

MAI  
WORLD

Child  
AND  
Youth  
VOICES

# What's important to me: Children and young people's views in the lead up to the 2017 General Election

Engaging children and young people  
in matters that affect them

December 2017

**Mai World Child and Youth Voices Report**

#maeworld #koreromai #beheard



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

**Children's  
Commissioner**



## About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The 1.1 million children and young people under 18 make up 24% of New Zealand.

The Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft and his office advocate for their interests, ensure their rights are upheld, and help them have a say on matters that affect them.

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## What's important to me: Children and young people's views in the lead up to the 2017 General Election

**"It affects the future generations so the ones that are actually going to live through it should have a say in who controls their future"** Age 15



For children and young people, Aotearoa is home, it is their world. They have told us that as the future generation, they are the ones who will live and work here in the decades to come. They will be most impacted by the decisions being made now. Despite this, we know very little about children and young people's views on New Zealand's topical issues. So we asked them. We wanted to hear from children and young people about what they consider are the most important issues facing us as a country, what they think can be done about those issues and how they would like to share these views and have them heard.

As the Office of the Children's Commissioner we have a responsibility to promote the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them. This is a right that they have under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (The Children's Convention).

### WHO DID WE HEAR FROM?

We engaged with children and young people across Aotearoa using two online surveys – primary and intermediate, and secondary. We gathered their opinions and expertise about living in New Zealand and topical issues in the lead up to the General Election 2017.

A total of 806 students took part – 129 primary and intermediate students aged 8-13 years old, and 677 secondary school students aged 13-19 years old.

The Children's Commissioner seeks the voices of children and young people through **Mai World: Child and Youth Voices**

In the lead up to the 2017 General Election, we have sought the views of children and young people on what's important to them.

"Mai World" takes a child-centred approach to hearing children and young people in order to understand their world.



## What children and young people told us

The 806 children and young people who chose to take part in the survey were asked a number of questions on what's important to them about living in New Zealand. Questions asked included *the best thing about living here; the three key (main) things that need to change; if they were Prime Minister, what would be the one thing they would change; who and how they would like to talk about these things; and finally, their views on children and young people and their right to vote.*

Below is a summary of what the children and young people shared with us, grouped into four key findings:

### **1) New Zealand is a great place to live**

- The children and young people we spoke to think there are a lot of great things about living in New Zealand including the natural environment, the people and the way we care for each other, our small population and relative isolation, and the fact we are a peaceful and safe place to live.

### **2) Some things in New Zealand need to change**

- The main things needing attention and change for children and young people are housing; the environment including climate change; inequality; and education.

### **3) Talk to us in person to hear our views**

- Children and young people care a lot about and feel connected to these and other issues. They want to talk about them with their whānau and friends. They want to talk and learn more about these issues in everyday life, ideally face to face, in a calm and safe environment.
- Children and young people prefer sharing their opinions and ideas via informal face to face conversations, or sessions led by children and young people, or through surveys, or with experts such as politicians visiting their school or community.

### **4) We want to have a say**

- There is strong support for lowering the voting age to at least 16 years of age.
- Children and young people also support having civics education at all levels of education, increasing engagement opportunities to learn about issues that both interest and affect them. Many children and young people wanted the voting age lowered, but only if it was coupled with education at school about voting.



## FINDING 1: NEW ZEALAND IS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

### *Survey question:*

- *What do you think are the best things about living in New Zealand?*

The children and young people that responded to our survey questions loved the fact that New Zealand is a small, not overly crowded country away from a lot of global troubles such as war and terrorism. It feels relatively safe, where you are free to explore the many opportunities available. Some children and young people highlighted the sense of community that they feel, and how they like that people help each other.

**“People helping other people that are poor and also the ones in the hospital”** Age 10

They like that there are many different cultures living here which make our communities ‘awesome’; and as a country, we acknowledge the special place of Māori people and Māori culture – the language, history and tikanga.

**“Our culture is amazing and unique and we keep the Māori language alive which is not what most countries do with their Indigenous languages.”** Age 15

We grouped what children and young people told us they see as the best things about living in New Zealand into the following themes:

### **BEING A FAIR AND JUST COUNTRY AWAY FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT LIVING HERE.**

Amongst those surveyed, there is a large focus on and pride in our natural environment. Not only is it beautiful but it provides a huge amount of opportunity to explore and have fun. They liked that people really wanted to keep it that way and were not afraid to care and speak up for the environment. Native birds got special mention from all ages, as did the fact that we don’t have a lot of really dangerous animals that can kill you!

They believe that compared to other countries, New Zealand is relatively clean and not polluted, and that is something to be proud of, as is being nuclear free. They enjoy the fact we have a public healthcare system that is available to everyone and that Aotearoa doesn’t feel too crowded or overpopulated.

**“There’s not that much people and it’s not crowded”** Age 9



**BEING A COUNTRY WITH BEAUTIFUL NATURAL SCENERY WHICH WE ACTIVELY CARE FOR IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT LIVING HERE**

Children and young people mentioned New Zealand being a great place to be with family and friends – there are a lot of fun things to do and compared to other countries, they didn't feel there is a lot of crime.

**“I think the best thing about NZ is all of the nature”** Age 11

**BEING A COUNTRY WHERE FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE IMPORTANT AND ARE SAFE IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT LIVING HERE.**

They believe there is a culture of care, kindness and empathy. This culture extends beyond whānau and friends to people who are in need outside their immediate circle such as the homeless, sick, and those who are generally struggling.

**“It is like everyone is a big family. The community is awesome”** Age 13

**BEING A COUNTRY WHERE EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT LIVING HERE.**

Children and young people believe New Zealand is a place of learning and opportunities. They made positive comments about their schools. They believe the education system, has room for improvement, but is 'good' and 'fun'. It is great that education is taken seriously by everyone, including the government.

**“The best thing is the carefree and privileged life we have in NZ where our education is of paramount importance”** Age 13



*"We are a free, equal, healthy, safe, peaceful and welcoming country. We are in fourth place in the list of 10 most safest and peaceful countries in the world. I very thankful to be born and raised here..."* Age 15

*"We are not at war"*  
Age 12

*"Freedom- we can be who we want, say what we want, do what we want. We can visit mountains, rivers, lakes and beaches. We have education and healthcare and the world is at our fingertips"*

Age 17

*"It's a free country and it has a lot of nature"*  
Age 10

*"Living here has been a great change, I have had a lot of opportunities to become a represented my town in basketball and many more"*

Age 12

*"I think the best thing about living in New Zealand is how there are so many different variety of cultures"*

Age 16



## FINDING 2: SOME THINGS IN NEW ZEALAND NEED TO CHANGE

### **Survey questions:**

- *What are the three most important issues<sup>1</sup>;*
- *When choosing your top issues, what was the main factor that affected your decision?;*
- *If you were Prime Minister for the day, and could change one thing, what would you do?;*
- *Why would you choose to change that thing?;*
- *Do you think most things in Aotearoa New Zealand are going pretty well or not so well?*

When asked why they chose to change 'that thing', the majority of secondary school reasons were because **'It will have the biggest impact in the future'** and **'I'm thinking about the impact on future generations'**.

The children and young people shared their vision about important issues and what they would change. Their comments fell into the following themes:

### **MAKING SURE THAT EVERYONE HAS A HOUSE AND A GOOD STANDARD OF LIVING IS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE NEEDING ATTENTION AND CHANGE**

Housing was a major concern for both primary and secondary school students. There is overwhelming support and agreement that there needs to be an increased focus on affordable housing, including planning, funding and action.

The general feeling was that people are struggling, that 'adults' are having to work more than one job to just get by; that more people are homeless and/or experiencing poverty and something needs to be done about this as soon as possible.

**"I would put better policies in place for people who are living in poverty. Living in poverty starts a cycle for future generations who grow up in poverty, to get a stronger economy we need to combat our issues with poverty"** Age 15

**"Help people get food. Also making house prices low just so they don't struggle with their family."** Age 11

Children and young people expressed the need to 'share the wealth' to ensure no one was left out. There is support to increase the minimum wage and they wanted

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<sup>1</sup> The children and young people were asked to choose three from the following: *Better education; More money for families; More jobs; Fairer society; Reduce child poverty; Better care for the environment; More housing; More health services; Less crime; Something else?*



to support New Zealand-owned and operated industry and products to create more jobs.

**“Help people that are sick and doesn’t have any home or food to eat and that is want I would like to do”** Age 10

### **MAKING SURE THAT NO ONE IS LEFT OUT AND EVERYONE IS TREATED FAIRLY ARE IMPORTANT ISSUES NEEDING ATTENTION AND CHANGE**

Children and young people shared their views on wanting greater equality. Some discussed the need to close the pay gap between men and women and to more fairly recognize certain professions by improving pay and conditions.

**“I would change the amount of money women get compared to men”**  
Age 10

Children and young people also feel both racism and prejudices in general are issues requiring more attention than they are currently receiving. Several children and young people mentioned the education system. They want it to better reflect the diverse talents and interests that children and young people have. There was also support for all education to be free, including tertiary, and for the education system to “not be standards based”. The things young people chose to change, and their reasons why were unprompted.

One young person also said that if they were Prime Minister, they would **“give back the Māori land”**.

### **MAKING SURE EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO GOOD HEALTHCARE, INCLUDING HAVING HEALTHY FOOD, ARE IMPORTANT ISSUES NEEDING ATTENTION AND CHANGE**

Health, including feeling safe, is also considered an important issue. They believe everyone should have access to good, free healthcare when and where they need it most. This included what we would describe as preventative health services. Children and young people used examples such as good healthy and affordable food. There was specific mention of better health services for children and young people, especially around mental health and bullying. Young people want quicker and more accessible support for their mental health. We heard about delays in support that then can lead to not asking for it the next time.

**“I would create strategies and pass bills that would make our mental health services a hell of a lot better!”** Age 16



Several children and young people surveyed want marijuana to be legalized. Others commented on the need to be an increased focus on (illicit) drugs, family violence and crime in general.

A continued focus on ensuring our roads are kept safe was also mentioned.

**MAKING SURE THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IS PROTECTED IS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE  
NEEDING ATTENTION AND CHANGE.**

Children and young people believe the natural environment and its ongoing protection needs to be a central focus. This includes not only water quality and protection of native flora and fauna but the impact of and regulations around waste and animal rights. We heard from some young people that there needs to be a more sustainable approach to managing our use of natural resources.

**“Create laws/regulations/policies to ensure the Kaitiakitanga and sustainability of the natural environment for future generations”** Age 17



*"Help people that are sick and doesn't have any home or food to eat and that is want I would like to do"*

Age 10

*"The amount of funds going into education"*

Age 14

*"I would create a scheme that solves poverty. Whether that is free meals at school, free healthcare until 18 years of age, a support system for families in need, whatever needs to be done"*

Age 15

*"If I were Prime Minister for one day, I would make everybody have a sufficient amount of money so they could live a life where they are not always worried about getting enough food on the table or paying so much for their property"*

Age 12

*"Help people get food. Also making house prices low just so they don't struggle with their family."*

Age 11

*"Identify all children living in abusive and poverty stricken homes and help as best as I can"*

Age 15

## KEY INSIGHT 3: TALK TO US IN PERSON TO HEAR OUR VIEWS

### Survey questions:

- Have you ever talked to your family or caregivers about this?;
- Would you like to talk to your family, caregivers and friends about this issue, or other issues, more?;
- If you have talked to your family or caregivers about this, generally speaking, do you have the same views as them, or different views, on this issue?;
- Who would you like to talk to most about these things?;
- Thinking about the person you chose to talk to about this, how would you like to talk to them?;
- Young people have told us in the past that they would like to share their opinions in lots of different ways. Out of the following ways of engaging with you, which ones would you prefer?

The majority of children and young people would like to talk about the issues that are important to them. They would most like to talk about them with family, friends and experts such as politicians. This can be initiated by them but equally, they welcome people starting a conversation with them too.

*"The school system is really easy to beat without learning, what i mean by this is that teachers are just teaching us stuff about the test so we get good scores but i don't think that I have learnt enough about the real world to become a productive citizen in the future"*

*Age 14*

To feel most at ease, children and young people expressed that it would be best to talk about these issues in everyday life, face to face in a casual, calm, environment. This could be around the dinner table, with friends, within the community or through school. For them, it is important that these discussions are not rushed, it is safe and there are not a lot of people. Having food provided is also welcome too!

Other ways they would like to talk and learn about the issues that interest them are via letters, submissions, petitions and social media such as Instagram, Facebook and Messenger. However, it is important to note that the use of social media was one of the least preferred ways to talk and learn about the issues that are important to them. The children we spoke with did not reference social media in the way that the young people did.

Young people conveyed they would like to share their opinions in lots of different ways. As mentioned above, face to face engagement is always preferred, with surveys and politicians visiting schools as the preferred formal ways of engagement. Other popular avenues to share their opinions were through social media and listening sessions led by children and young people.

## KEY INSIGHT 4: WE WANT TO HAVE A SAY

### Survey questions:

- Children and young people under 18 aren't allowed to vote currently. What do you think the reason(s) are?
- Do you think children and young people should be able to vote in that General Election?
- If you would like to vote, what is likely to be the main thing that would influence your decision?

"I remember the voting for the flags. I wanted one so bad though I wasn't allowed to vote"

Age 9

Although not currently allowed to vote, the vast majority of children and young people who took part in the survey support lowering the voting age to at least 16 years of age. They are keen and believe they are more than able. They are interested and invested in New Zealand and what happens here.

Children and young people discussed a number of reasons why people under 18 are currently not allowed to vote. The main reasons given were that they're too young, they haven't had enough experience of life and they don't know about politics.

*"Politicians don't see them as responsible enough but in some areas under 18 years olds (like in Oranga Tamaki) have to be an adult"*

Age 17

They voiced that as children and young people, they provide new ideas and perspective. They are the next generation 'so the ones that are actually going to live through it should have a say in who controls their future'. To not be allowed to vote seems unfair to them as they have rights too.

For the minority who voted against lowering the age, the main reasons provided were people under 18 were just too young, immature and impressionable and won't take it seriously. Plus, it is felt that children and young people don't know enough about politics and the issues and adults know more.

Many children and young people talked about having some kind of 'civics education' programme sit alongside their right to vote. Young people told us that this programme, to be available through schools or the community, would help them feel confident and knowledgeable in their voting choices.

If given the right to vote, the main things that would influence their decision, would be politicians who have the best ideas for young people like them. They also said liking the party policies, especially if they are future focussed, and promote action, would be a key influencer in their decision.



## Some young people shared their thoughts with us through slam poetry:

In addition to the surveys, the Commissioner led a follow up workshop alongside a rangatahi worker who supports children and young people to express their opinions through slam poetry. The workshop aimed to explore the themes raised in the survey responses and to discuss any new issues that the young people present highlighted as important.

Change the concept of climate change so it's not so foreign  
within our own borders,

Make a change, create ripples in our waters,

We need to build bridges not walls,

Help others rise from poverty instead of making them feel  
small,

Make New Zealand safe and secure,

Keep New Zealand pure,

Save NZ for the future generations,

Only then we have reason for celebration.



**If I was Prime Minister I would  
make the rule,  
That Te Reo Māori is compulsory  
in all schools,  
Raises like a case when done  
Studies is free in NZ  
I want to protect my home  
Tolaga, because that's the resting  
place of my papa.**



Suicide helpline or something you can call,  
stopping my people  
From falling like petals in the fall.  
For example, instead of being put on a mantle  
they life be going through a storm  
Out of their mind, stealing money from a store.  
Chased down the road keeping hunnids in his  
pocket  
Shooting out this world like a rocket  
The reality behind life, man isn't it funny your last  
name can't be  
Mayweather but you ain't got money  
Take this suicidal mentality from my thoughts  
Before consequences hit you in the face like  
hadoku  
Coming out from the gang but it aunt [- - -]  
Shooting people up like kamukameha  
Dudes sitting outside sipping on Bacardi  
Non bilingual kiwi's learning about our Māori.



These are the things,  
I'd try fix on the way.  
Growing poverty, and a lack in Education,  
Don't let it fall like condensation.  
But how do we start?  
What should we see?  
Policies plus poverty.  
Enforce the change and be the best you can  
be.  
I know what I want, but where should we be?  
But, well, I think NZ tries to be free and clean  
We need to start advocating like other  
countries I've seen.

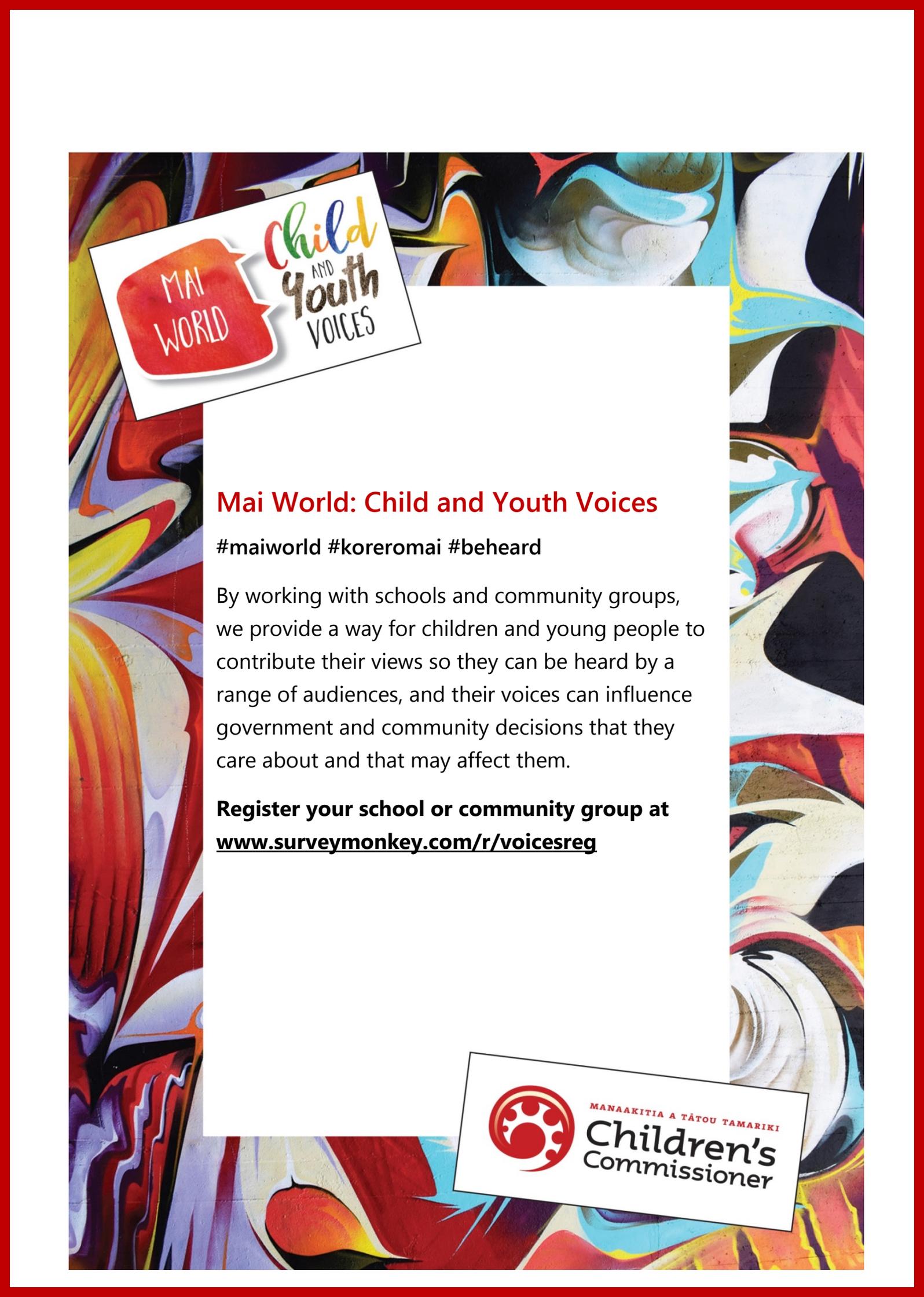
Now we know where to start.  
We know where we are.

A chance for one

A chance for all

Acting dancing or sports

On the field kicking a ball.



MAI  
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## Mai World: Child and Youth Voices

#maiworld #koreromai #beheard

By working with schools and community groups, we provide a way for children and young people to contribute their views so they can be heard by a range of audiences, and their voices can influence government and community decisions that they care about and that may affect them.

**Register your school or community group at**  
**[www.surveymonkey.com/r/voicesreg](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/voicesreg)**



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