



CHILD AND YOUTH
WELLBEING STRATEGY
REVIEW

SUMMARY REPORT OF CHILD
AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

AUGUST 2022

ATA GLANCE

Between June and July 2022, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), in partnership with other agencies and the Office of the Children's Commissioner, undertook a series of workshops to find out how government can better support and empower children and young people to have their voice heard.

We asked them about:

- their understanding of their rights in relation to civic participation
- their experiences of being heard in the past, including what went well, what wasn't so good, and what could have been done better
- their experiences of not feeling heard, including what got in the way, what would make it easier and what support they needed
- their ideas about how we can more creatively engage with children and young people, particularly those on the margins, and how we can create a more enduring and sustainable ways of supporting child and youth voice to influence change.

This report is a summary of what we heard during our engagement. There were a number of key themes that emerged throughout the engagement. These themes have been summarised below:

Engagement must work well for children and young people

Young people talked about what works well for effective engagement with government, which included:

- getting the basics sorted to enable children and young people to participate fully
- getting the venue and facilitation right from the start, and help children and young people prepare
- ensuring the engagement is inclusive and culturally appropriate
- making sure children and young people feel safe to share their voices
- ensuring children and young people feel respected and listened to, and that they are recognised as experts of their lived experience
- ensuring that the engagements are followed by action
- ensuring a good feedback loop, so that children and young people know what happened as a result of them sharing their voices.

Children and young people want a range of ways to engage with government

There was no single method, setting or type that was preferable; young people want choice and flexibility. Most of their suggested methods are well established, however a few novel ideas were also put forward, including using gaming platforms and social media more; using art as a valid way of communicating perspectives; town hall-style meetings just for youth, with local government or local MPs.

Young people want representation as well as engagement

Young people said it can be challenging for some of them to talk directly to decision makers, so it's important that youth representation is a feature of all government organisations. Suggestions included: lowering the voting age, more youth-focussed roles in government agencies, dedicated positions on boards, and strengthening Youth Advisory Group networks.

Young people want support and opportunities to learn and develop

Many children and young people didn't understand their rights to be heard, or know how or why to engage with government. They want the opportunity to learn more about civics in a way that is meaningful to them, and to be acknowledged when they are civically involved. Young people also want to be given more developmental opportunities, and the chance to set the agenda themselves.

There needs to be greater visibility of engagement and representation opportunities

Young people talked about the poor visibility of engagement and representation, and that they often found out about them is through parents / teachers / contacts. They want these opportunities to be more visible, including promotion through social media channels and use of influencers that young people can relate to. Suggestions included a central platform, which captures the various engagement and representation opportunities happening across government.

BACKGROUND

New Zealand's first Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy) was launched in August 2019. It was informed by nationwide engagement, including engagement with more than 6,000 children and young people on what is important for their wellbeing, now and for the future, what government can do and how others can help.

The legislation that underpins the Strategy (the Children's Amendment Act 2018) also requires that the Strategy be reviewed within three years, with the first review due to be completed by August 2022. This must happen in consultation with relevant Ministers (Children's Ministers). Cabinet agreed that the review should go beyond minimum consultation requirements, and consider the views and experiences of a targeted group of key stakeholders, most notably children and young people themselves.

The engagement with children and young people involved a series of focus group sessions to hear and understand from targeted groups of children and young people what good child and youth participation looks like. It sought to hear their ideas on enduring mechanisms of engagement, and how they can be supported and encouraged to have their say, and be more involved in government and local decision making.

ABOUT THE FOCUS GROUPS

The series of targeted workshops included:

- Seven in-person focus groups with 58 children and young people (aged 8-12 years old and 12-16 years old). These were facilitated by The Office of the Children's Commissioner, in partnership with community organisations and schools:
 - These engagements reached a diverse group of children and young people across Aotearoa New Zealand.
 - Priority groups, who we know are less likely to have their perspectives heard within traditional engagement processes, were targeted. These included children and young people who are or identify as: Māori, Pacific, Disabled, from the Rainbow Community, living in the South Island and/or rurally.
- Seven in-person and online workshops with established agency Youth Advisory Groups (YAG) and network members of advocacy organisations, including:
 - Oranga Tamariki YAG: Five young people, aged 21-25 years old (mixed gender, care-experienced, Pakeha and Māori)
 - Ministry of Education YAG: Twelve young people, aged 14-18 years old (mixed ethnicity and gender, including trans and non-binary, neuro diverse and disability, from across New Zealand)
 - Ministry for Pacific People youth network: Fifteen young people, aged 16-25 years (mixed gender and Pacific ethnicities, including MVPFAFF (LGBTQIA+), from across New Zealand)

- Te Puni Kōkiri youth network: Eight young people, aged 17-24 years old (mixed gender rangatahi Māori from Gisborne, Rotorua, Otaki, Porirua and Wellington).
- VOYCE Whakaronga Mai: Eight care-experienced young people, aged 16-24 years old (mixed genders and ethnicity from Otautahi; Palmerston North and Tāmaki Makaurau)
- I.Lead (YES Disability youth-led group members): Twelve young people (mixed ethnicity and gender, including young people with learning differences, neuro diversity, physical impairments and long-term illness)
- InsideOUT rainbow youth network: Six young people, aged 15-24 years old (mixed genders, from New Plymouth, Kapiti, Wellington Nelson, Christchurch and Dunedin)

Focus of enquiry

- The children and young people were asked about:
 - their understanding of their rights in relation to civic participation
 - their experiences of being heard in the past, including what went well, what wasn't so good, and what could have been done better
 - their experiences of not being heard, including what got in the way, what would make it easier and what support they needed
 - their ideas about how we can more creatively engage with children and young people, particularly those on the margins, and how we can create a more enduring and sustainable way of supporting child youth voice to influence change.
 - how they might design better ways to be heard in the future.

RECORDING AND ANALYSING WHAT WE HEARD

Templates were used in each group session, to record the views shared by children and young people. Some of the sessions were also digitally recorded and photos were taken of white boards and post it notes.

The record of each individual group session was then shared with all the participants, giving them the opportunity to amend the record if anything was missed or misrepresented. They were also invited to add any additional thoughts or feedback they may have had subsequent to the meeting.

A combined analysis hui was convened by DPMC, where each workshop facilitator shared their reflections of their workshop, including high-level insights and key messages. The group then reviewed an overarching document of key themes which formed the basis of this report, to ensure the views shared at their workshop were adequately reflected.

KEY THEMES AND INSIGHTS

Engagement must work well for young people

Children and young people talked about what works well and what gets in the way of effective engagement with government, highlighting the importance of: getting the venue and facilitation right; having relatable facilitators; whanaungatanga; ensuring engagement is inclusive and culturally appropriate; feeling safe to share their voices; feeling respected and listened to; and good feedback loops, followed by action.

Children and young people need the basics sorted to participate fully

- When talking about the idea of being heard, children and young people talked about issues that they would like to be addressed so that that all children and young people can participate fully.
- Issues such as poverty, mental wellbeing, education, digital access, and racism and discrimination were all raised as barriers to engaging.
- Children and young people said these issues were entwined with being heard and need to be addressed to fully enable this.

“...children are living in poverty in NZ and the only way for us ALL to be heard is for us ALL to be at least living in liveable spaces so lift everyone from poverty.” (OCC-led workshop participant)

It's important to get the facilitation and venue right, and help children and young people prepare.

- The young people talked about the importance of having someone who is passionate and engaging, and who knows what they're talking about lead/facilitate the engagement. Ideally the facilitators will be people they're familiar with or can relate well to, for example youth workers or community leaders. They also expressed a desire for more 'for youth-by youth' engagements.
- It's important to go to where young people are, ensuring the venue is accessible and where young people feel comfortable (eg, educational institutions, sports clubs, youth hubs, church youth groups and other informal settings). Consider engagement after-business hours, to suit young people's schedules.
- Time for whanaungatanga is vital. We need to provide adequate time to let the children and young people get comfortable and loosen into the engagement. We also need manageable group sizes, and opportunity to break into smaller groups
- Children and young people want it to be engaging and fun.
- Information pre-engagement is important. Children and young people want to come well prepared, and understand the purpose and how much scope there is to influence change. Information needs to be simple and accessible, but not dumbed down – eg, easy-to-read

documents, accurate closed captions. They also wanted to learn through the engagement, to help them develop and expand their ideas

- While some engagement processes (eg, submissions) are formal, it would be good to have less formal and anonymous options for young people to contribute, with more accessible language/ submission templates and processes.

*“I love the way we have started this engagement. It’s led by Pacific youth, starting off with a prayer, going around the screen and introducing ourselves so we can make connections.”
(MPP workshop participant)*

“Plain language! paperwork is not easy to read – the jargon, the language and parliamentary language.” (I.Lead workshop participant)

“When trying to get the voice of rangatahi, the key is being clear about why you want their voice, and what is going to be done with it. There has to be a reason.” (VOYCE Whakaronga Mai workshop participant)

“In an environment I’m comfortable in, my voice comes out best.” (OCC-led workshop participant)

We need to ensure engagement is inclusive and culturally appropriate

- Children and young people told us we need to meet their different needs, including different access needs. It’s also important to ask what support is needed – don’t assume.
- Young people feel it’s important to ensure wide representation; reaching more people would help reduce pressure on those who are frequently asked to represent their peers and who may be feeling ‘engagement burn-out’. They said particularly those on the margins. Reach them directly through whatever support services they are involved in, and offer a decent incentive that shows you respect them
- Young people said they want to engage with people that look like them and understand where they are coming from culturally and that it’s important to respect cultural traditions (eg, incorporating prayer or karakia) and understand cultural differences.
- Many mokopuna spoke about the importance of language, and being able to express themselves in their own language and have people understand them.

“Having cultural humility is better than cultural awareness – it means the person recognises the differences but doesn’t think they’re an expert because they happen to know something about it.”(MoE workshop participant)

“Being inclusive and including younger audiences like primary school kids because they see the world very differently from our youth.” (MPP workshop participant)

“Eventually your opinion and voice becomes an expectation rather than privilege. Consistently being asked to speak even when not having the capacity to do so leads to burnout it also doesn’t provide others chance to speak and places an expectation on you to speak on behalf of all young people everywhere.” (OCC-led workshop participant)

Young people need to feel safe to share their voices

- Children and young people described safe spaces as being welcoming, inclusive and non-judgmental. They also want some control over the way the consultation is conducted and to be given the right not to answer.
- Many children and young people talked about not wanting to feel judged by people. They shared their experience of racism and discrimination, and about feeling uncomfortable to share their voice and of feeling shamed, ignored or misunderstood. Many young people said they want to engage with people that are like them, who understand where they are coming from.
- They talked about the importance of whanaungatanga, and the time needed to warm up and build trust and confidence. Breaking into smaller groups can help, so they are more comfortable to speak up.

Safety is important when engaging with young people. Young people need to feel like they can be open with their issues. (Rainbow workshop participant)

“Being the only Pacific youth person in a non-Pacific place.... I can find a lot of resistance to my views. Mentally it’s quite traumatic and I’m feeling isolated.” (MPP workshop participant)

“We feel safe it is us as a group as we know each other and find our brave from each other, we are safe together, can’t be punished if we say something people don’t like or we don’t agree with adults.” (I.Lead workshop participant)

Children and young people want to feel respected and listened to, and recognised as experts of their lived experience

- Children and young people talked about wanting to be brought in early, and that there needs to be enough time for real consultation to take place. Shouldn’t be a tick box exercise or tokenistic.
- Many young people said they felt age influenced how much your voice is privileged, and that their advice and views is often treated different than others. They said that we need to recognise that the lived experience is as important as the adult or expert voice.
- They talked about the importance of valuing their time and expertise. This could include through providing kai, koha, and compensation of expenses, development opportunities, and by giving them kudos for their ideas. They talked about adults often taking the credit, without any recognition for the young people involved.
- Some young people talked about the importance of the individual experiences and that they shouldn’t be diminished when extrapolating the wider themes – the individual voice and stories can be used to illustrate the themes and bring them to life. They also wanted people to be willing to go deeper, and to ask the hard questions and have the awkward conversations ... and be prepared to hear answer.

“Young people can be left with a feeling of tokenism - wheeled out to tell your story, but nothing meaningful came out of it.” (VOYCE Whakaronga Mai workshop participant)

“Take time to really listen, sometimes it is really hard to say things, understand us and take time, give us time to get our thoughts together.” (I.Lead workshop participant)

“Acknowledging and giving kudos credit (where due)... there's always an adult's name on a decision that might have come from like young people.” (OT workshop participant)

A good feedback loop, followed by action, is essential

- Children and young people talked about the importance of engaging early and bringing them along the journey. They want to be kept updated on the process with regular check-ins and looping them in on next steps.
- They also stressed that engagement needs to be followed by action. Action as a result of feedback is the proof of being listened to. Let young people know how their voice has been used to effect develop or change policy.

“Feedback is key. When you receive feedback let us know how you have used this if you have changed policy or changed your engagement. Personally, if I have made a recommendation and it has been used to change policy, I would want to know. It makes me feel good and I know that I have contributed to something positive. Don't let us sit here and guess if my voice has been useful but show us that you care.” (MPP workshop participant)

“Good when what you say has an impact - like once gave feedback “don't just slap a Māori name on something” and the people asking about it took that on board - that was good to see.” (VOYCE Whakaronga Mai workshop participant)

It's pretty easy to just go platitudes of, like, we've heard you. And that's so important and yadda yadda yadda, but if nothing changes, it can be a pretty demoralizing experience and make you feel like if you don't particularly wanna use your voice because you're just feeling all this time and talking into a system isn't listening (OT workshop participant)

Children and young people want a range of ways to engage with Government

There was no single method, setting or type that was preferable; they want choice and flexibility. They also talked about wanting direct access to decision makers. Most of their suggested methods, outlined below, are well established, however a few novel ideas were also put forward. It's vital that, regardless of the approach, consideration is given to ensuring the elements outlined above (eg, whakawhanaungatanga, inclusiveness, and creating safe spaces for people to share their voice). Methods discussed included:

- Both on-line and face-to-face options were mentioned, which should include break-out group opportunities if the group is large
- Group sessions help stimulate ideas and enable collaboration. Also gives a sense of working collectively on something and makes me feel hopeful that change can happen
- Wananga with 'experts', but facilitated and led by young people. Need to go back to the essence of what a wānanga is - in person and in a marae, collaborative and long-term
- Hui / fono at secondary schools or presenting at assemblies
- Good to have practical, hands on engagement options – not everyone likes sitting around a table talking

- One-on-one and small interviews are particularly good for personal or sensitive topics
- Simple and anonymous feedback options are good for those who are shy about sharing ideas
- Surveys – key is having good questions
- More innovative suggestions included:
 - using gaming platforms to engage, as a lot of young people are gamers
 - consider a gamified version of engagement eg, kahootz style where you can vote on options and ideas and see instant results
 - using art is a valid way of communicating (eg, giving teenagers a camera and let them express and articulate their thoughts and ideas; short films)
 - easy, quick and effortless options (eg, quick and easy instagram questions; google form surveys, informal, quick and regular pulse checks)
 - Young people also suggested town hall meetings just for youth, with local government or local MPs. A similar smaller-scale suggestion was national or local politicians hosting in-person or online conversations with a small group (5-10) of children or young people

*“Good thing with online is that you can be anywhere and still connect, even if you’re in the ‘wop-wops’, if you have a signal you can participate - but still don’t feel you can get as deep.”
(VOYCE Whakaronga Mai workshop participant)*

*“Everyone communicates in a different way, and there shouldn’t be barriers around this.”
(OCC-led workshop participant)*

“It’s easier to share your opinions and have your voice heard in smaller groups – even if you’re on zoom” (VOYCE Whakaronga Mai workshop participant)

Young people want representation as well as engagement

Young people said it can be challenging for some of them to talk directly to decision makers, so it’s important that youth representation is a feature of all government organisations. Young people suggested a number of ways to do this, including:

- youth-focussed roles in government agencies, including internship / cadetship type roles for young people to get them thinking about how the government works and why it matters. Need to ensure diverse representation
- expanding and improving existing mechanisms, including linking up youth advisory groups to strengthen networks
- dedicated positions on boards (eg, care-experienced). Selection of group representative could come from in-person wānanga where participants then choose who represents them

- more adults / advocacy groups championing youth voice
- lower the voting age to 16. 16-17-year-olds are more aware of how politics affects them, but can't vote yet

Youth representation needs to be in part of government organisations, it is hard for youth to talk to govt (Rainbow workshop participant).

If you weave it into practice starting at not such a big scale – everyday practice – then will feel have a voice still. So like government was better at doing it in general they are not gonna have to like run into a problem and then say oh... maybe we should talk to young people. Make it part of everything now and in practice then it will feel like we have our voices heard. (OT workshop participant)

Lower voting age to 16. If you did that, young people would be taken seriously (OT workshop participant)

Young people want support and opportunities to learn and develop

Many children and young people didn't understand their rights to be heard, or know how to engage with government or why they should get involved. They want the opportunity to learn more about civics in a way that is meaningful to them. Young people also want to be given more developmental opportunities, and the chance to set the agenda themselves.

Suggestions included:

- Help children and young people understand their rights under United Nations and Te Tiriti, and ways they can have their voice heard. This could be done by implementing civics and rights education in schools, starting at primary and going through to secondary school, including NCEA credits.
- Young people also want greater recognition for those who are civically and politically involved eg, NCEA credits to youth for volunteering, advocating for issues or being involved in engagements on government initiatives .
- Provide development opportunities for those already involved eg:
 - mentorship and support, including Tuakana-Teina model. This could involve those who have been there before and know how to break through barriers.
 - YAG members could be utilised more effectively as networkers, and given development opportunities, such as facilitator roles in youth-led engagement.
 - give young people opportunities to set the agenda and talk about problems they care about - like climate change, vaping and smoking problems, stress, mental health, discrimination, finances and solutions.

“Yes I know I have a voice but I don't know how to use it.” (OCC-led workshop participant)

“No one taught me that I have a right to speak up.” (OCC-led workshop participant)

“Give youth the role to lead the discussion, it's a great opportunity for them.” (MPP workshop participant)

There needs to be greater visibility of engagement and representation opportunities

Young people talked about the poor visibility of engagement and representation, and that they often found out about them is through parents / teachers / contacts. They felt that adults shouldn't be the gatekeepers and that recruitment methods need to be less opaque and opportunities need to be more visible, including promotion through social media channels. Their suggestions included:

- Advertising should be used more widely to reach more young people, especially those on the margins. Need to take a marketing / advertising approach and run as a campaign, targeting different demographics. Use social media to promote – eg, tik tok, Snapchat and Instagram (or whatever platform is current at the time) as well as promoting at schools and unis and on bulletin boards

Involve influencers that young people can relate to eg, Jimmy Jackson; Julien Dennison, Hahana Groups, musicians and artists . 'Attitude' presenters also great example of youth / youth adjacent influencers. Use the already existing leaders in the communities to promote and influence in their spaces

- Would be good to have a central platform, which captures the various YAG and engagement opportunities happening across government. The promotions suggested above could link back to this platform.

(Recruiting through networks) is good for hearing from people who are more plugged-in and very aware of political issues affecting them, but wider advertisement should be used to hear from those more on the margins. (Rainbow workshop participant)

“Check and see who else has engaged with us – (it's frustrating) going back and forwards saying the same thing to different people.” (I.Lead workshop participant)