

Children's Commissioner 2017 Stakeholder Survey results

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the Office of the Children's Commissioner has undertaken a stakeholder survey to find out how well we are achieving our goal of improving child wellbeing in New Zealand. This year, 76 stakeholders responded to our stakeholder survey from 7th to 22nd June 2017.

The stakeholders include any person or agency to whom, or for which, we've provided advice, presented, or collaborated in advocating for children's wellbeing, according to the Children's Commissioner's Act (2003).

Our Values:

Aroha: Compassion, care and empathy for other also for the self

Tika: Doing things right, for the right reasons, for the long term benefit of the collective

Pono: Being truthful and acting with integrity

Matauranga: Knowledge comprehension or understanding

PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF OUR ADVOCACY

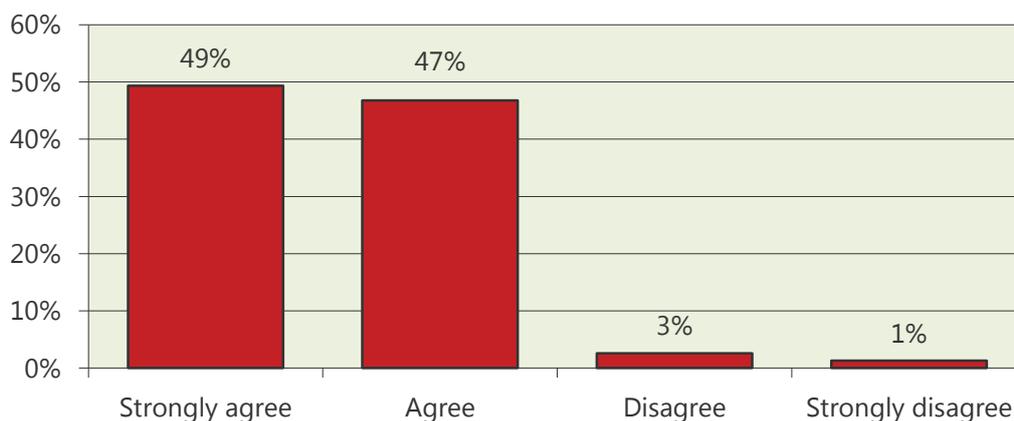
In our Annual Report we state the extent to which our stakeholders agreed with the following statement about the Office of the Children's Commissioner: ***"The Office's advocacy activities contribute to improving the wellbeing of children."***

In our survey, the response options were: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree or Strongly disagree. Therefore we could tell positive responses clearly from negative ones. 76 people answered the question, only 3 'Disagreed' (4%), and of the remainder, about half 'Agreed' (47%) and the other half 'Strongly agreed' (49%) with the statement. Therefore we stated that 96% of stakeholders agreed.

96%

of our stakeholders agree that the Office's advocacy activities contributed to improving the wellbeing of children

To what extent do you agree with this statement?
The Office's advocacy activities contribute to improving the wellbeing of children.



OUR ADVOCACY CONTRIBUTES TO IMPROVING THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN

We asked our stakeholders: ***"thinking about how the Office of the Children's Commissioner contributes to improving the wellbeing of children, can you describe any impacts you would attribute (wholly or partly) to our work?"***

59 people could identify impacts, 2 said no, and 15 didn't answer. We analysed the answers by grouping them in to themes.

The commonest themes that emerged related to: raising awareness of child poverty (17); raising awareness of child protection issues (14) as well as making the new children's agency, Oranga Tamariki, more child-centred (11); the value of child voice (13); raising the age for youth justice (11); raising awareness of child rights (8); increasing investments in children (6); the office's credibility (6) and independence (5) and voice in the media (5). Other themes that emerged were to do with improved government policy including health; child voice; attitudes towards children; and using a strengths-based or rights-based approach.

There is a general feeling that our independence, alongside our willingness to raise awareness of issues in child-centred ways, actually shifted public and government attitudes about children, reduced harm to children, and improved care for children and young people.

IN THEIR WORDS - IMPACTS OF OUR ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

- *"Courage to speak the truth increases public confidence in the office."*

Policy

- *"Awareness of breach of UNCROC re: 17 year-olds in the adult justice system"*
- *"Support legislative changes for including 17 year olds in youth jurisdiction"*
- *"raising of the age to receive state care supports and to access youth justice."*
- *"legislative change - by lodging submissions"*
- *"Advocacy for raising the youth justice age, submissions on the oranga tamariki legislation (particularly about participation/voice) leading to revisions in the bill, state of care report raising awareness about kids in care generally."*

Children in care

- *"The State of Care report raised awareness about kids in care generally"*
- *"Being a 'watchdog' to the state child protection agency."*
- *"Great that the Commission monitors the MVCOT ensuring standards of care are maintained"*

Child poverty

- *"The work of OCC made the implementation of increased incomes for the working poor a more viable political reality for the government. This was translated into improved incomes via this year's Budget."*
- *"Going back to previous commissioners, I am sure that the poverty focus was in part responsible for the government's \$25 per week extra for beneficiaries."*
- *"...While many do important work in this area the OCC has been able to give a sustained focus on this [child poverty] issue to a wide variety of stakeholders and most importantly the government..."*

Promoting child-centredness

- *"It [OCC] vindicates and supports our child centred approach when other government officials want us to be asset or process focused instead."*
- *"advocacy for greater role for voice of young people in policy making has ensured our agency is setting up processes to gather this voice."*
- *"An increased value of the concerns of children in the healthcare sector from listening to children"*
- *"Support for and validation of the issues affecting children."*
- *"Maintaining a focus on the importance and rights of children in a society that has a focus on adults at the centre"*
- *"submissions to the United Nations UNCROC. Child rights submissions, child advocacy in every aspect of NZ society"*
- *"The wider public interest in child poverty and the place of children in decision making"*

Public awareness

- *"Recent workshop on messaging - has already helped shape how we communicate."*
- *"Child poverty and the challenges of state care are in our news media and seen widely as issues - to a large extent this is due to the Children's Commissioner and the office I think."*
- *"Research done by OCC or others regarding children and their health is given publicity by OCC and the community is made more aware of the outcomes [for children]"*
- *"Greater public awareness of child poverty and the needs of children in care. Unconscious bias and its impact of Māori C&YP."*
- *"Raised awareness, use of the much better Maori name for the new Ministry" (two people said they were glad we used the terminology 'Oranga Tamariki' instead of 'vulnerable children'.*

WHAT COULD THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER DO TO IMPROVE ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN?

“OCC does a great job. Judge Becroft maintains a commendable distance from government which is critical in this watchdog role.”

“Secure a greater putea [funding/resource] to ensure more staff and resources could be dedicated to your important work.”

57 people responded to this question, and many had constructive ideas on what the Office can do to improve its effectiveness in advocating for children.

Most of these ideas (26) had to do with how we communicate. A good number said to continue doing the same (15) given the limited resources and successful media presence. 13 people said we need to partner with other agencies, such as NGOs and government to get collective impact. 8 recommended increasing advocacy for children's voices. 5 said we should increase our influence (especially to government) on child issues. 4 people desired closer connections to Pacific and Maori groups, and to produce materials, such as the UN Convention, in te reo Māori. 4 people suggested child rights training and education, two said we should increase empathy and understanding for children in care or youth justice. A greater commitment to disabled children was requested by one respondent, given the high numbers of children with disabilities needing care and protection, and youth with neurodisabilities in youth justice system.

Some of the ways we could improve are limited by funding

Suggestions like commissioning research or using the IDI (New Zealand's integrated data infrastructure) to demonstrate outcomes for children are beyond our resources. However, we do advise other researchers on knowledge needs regarding childhood outcomes.

Some said we should have more of a regional presence. However, in recent years, we closed our Auckland Office and moved our Wellington office (largely for financial reasons). We take on board the need to travel the country, and to have a closer connection with Auckland.

One person suggested publishing a pre-election brief telling the public 'who to vote for' in terms of child centred policies. However, our status as an independent Crown entity means our staff members operate under the Code of Conduct of Public Servants, so we cannot get involved in lobbying for elections.

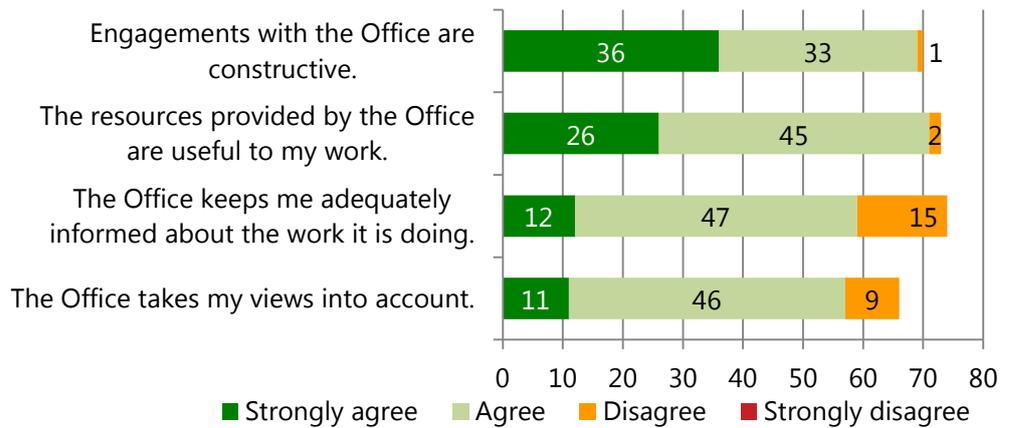
One person said 'get more power' others said 'get more resources from government!' The Children's Commissioner Act (2003) gives the Commissioner significant powers, but as with all agencies, limited budgets mean we have to prioritise work. A one-off budget increase in 2017 has contributed to employing more monitoring staff and a dedicated staff for monitoring implementation of the Children's Convention.

MOST PEOPLE HAVE POSITIVE VIEWS ABOUT THE WORK AND STAFF OF THE OFFICE:

People were asked “To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Office of the Children's Commissioner?”

- Engagements with the Office are constructive.
- The resources and/or information provided by the Office are useful to my work.
- The Office keeps me adequately informed about the work it is doing.
- The Office takes my views into account.

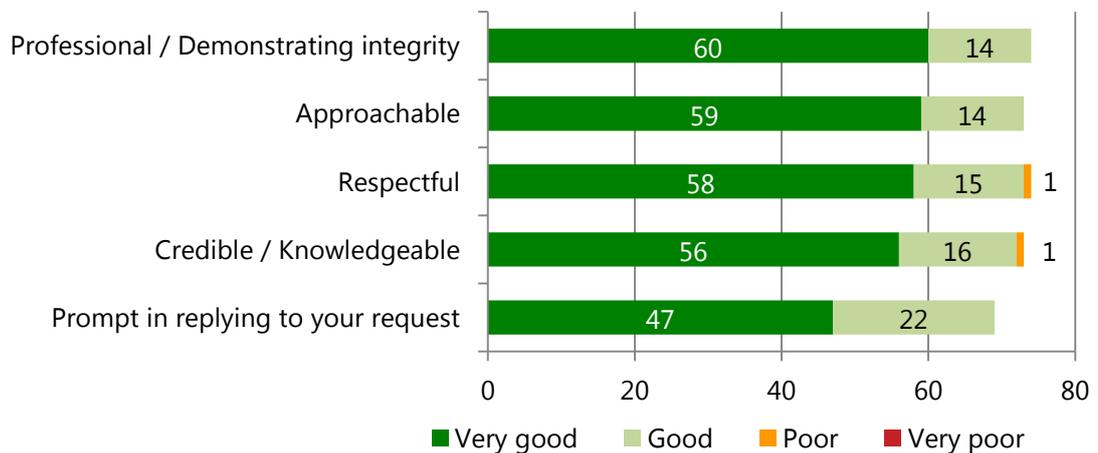
90% of responses about OCC work were positive



People were asked “When you have dealt with people at the Office of the Children's Commissioner, please rate the extent to which you have found them to be:”

- Professional / Demonstrating integrity
- Approachable
- Respectful
- Credible / Knowledgeable
- Prompt in replying to your request

99% of responses about OCC staff were positive



WE ASKED FOR FURTHER COMMENTS, AND RECEIVED PRAISE

We asked in this anonymous survey if people had other comments to make.

Encouragingly, people responded with a lot of positive comments, many about keeping up the good work. We made a word cloud, reflecting the frequency of words found in comments. The most common theme was to “**keep up the great work**”:



Overall, most suggestions for improvement related to the way we do our work

“The Child Poverty Monitor is good but needs simplifying.” We try to use infographics to show the high-level results each year, in a simplified way. However, we will take this feedback on board through our Child Poverty Monitor review this year.

“I would really like to see the OCC get into schools - this is where so much change can occur.” In the 2017-18 financial year we have an education advocacy work plan focused on schools, particularly how well they support children with neurodisabilities or neurodiversity.

CHILDREN’S VOICES WILL ILLUMINATE OUR WAY

This stakeholder survey will be continued each year to ensure we maintain a high standard of public service and have effective advocacy for the wellbeing of children.

We will also continue to consult children on what is important to them, and use the impact of their voices to influence government policy, business, philanthropists, communities, schools, health care providers and social workers whose work and family lives are so important to ensure all children in New Zealand may thrive.