

At a glance

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LIFE?

Children and young people's views on wellbeing



March 2019



MANAAKITIA Ā TĀTOU TAMARIKI
Children's
Commissioner



ORANGA
TAMARIKI
Ministry for Children

We sought children and young people's views to inform the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

In October and November 2018, the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) asked for the views of children and young people on what wellbeing means to them.

Their views were sought in order to inform the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy), which is designed to drive government action on child wellbeing. The Children's Act 2014, which underpins the development of the Strategy, includes an obligation to consult with children and young people. This is also in line with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children and young people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

In February 2019 the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Oranga Tamariki released *What makes a good life? Children and young people's views on wellbeing*. This booklet provides an overview of the findings of that work.

Children and young people have valuable ideas. Their views can inform not only the Strategy but also inform practitioners and communities who want to make a difference for children and young people.

The full report can be accessed here:

<http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>

We heard from more than 6,000 children and young people

An online survey was completed by 5,631 children and young people and 423 children and young people were spoken with face to face, through a series of focus groups, one on one and paired interviews. The survey, interviews and focus groups all asked for children and young people's views on having a good life. The face to face conversations explored in more depth what it means to have a good life, what gets in the way and what helps. All were asked what they thought would make things better for children and young people now, and for their future.

The survey reached a diverse group of children and young people across New Zealand, with a mix of urban/rural, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and age characteristics. We targeted our face to face conversations to ensure we heard from those we knew would be more likely to be experiencing challenges in their lives. These included children and young people living in poverty, living in state care, with a disability, from rural and isolated areas, aged under three years, with refugee backgrounds, who identify as LGBTIQ+, who are recent migrants, or who have received a mental health diagnosis. The majority of children and young people we spoke to in focus groups and interviews were Māori.

This report provides a broad overview of what children and young people told us. It encompasses the views of all children and young people we heard from.

In our surveys the majority of children and young people told us they are doing well, but a significant number face challenges

The survey asked children and young people for their views on their own wellbeing, what a good life is and what they thought were the most important areas to focus on to make things better for all children and young people.

The survey asked children and young people to respond to a series of 17 statements relating to their wellbeing such as "I have a warm, dry place to live", "I feel safe in my neighbourhood" and "I can cope when life gets hard". The majority of responses to all 17 statements were positive, indicating that most children and young people are doing okay.

However, some children and young people indicated they were facing challenges. Around 10% responded negatively to four or more of the 17 statements and around 2% responded negatively to ten or more statements. This group is likely to be growing up in very challenging circumstances.

Children and young people told us what it means to them to have a good life. When asked an open-ended question about what a good life means, the most common responses related to having fun and feeling contented, having supportive family and friends and having basic needs met. Other responses related to being healthy (including mentally healthy), feeling safe, having a good education and feeling valued and respected.

"Being with your family, even if they're annoying the heck out of you. They are immediate, speed dial no.1." Rangatahi from Matamata

"Being surrounded by loved ones and friends that support me and provide me with opportunities." 17 year old New Zealand European, Māori

"Money may not be the key to happiness but it is the key to living and I know many people who struggle." 17 year old girl

Figure 1 below shows the themes from responses to this question, as well as how the themes related to each other.

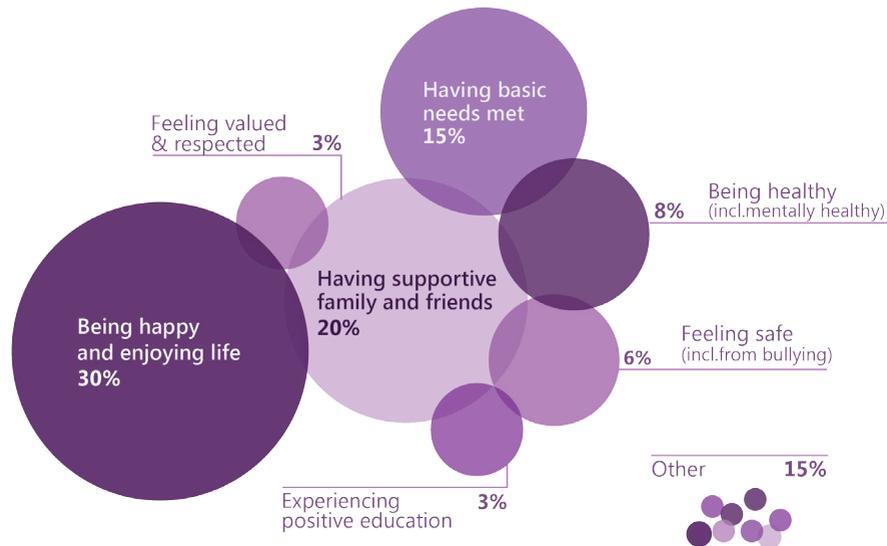


Figure 1: Clusters of key themes from: "what makes a good life?"

When asked what they saw as the top three most important things for children and young people to have a good life, the items most frequently selected (from a defined list) were:

- Parents or caregivers have enough money for basic stuff like food, clothes and a good house to live in.
- Children and young people have good relationships with family and friends.
- Children and young people are kept safe from bullying, violence or accidents.
- Children and young people are valued and respected for who they are.

The face to face interviews and focus groups were an opportunity to explore these issues in depth, with a group of children and young people we knew were more likely to be facing challenges.

In our focus groups and interviews children and young people talked about the challenges they face

From the children and young people we met in person we heard five key messages:

1) Accept us for who we are and who we want to be

Children and young people told us that they want to be accepted, valued, believed in and they want people to support their hopes for the future.

"To be accepted. To be understood and taken seriously. It's important because it gives you confidence in your uniqueness."
Young person from Whangārei

2) Life is really hard for some of us

Many children and young people face significant challenges, such as racism, bullying, discrimination, judgement, violence, drugs and a feeling of continually being let down.

"At our school people find mocking Māori culture to be a joke. 'Māoris go to prison', or 'Māoris do drugs.'" Rangatahi from Auckland

"Something I always have to deal with at school is the stigma. When people find out you're a foster kid they're like 'oh you're an orphan, whose house did you burn down.'" 16 year old girl living in state care

3) To help us, help our whānau and our support crew

Whānau are a critical factor in children and young people's wellbeing. In general, for children and young people to be well, their whānau, friends and communities must also be well. Wellbeing is about relationships, not just about having things.

"If the parents are good then the kids are good."
Rangatahi from Rotorua

4) We all deserve more than just the basics

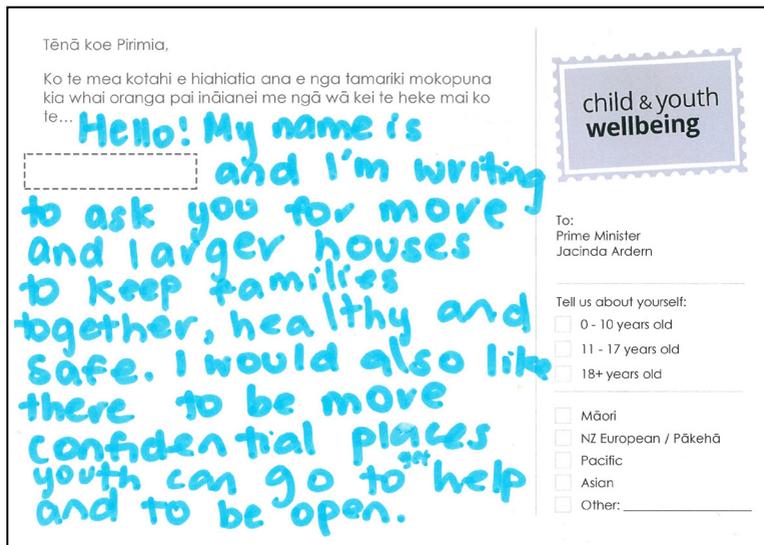
Children and young people want ‘the basics’, such as a home, an education and a safe community. But they want more than just a minimum standard of living, and they want the systems that support them to be inclusive, accessible, and affordable.

“Enough for the basics, plus a little bit more”
Young person from Dunedin

5) How you support us matters just as much as what you do

Efforts to support children and young people will not be effective if the sole focus is on what needs to be delivered. How supports are delivered matters just as much. Services must accept children and young people for who they are and respect their critical relationships with their whānau and communities.

“Having a good life isn’t necessarily about the materialistic things. I think having strong friendships/relationships with people who genuinely care about you contributes better to a good life.”
Rangatahi from Taumarunui



Messages to the Prime Minister

We asked all participating children and young people what was the one thing they wanted to tell the Prime Minister that children and young people need to live good lives. This was a final open-ended question on the survey. Those we met with face to face completed this question on a postcard at the end of the session. We received a total of 3,330 responses. Most of the issues that children and young people raised reflect the barriers they identified for a good life.

Figure 2 below shows the key themes from the messages to the Prime Minister, as well as how the themes relate to each other.

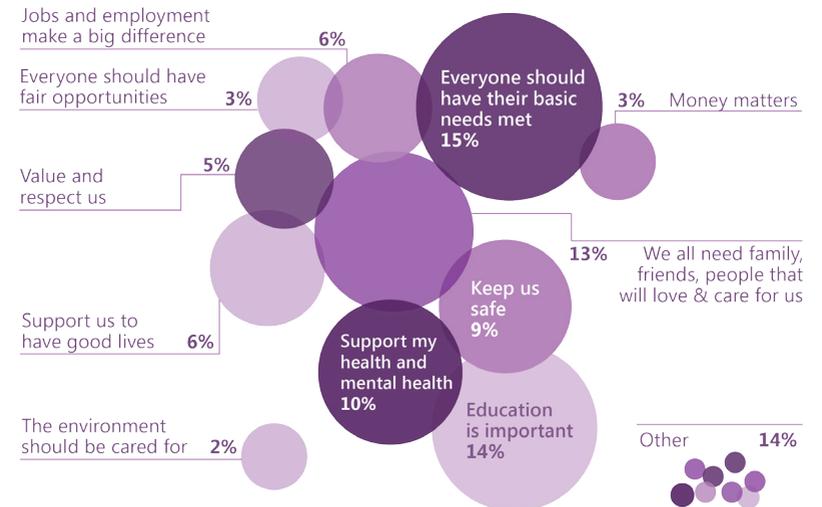


Figure 2: Clusters of key themes from messages to the Prime Minister

“I think the prime minister should make public transport for kids free so then kids can look forward to going to school instead of staying home cause they don’t have any money to get to school. Also I think that the government should give out free food to all school students so they don’t have to worry about food and get hungry at school.” 14 year old Tongan boy

Overall, we learned that change is needed in order to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people

The feedback we were given through the survey, the focus groups and the interviews highlight a number of things that need to be considered if we want to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people in New Zealand.

Change is needed

The majority of children and young people are doing well, but some are facing significant challenges. Almost everyone who shared their views, including those who said that they were doing well, could point to something that needed to change if all children and young people are to have a good life.

Family and whānau are crucial

Children and young people told us that families must be well in order for children to be well, and families must be involved in making things better.

Providing the basics is important, but not enough on its own

Intrinsic things such as feeling accepted, valued and respected are just as important as children and young people's material needs. Children and young people want more than just a minimum standard of living.

Children and young people have valuable insights

Government initiatives should respond to children and young people's needs, wants and aspirations. Listening to children and young people's views regularly and meaningfully is the best way to achieve this.

Efforts to support children and young people need to focus on more than just what services are needed. Support systems need to accept children and young people for who they are, respect their critical relationships and support the people they care about to also be well. Children and young people have told us that they want the basics, plus a little bit more. We think they deserve a lot more.

Dear Prime Minister,

I think the one thing that children and young people need to have good lives, now and in the future is...

HELLO (p.s. please make petrol cheaper here in auckland, my mum requested that. It is SOOO EXPENSIVE) THANKS.

WHY DO I HAVE TO ACT LIKE SOMEONE ELSE IN FRONT OF OTHERS? PLS TEACH PROFESSIONALS, TEACHERS THAT WE SHOULD BE OURSELVES ANYTIME WE WANT. THANKS.

To: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

Tell us about yourself:

0 - 10 years old

11 - 17 years old

18+ years old

Māori

NZ European / Pākehā

Pacific

Asian

Other: _____

See the full report here:

<http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>

