin to find work, many new families are bereft of support from their elders. Therefore, to ensure that the early years of a young person's life are optimal requires the establishment of specialised, stand-alone family facilities. These facilities would provide a place to birth children, bond with and establish good patterns of care for a child, before the family returns home.

The support of the family facility needs to continue where needed throughout the early years of the child's life, and can be done by having these family facilities providing on-going opportunities for mothers and fathers and their child/children to come together to learn from one another and be guided by trained staff. Opportunities such as play groups, music groups, kiddy-gym, toy libraries etc. can be run out of such a facility. It would be ideal if this facility were situated within or nearby a retirement village, to enable other elders to share their knowledge and time with young families, providing the opportunity for the transmission of intergenerational values. Imagine, for example, a retired carpenter teaching a group of young fathers how to build a wooden wheelbarrow, or a trolley for the

children, whilst also conveying an appreciation for the wood he is using, how to care appropriately for tools and equipment, and the joy of his art in making something for a child.

A family facility as outlined above sets a nurturing, caring environment for the early years of a child's education. Such a facility empowers adults to share and support one another. Each child is enabled to interact with a range of caring adults and a cohort of other children, building their confidence with others. Such interaction and conversation will develop, ground and consolidate language and cognitive development. The education that a young person participates in is crucial for setting them up well. Therefore, our formal education system needs to be overhauled in order to contribute to a child's wellbeing.

Currently, education is a process concerned with sorting and preparing our tamariki and rangitahi for a place in the economic system. It is time that we seriously consider the purpose of education and the responsibility we have as a community to ensure that education serves our young people well. Our current education system is driven by economic and bureaucratic considerations. Education is deployed as an instrument to work on individuals so that they can acquire or develop certain 'capacities', 'skills' and 'qualities', in order to 'improve performance', which has become a 'measurable activity'. This measuring, which in turn is used to rate and rank our children, sets up a stressful, competitive environment that severs cooperative connections between people. An education system centred on measuring, rating and ranking is not conducive to having a place where children can be "valued for who they are", (Connectedness strand, Wellbeing Strategy), and are "actively and positively engaged in learning" (Development strand, Wellbeing Strategy). In our current education system good performance is based on the accurate recall of facts, and success is measured in terms of 'academic achievement' in specific disciplines. This current approach obscures that living well with others in our challenging, interconnected world is a mark of wellbeing and the ground of success.

When young people struggle in our current dehumanising system, 'deficiencies', 'failure' and 'deviance' are said to be 'located' in the young person, rather than in the systems that are imposed on the young person. Framing the situation in terms of an individual's problem further marginalises and stigmatizes, at the same time further obscuring the inter-related social structures that we live within and uphold through our actions.

Our young people are the canary in the mine. They are the most vulnerable and sensitive to things going wrong. With growing numbers of young people ending their own lives, with the increase in young people feeling depressed and hopeless, and being 'diagnosed' with 'mental illness' (again framing this as an internal or underlying issue of the individual), the high number of young people involved in the criminal justice system, and many young people looking to gangs as a place to belong, it is time we recognise that it is our social structures that are flawed and are failing us.

For education to play its role in the wellbeing of children and young people, it must facilitate critical and creative thinking and provide opportunities for cooperation and collaboration on meaningful and worthwhile activities. Education must value open dialogue and the critical exchange of ideas, including providing a safe place for the exploration, questioning and transformation of injustice. Injustice impacts on everyone's wellbeing.

To implement a meaningful Wellbeing Strategy requires the transformation of our social system, our education system, and as a corollary our economic structures. If we are serious about the wellbeing of our children and young people, we must nurture families and build an education system that enables children and young people to understand “who they are” and “where they belong”(Connectedness strand, Wellbeing Strategy); cultivate bonds and connections that hold children, young people and their families well; discern and work with values that will enable all people to thrive; and affirm and empower all people to change practices that are harmful.

Please note that your submission will become official information. This means that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet may be required to release all or part of the information contained in your submission in response to a request under the Official Information Act 1982.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet may withhold all or parts of your submission if it is necessary to protect your privacy or if it has been supplied subject to an obligation of confidence.

Please tell us if you don't want all or specific parts of your submission released, and the reasons why. Your views will be taken into account in deciding whether to withhold or release any information requested under the Official Information Act and in deciding if, and how, to refer to your submission in any possible subsequent paper prepared by the Department.