



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.

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TE HONONGA AKORANGA
COMET



SUBMISSION

CHILD AND YOUTH WELLBEING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

Submission 095/18

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, December 2018

Whakatauāki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi
ki te raranga i te whāriki
kia mōhio tātou ki ā tātou.
Mā te mahi tahi ō ngā whenu,
mā te mahi tahi ō ngā kairaranga,
ka oti tēnei whāriki.
I te otinga me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.
Ā tana wā, me titiro hoki ki ngā raranga i makere
nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

- Kūkupa Tirikatene

The tapestry of understanding
cannot be woven by one strand alone.
Only by the working together of strands
and the working together of weavers
will such a tapestry be completed.
With its completion
let us look at the good that comes from it
And, in time we should also look
at those stitches which have been dropped,
because they also have a message.

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[COMET Auckland - Te Hononga Akoranga](#) is an independent charitable trust and Auckland Council's CCO focused on education, skills and lifelong learning across Auckland and, increasingly, other parts of the country. Our latest Statement of Intent is [here](#).

Background and organization description

This submission has been assembled by COMET Auckland, Tre Hononga Akoranga, based on our own collective knowledge and experience, and our ongoing engagement with our stakeholders, including educators, community leaders, employers, parents and students.

COMET Auckland's role is to support lifelong education and skills for Aucklanders, especially in areas of high education need. Briefly, our work involves:

- Sector leadership – mapping data and evidence, working with sector leaders to identify and prioritise the most pressing areas of focus, and connecting people around that common agenda, to plan collaborative action.
- That can then lead to advocacy or changes to partners' business as usual, or sometimes to planning and trialling new ways of working (incubation projects).
- These incubation projects generally develop through scoping and planning to trialling, and then implementation and evaluation, with the goal of handing them on once they are fully developed, so we can move on to focus on another part of the system.

In particular, this submission reflects insights from our work in four areas:

- Talking Matters, a campaign to get everyone talking more and talking differently to babies and young children, in the language(s) and through the culture(s) of the whānau. Talking Matters is led by COMET Auckland with funding from the NEXT Foundation. We work with strategic partners and a growing number of community organisations, plus more than 280 members of the Talking Matters Network. We are exploring what works for families in small-scale pilot projects in three Auckland communities (Māngere-Ōtāhuhu, Tāmaki and Puketāpapa) and supporting an initiative in Whanganui, aiming to identify promising practices to replicate and scale up. Talking Matters is built on the evidence that children build the foundations to love, learn, think and communicate through responsive interactions with adults when they are very small. Interaction and talk help shape a child's brain architecture and influence their social, emotional and intellectual capabilities, and therefore their wellbeing, throughout their lives.
- The Tāmaki Makaurau Education Forum (TMEF), a group of iwi leaders and educators who come together to share examples of effective practice for Māori learners and to discuss issues and opportunities towards enabling Māori to reach their aspirations through learning. COMET's role is convenor and coordinator of the TMEF. In 2018 their work has focused on a rangatahi consultation which brought together Māori young people from kura, mainstream secondary schools, marae and various alternative settings to hear from them about issues that affect their lives and learning. The key messages from this consultation are rangatahi attending mainstream schools experience significant racism (but those attending kura do not); they want more say in their future pathways; and they want more focus on wellbeing at school. The consultation has led to formation of a rangatahi advisory group who will share the messages and shape one or more actions to address them.
- The Youth Employability Programme (YEP): License to Work, a nationally-recognised programme that builds young people's employability skills and thereby prepares them for

successful transition to stable employment. YEP was shaped by COMET based on focus groups with employers and young people about their experience of the transition to work. The programme is now delivered at 33 sites (mainly secondary schools, kura and youth employment programmes) across 8 regions. Young people who struggle in the transition to work, and especially those who become long-term NEET (not in education, employment or training) can experience significant impacts on their wellbeing, so building employability skills is an important protective factor for young people. Several of the employability skills that YEP focuses on also specifically relate to wellbeing, especially resilience, teamwork and communication.

- Learning Auckland (LA) magazine, a by-students, for-students sister publication to Education Today (ET). Our role is to bring together a student editor group of around 25 young people from diverse Auckland primary, intermediate, secondary and tertiary education settings to discuss and write about the issues that affect their learning. Some of the most powerful discussions and stories that this group generates relate to wellbeing, for example depression, bullying, attitudes to LGBTQI students, importance of culture and identity, sexism, racism, sex education, exam stress and worries about their future.

Executive summary

We welcome the government's initiative to establish a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. Wellbeing is an extremely important kaupapa and one that has not received enough focus in the past. The draft strategy is a significant step that has potential to make a real difference for children and young people in Aotearoa.

We strongly support the proposed vision and the seven proposed principles. In general we also support the proposed wellbeing domains, desired outcomes and focus areas. We have included in the submission below some specific suggestions to clarify or improve some parts of the strategy.

In summary, the main changes we would like to see are:

1. Expanding the age range for the strategy to include all young people up to 25 (not just those in state care), so wellbeing during the crucial transitions between school, post-school learning and work can be included.
2. Separating outcomes and focus areas into sections that relate specifically to different age groups so it is easier to see how the strategy supports wellbeing in tailored ways that meet the developmental needs of very young children (for example in the first 2000 days from conception); older children; and young people.
3. Being clearer about how the strategy will support Māori as Tāngata Whenua
4. Being clearer about how the strategy will provide for tailored or targeted support for groups that may have specific needs, such as children and young people experiencing poverty; disabled children and young people; those in state care; Pasifika children and young people; migrants and refugees; and LGBTQI young people.
5. Including more emphasis on actively providing support to families so they are able to provide for and nurture their children's growth and learning.

6. Adding an outcome for babies and very young children to have a strong primary relationship with at least one caring adult, based on the evidence that a primary bond is crucial for wellbeing at this age.
7. Recognising the value of children's first or heritage language in supporting identity and therefore wellbeing by including the word "language" alongside "culture" in relevant outcomes and focus areas.
8. Including more focused action to support young people in the transition from school or post-school study to work.

Comments on the Vision and Principles

We strongly support the vision and all seven principles. We are especially encouraged to see principles 2, 3 and 5 because these ideas have often been absent in previous government policies and strategies.

Recognising that children's wellbeing is indivisible from the wellbeing of their family and whanau and from the quality of relationships that encompass them (principles 2 and 3) can sound simple and obvious but has complex policy implications. This is because supporting more than one generation in a coordinated way requires that funding, contracting and success measures all need to connect across several government departments. The implementation plan for the final strategy will need to identify how these inter-agency connections and policies can be realised.

Comments on the wellbeing domains and desired outcomes

The Child and Wellbeing Framework Outcomes framework is an admirable document. By putting a wide and diverse range of factors into one page it demonstrates the holistic nature of wellbeing. However the layout suggests all things are equally important and of comparable scale. While all domains and outcomes are interdependent, some of the items on the far right column 'are learning and developing' are developmentally essential for outcomes in other places, which may be an argument for shifting this domain to the left.

There is a need for some parity of scope for the domains. For example, the item sitting second on the outcomes list under Learning and Developing is far too broad – encompassing development from birth, through education to successful transition into adulthood. Compare that to the quite small and specific outcome statement about children having experiences outside the classroom.

The current format also largely ignores the very different contexts and needs of children and young people at different stages of development. Some items apply to all age groups, others more to very young children or to adolescents and young adults, but these items are not clearly signposted.

The science is clear, the early days and years are particularly important and we know that this is an area of under-investment. This is sometimes characterised as the first 1000 days (from birth to about two and three-quarters), or as the first 2000 days – conception through to the start of school. Whichever approach is used, the needs of young children are quite different from those of older

children. The framework would be more powerful and more aligned to what is known if there was an age differentiation.

Recommendations:

We recommend separating the columns out into rows, or adding age group symbols to column items, to make it easier to identify outcomes and actions for specific age groups.

We recommend the following additions and adjustments to the outcomes, based on the things that evidence shows are particularly important for babies and very young children. The table includes a rationale for these suggestions.

| Suggested outcomes for young children | Rationale for additions/changes |
|---|--|
| Families and whānau are safe and nurturing | |
| From before birth, babies are in a healthy environment and their mothers are supported | |
| Children have their material needs met, including food and housing | |
| The environment babies experience before birth supports positive development | |
| Families are equipped and supported to nurture their children’s growth, development and learning | Some outcomes in the draft strategy state what parents and families need to do, but they don’t state what is needed for that to happen. Families need support for their important role. |
| Children experience a stable, loving and responsive relationship from birth where they build attachment and positive mental health | Infant mental health is contingent on solid and stable loving relationships, attachment and communication with one or a small number of primary carers. This is distinct from the needs of older children to have “strong <u>networks</u> of trusting, caring relationships” which is included in the current framework. |
| Children develop early language and communication skills at home, in early learning and in community settings. Children are equipped with language, socio-emotional skills and support to transition smoothly into school | Language and communication skills are essentials for building socio-emotional skills and resilience. Resilience comes through and as a result of attachment, language and the meeting of their early needs. |
| Children know who they are, their heritage, whakapapapa, culture and home language | Identity and wellbeing are greatly enhanced when children grow up knowing and valuing their home or heritage language, but the draft strategy did not include this. |
| Children have opportunities for play and exploration to learn about and make sense of the world around them | This is quite different from down time for older children. |

At the other end of the child and youth age spectrum, teenagers and young adults also have wellbeing challenges and needs that are specific to their age group. A key area that requires more

attention is the transition from the formal education system (school or tertiary) into work. It has been identified that early stints of unemployment can lead to long-term unemployment and benefit dependency, with significant impacts on short-term and long-term wellbeing. This issue is particularly acute for vulnerable young people, especially those who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS).

Many young people leave school with very little understanding of what to expect in the workplace, and with few of the skills employers most want – skills like communication, time management, teamwork and problem-solving. This is especially so in communities with high adult unemployment, as young people can grow up without the kinds of work-related family conversations and experiences that many of us might have taken for granted when we were growing up. One symptom of this issue is the 70,000 young people in Aotearoa who are NEET (not in education, employment or training).

The issues faced by many of the young people who participated in our Youth Employability Programme over the last four years illustrate the complexity of the need. For example, some young people had never been out of their community of residence, some had never been on a school bus, or inside a work place. They talk about being trapped, with few choices or opportunities and little control over their lives. Some came from households of over 14 people and yet were the only person going to work (their work experience as part of the programme). A few were the first in three generations to have a job. It is easy to see how young people growing up in situations like this can miss out on developing employability skills.

Clearly better support for young people in the transition to work is urgently needed. However the strategy as it stands is not well-positioned for this because the age range covered by the strategy is too restrictive. Given that the transition to work can happen (in one shift or across several stages) anywhere from age 16 to early 20s, a cutoff age of 18 (for young people not in state care) is not helpful.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the age range for the strategy be adjusted so that it covers all children and young people to age 25.

We also recommend the following changes to two of the desired outcomes under the “have what they need” domain:

| Current wording | Suggested wording | Rationale |
|---|---|--|
| Parents and caregivers, and young people transitioning to adulthood, enjoy quality employment | Parents and caregivers, and young people transitioning to adulthood, enjoy stable employment that provides at least a living wage and opportunities for learning and/or advancement | The term “quality employment” needs further clarification. Stability is important because of the risk to financial and emotional wellbeing from frequent job losses or uncertain hours-only contracts; a living wage is important to provide “what they need”; and opportunities for learning or advancement provide for long-term |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | | material wellbeing and also for increased self-confidence and agency |
| Young people who are not in education, training or employment receive additional support to gain education and skills and to obtain and maintain employment | Young people who are not in education, training or employment, and those who are at risk of this, receive additional support to gain education and skills and to obtain and maintain employment | Waiting until a young person is NEET before giving extra support exposes them to the harmful effects of unemployment and also makes it harder for them to successfully move into stable work. It is more effective and also kinder to identify and support young people who are at risk of becoming NEET, as well as those who are already NEET. |

Comments on the proposed focus areas

We strongly support the value of identifying a relatively small number of focus areas for prioritised action under the strategy. In general we agree with the focus areas identified, but we suggest that prioritising within these would be useful, as identifying 16 priority areas and 55 actions is still too many for effective focus.

At present the focus areas seem to be arranged according to the five wellbeing domains, and then randomly within those domains. We suggest that the order be changed, or that a different numbering system be introduced, to identify the highest-priority areas within this list.

Below is our suggested priority order, for consideration.

We propose that these are reordered based on the evidence

1. Safe and nurtured (currently numbered 1)
2. Children experience best development in first 1000 days (currently 14)
3. Thriving socially and emotionally in the early years (currently 15)
4. Culture and identity recognised (currently 5)
5. Free from racism, discrimination and bullying (currently 7)
6. Housing (currently 4)
7. Mental wellbeing (currently 12)
8. Equity of outcome (currently 6)