



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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Rāapa, te 5 o Hakihea, 2018

Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy
The Right Honourable Jacinda Ardern and her Cabinet

Kei te tari o te Pirimia me te Komiti Matua, tēnā koe.

Re: Child Poverty Reduction Bill and the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission, this will be on behalf of the Hutt City Youth Council - a group of young people representing the views of youth in Lower Hutt.

The purpose of Hutt City Youth Council (HCYC) is to be the bridge between what is happening with our Local Government and the young people living in our city. We engage with youth in the Lower Hutt and get their opinions to be able to represent them to Council. Our other purpose is to dissect the difficult political language that Council uses, and translate it into something youth-friendly. This is to make sure that the people who want to be engaged are able to and that syntax isn't a barrier between the two.

This submission is based off the experiences from young people living in Lower Hutt and what they wish they had whilst growing up. This discussion will be addressing each of the wellbeing domains from the framework that was published, offering insight and ideas that we think will help achieve the proposed vision.

We have identified that each of the wellbeing domains from the framework that the DPMC published, are directly linked to a Government Organisation or a Ministry. Due to this, we have structured our discussion into the five categories and will put our thoughts, ideas, and recommendations under what we see as fit.

"...are loved and nurtured" *Oranga Tamariki/Ministry for Children*

We believe that point number one of the sixteen potential focus areas covers a lot of what we think is needed for young people to be loved, nurtured, and safe. We would like to bring a special emphasis on 'safe' and reiterate what safe to a young person means. To us, it means free from all types of violence, free from substance abuse, and

hopefully no gang presence. All three of the listed are known to be detrimental to any young people involved and we hope that by this Government doing their part to decrease the presence of all three in a child's life will help achieve the vision that New Zealand is the best place in the world for children.

Moving on from the point of having a negative presence in a child life, we offer a solution that we think is absolutely necessary in any young and easily influenced persons life. A safe and trusted adult that they can confide and depend on. This is to help when there is no stability, security, support and trust at home for the young person to be surrounded by. This support person could fill the role of Tuakana in a Tuakana/Teina relationship, and also work in turn to help the Governmental Organisations identify the young people who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing neglect.

To achieve all children and young people being loved, nurtured, and safe we strongly believe a more urgent approach needs to be taken when it comes to Governmental Organisations, such as Oranga Tamariki and services for mental health. Prevention is one of the things that should be at the forefront of your minds when creating this Bill. One of the main reasons our youth aren't safe, is because of the overwhelming demand of service providers that can't cater to the number of people in need. This issue could be fixed with a prevention instead of patience mindset. Let's help our young people to feel loved by fixing the issue before it becomes a problem for them.

“...have what they need” *Ministry of Social/Youth Development*

The Hutt City Youth Council are extremely worried when it comes to this domain, because we think that the Child Poverty Reduction Bill will come up with a blanket solution for what children and young people need in New Zealand. We want to stress how important equity is, in place of equality.

Having talked to young people in Lower Hutt, we wholeheartedly believe that it is unfair for young people in lower socioeconomic communities to miss out on school activities due to financial reasons. It is clear to us that not every young person in New Zealand gets to have the same opportunities as each other and we strongly have confidence in the fact that lack of money is the reason why and that it needs to change now. Due to the previous discussion around school activities, and the school curriculum reviews that are being done at the moment, we think that now would be a good time to bring up some daunting facts. Young people are not only missing out of school activities because

of financial reasons, there are also activities mainly surrounding EOTC being cut. Swimming, for example. Used to be free, but now there is a cost attached to it and it is no longer compulsory. We would like to bring up the fact that there has been a rise in numbers of children drowning in New Zealand. We believe that not only Education Outside The Classroom should be free, or at the very least subsidised, but there should also be compulsory lessons for life skills, such as swimming.

Despite multiple members of the Hutt City Youth Council speaking to the Honourable Paula Bennett in 2017 about 'period poverty' and the lack of free subsidised sanitary items, we are yet to see a drastic change when it comes to this. We believe that not only do sanitary items need to be free for our young people, but there also needs to be sustainable alternatives to fix this issue.

We acknowledge that work that NGOs such as Eat My Lunch and KidsCan do to help feed children and young people, but we don't think it's enough. One of the major concerns that came up when discussing this topic was that there was only one meal available: breakfast. Despite this proving to be the most important meal of the deal, we would like to once again reiterate the importance of equity. If a child isn't eating at all at home, and has to depend on schools to provide for them, they will need more than just one meal a day. The lack of nutritional food available for a lot of young people in New Zealand in their homes needs to be made up for in school, so there is no negative impact on their school work.

It is significantly clear to us that more counsellors or support systems are needed in schools. This is an issue that has been raised with us on multiple occasions and we believe and hope that this Bill might be able to solve it. The lack of accessible counselling is inexcusable, and is definitely tied to the amount of mental health issues and high youth suicide rates. More often than not, the number of school counsellors does not correspond to the amount of students in the school. We say this from experience, when the Senior Management Teams and the Board of Trustees in schools simply care more about the cost of more counsellors and support people over our struggling youth. We are also aware that teachers and counsellors don't receive adequate training when it comes to mental health. We recommend that there be an in depth training when they are studying for their qualifications.

The NGO sector and Kaupapa Māori are strong, but still needs to be strengthened, especially to help conquer issues such as mental health. We believe that there isn't a need for more NGOs to be created, we just need the ones that are already up and running to become more recognised and receive more funding. These NGOs are the people who deal with all the real life situations that our children and youth are being put

through. This has to be heavy and emotionally draining work, and we don't think that it is fair that the people who are on the frontlines, changing and helping peoples live have to depend on grants and having to fundraise to keep operating and helping our people. With that being said, we also think that giving NGOs more funding will help with the competitiveness and stop them being so territorial. There needs to be more coordination and cohesiveness. The NGO sector and Kaupapa Māori comprises a complex network of organisations and people who need to work together to help our children and young have what they need.

“...belong, contribute, and are valued” *Local Government and Iwi*

Wellbeing is a broad topic. The Hutt City Youth Council recognise the work put into the framework of this Bill and Strategy, and appreciate it so much. We think that it is something intertwined with so many other issues in our society, and it can't be solved by the one Bill. But we think this is a good start to changing so many young people's lives.

We believe that the United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child should be the foundation of this Bill, for obvious reasons. Not only do we think that, we also think that this Bill should acknowledge and honour Te Tiriti. We think it could do this by breaking it down into the 'three P's'.

Partnership. There is no doubt in any of the Hutt City Youth Council's mind that Māori are one of, if not the most, affected by poverty in New Zealand. We believe that our Government should work in partnership with Iwi, whanau and communities to help develop a better future for our rangatahi with their culture in mind.

Protection. Actively protecting the culture, values, knowledge, interests and other Tāonga - which includes our young people. We think this could be done by normalising and education of Te Ao Māori. Upon further discussion, we believe that created strategies within the Child Poverty Reduction Bill would be in best interest for Māori, as it lets tangata whenua have their say and perspectives heard.

Participation. We believe that out of the 'three P's' that this is the one closest to the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. The Government is reaching out and creating this Bill from a place of honesty and concern, which is the perfect scenario to honour Te Tiriti. Having equity for Māori is of utmost importance for the Hutt City Youth Council, and it could be shown by creating the best place in the world for the tamariki and rangatahi.

“...are healthy and happy” *Ministry of Health*

The Hutt City Youth Council are extremely passionate about mental health, and we think this is one of the biggest issues when it comes to making sure children and young people are healthy and happy. We, and youth we have engaged with, have both expressed concerns when it comes to GPs and school counsellors. We believe neither of these professions can keep up with the demanding support young people need when it comes to their mental health. We have heard and experienced horror story after horror story when it comes to our struggles with mental health, and we have all said the same thing. There is no urgency when it comes to supporting mental health. Young people have been turned away from doctors who don't believe that they are actually suffering. School counsellors aren't trained to handle high risk mental health situations. Both of these situations add to the stigma that people are trying so hard to dismantle. We have also noticed that there is no talk about antidepressants being linked to self harm in the Mental Health Inquiry that was published on the 4th of December. We strongly believe that mental health, despite all the talk the passed couple of years, isn't being taken seriously in this country, and that needs to change.

We want to thank the changes the Government has made when it comes to GP visits, however we would like to make a few recommendations on the matter. There needs to be more awareness around mental health and how to access help.

Like dental care, we think that GP visits should be free up until the age of 18, or 25 if you were in state care. We also think that if they fit into this age bracket, that visits to specialists should be subsidised, especially orthodontists, dietitians, and dermatologists.

We have seen multiple studies and statistics and have anecdotes that we could tell you to prove that Māori and Pasefika youth are at the highest risk when it comes to mental health. To help fix this problem, we agree with Dr. Lance O'Sullivan's statement that there needs to be appropriate clinical care. We wholeheartedly believe that our at-risk youth would be more willing to seek help, if the help looked like them.

We would also like to propose the idea of a travel allowance. There are schemes that have been put in place to subsidise the cost of seeing a doctor, but not getting to and from the doctor. We think that this could be a serious issue for young people, and that putting something similar to this in place could remedy that.

The Hutt City Youth Council are in favour of creating some sort of a sugar tax. However, we believe that if this is done, our country's main exports, so meat, dairy, and produce should be significantly cheaper. In addition to this, we believe that there needs to be proper education for young people and their caregivers around nutrition. We think that these two ideas put together would incentivise people to make better food choices.

“...are learning and developing” *Ministry of Education*

As said earlier in previous discussions, we are aware that the NCEA review has not long finished taking submissions, but we are also aware of the Early Learning Strategic Plan Hui's happening around the country. The Hutt City Youth Council submitted and met with the Minister of Education to talk about the NCEA Review, we will also be taking part in the consultations on the draft strategic planning for early learning. We believe that there needs to be some changes made in the current curriculum. A lot of our members, and the youth in the wider city haven't been taught life skills in schools. We have heard the argument that caregivers should be teaching a lot of basic knowledge life skills at home, but we refute this argument by saying that not all kids have a home safe enough to learn in. Regardless of what gets taught in homes, we still think that it is necessary to have young people and children be taught certain things in classrooms. Such as resilience, there may be only one or two lessons for the first three years of college and then that's it. We think that this is definitely something that needs to be taught in schools, but with care so that we don't reinforce the toxic ideas of “you'll get over it”, or “crying is weak”. We also think that mental health needs to be taught. The fact that it isn't an in depth lesson which leaves young people figuring out on their own is dangerous and can be completely avoided if we have a detailed curriculum that included mental health. We believe that resilience and mental health are the two biggest issues missing from our school curriculum, and that it needs to be addressed now. We have also had concerns raised around these topics being taught too late in school life, and would like to propose that they be brought up earlier. Nothing too drastic in ECE as to add to our point early about desensitising our youth, but enough for young people to know that it exists and how to reach out for help if need be.

The Hutt City Youth Council are in favour of making a second language compulsory in the school curriculum. To do our part to honour Te Tiriti and the value of 'protection', we think that both Te Reo Māori and Tikanga Māori should be taught. However, we also think that New Zealand Sign Language should be taught in schools, and that students

can have the option between Te Reo Māori or New Zealand Sign Language, as they are both the other two official languages on New Zealand.

In addition to adding things to the school curriculum, we believe that there should be compulsory civic education. The fact that it isn't already, is shocking, and has affected many of our members and youth in the Hutt Valley area as they have transitioned from secondary school, to tertiary (to study something relating to politics). We believe that if civic education was made compulsory and taught correctly, there would be more youth engagement in politics and that it would help raise the statistics when it comes to voting. We also believe that if civic education was made compulsory, that lowering the voting age might work, because more of our young people would be knowledgeable in what is actually happening.

We also have additional points that we would like to bring to your attention. We, as a collective, are in favour of creating specific strategies for Māori as they are often the highest risk when it comes to poverty and child poverty, and we think that by creating this Bill with tangata whenua in mind honours Te Tiriti. We would also like to ask that the Department of the Prime Minister and her Cabinet note the significance of working collaboratively with communities, NGOs, local Iwi and any other people that are on the frontlines and actually interacting and trying to help those who are struggling. Furthermore, we wanted to say that child poverty is a result of poverty-stricken caregivers and communities, and that needs to be addressed as well as child poverty. The Hutt City Youth Council wants to accentuate how important this bill is to children and young people in New Zealand and people looking to immigrate. In addition to that, we are well aware of the competitiveness between Parliamentary parties and how political parties disagree for the sake of disagreeing, but we wanted to take the time to say that regardless of who is in power, our tamariki and our rangatahi need to be prioritised no matter what. Child poverty, and hopefully poverty as a whole needs to be tackled, and we think that this Bill has a real chance to make a difference in so many people's lives.

We thank you for all the work you have both knowingly and unknowingly done to try and append this issue in New Zealand, and we cannot wait to see more work on this Bill being done.

Point of contact for our submission:

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to this inquiry. We look forward to hearing more as this progresses.

Noho ora mai.

Ngā mihi nui,

Bree Jensen

Deputy Chair

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