



PREAMBLE

The trial period for the Ministry of Youth Development's online youth engagement and consultation tool named VOICY concluded on 17 October 2011. This report summarises two months of discussions, including 106 posts made by 53 members. The report is now available on the Ministry of Youth Development website.

Your input has provided government with a better understanding of what young people think around youth mental health wellbeing, young people who may be living in difficult circumstances, and the supports that community and family can provide for young people to ensure they do their best. This report will be included as a submission into the governments Green Paper on Vulnerable Children. To find out more about this process visit <http://www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz/>

Gathering and reporting the views of young people remains a very important part of the work of the Ministry of Youth Development. Get engaged in the work of the Aotearoa Youth Voices network and stay connected to future opportunities to have your voice heard.

DRAFT - VOICY REPORT ON DEPRESSION, POVERTY AND BEING VALUED AS A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises and synthesises feedback on three statements listed below using the VOICY website:

- A significant proportion of young people suffer from depression and other mental health disorders
- Children growing up in households without much money can have fulfilling and successful adult lives
- Children do best when their community actively values and supports them, their family and whānau

Responses to each of the statements were tagged by keyword (see appendix A) and then grouped thematically by response with key statements appended under each theme.

SUMMARY

Financial Stresses

Key themes that came out of the VOICY responses were the financial disadvantage many young people faced as they entered tertiary education. The ill effects of financial stress, employment laws and welfare policies that reduced the ability of a young person to be financially secure was detrimental to a young person's mental health; ability to gain the most out of study; and cope with the wider stresses of growing up in a dynamic and changing world.

Families, peers and direct role models (eg teachers) played the most important role in making a young person feel valued and stopping a young person feeling vulnerable. In addition, there was a general sense that people's environment shape and influence their decision and choices in life. However, because of the complexity of the world, parents, caregivers and other significant people in the life of a young person sometimes need skills and supports to identify where a young person is coming from.

Additional supports and guidance

Money alone does not deal with the underlying issues facing many young people today. Yet it was also pointed out on VOICY that young people also had to take ownership of their own situation and not be solely reliant on others to succeed. Luck itself, is not enough. However, young people sometimes require some additional guidance and encouragement to succeed beyond any adversity that they face. High debt, poverty, low wages were considered precursor for depression and mental disorder. An increase youth employment was seen as a way of reducing depression and mental disorder.

Responses also outlined that opportunities are not equal to everyone in different regions and that Government plays a key role in providing leadership and fostering opportunities in such communities to assist young people and their families and whānau to succeed.

Importance of schools

Schools were identified in the submissions as a key place where this support is essential, particularly working in partnership with parents and caregivers to encourage a young person to be successful.

Schools are often at the heart of a community and safe place for the community to aspire to letting their children become the future leaders.

Valuing young people

Recognising young people's achievements and supporting them to accomplish their goals by providing opportunities was a key submission theme; this recognition needed to start at the family level – through parents, siblings and other relatives.

The responses on VOICY was clear that if Government was serious about valuing young people and letting them thrive, belong and achieve, then a young person's rights in New Zealand needs to be demonstrated through laws and policies that do not discriminate and devalues the worth of a young person. Young people want to see adults being more understanding, compassionate and supportive of young people's views and opinions in their adolescent lives. Young people recognise that often the hardest decisions need to be made at the most difficult times. This theme came powerfully through the stories that were told in the VOICY submissions.

STATEMENT: “A significant proportion of young people suffer from depression and other mental health disorders”

RESPONSES

1. The transition into adulthood from adolescence has many stressors that increase the risk of mental illness developing.

- *Coming out of high school, a safety net for many is like stepping through the backdoor to reality. Never mind taking the easy road and learning on the way, you're lumped with massive debt for wanting to better your life and pursue and education and then live on the measly amount of money from Studylink, then get taxed high as the sky if you decide to work part-time as well. ... it doesn't surprise me that youth have a high rate of depression and mentally ill diseases.*
- *I run a bar 4 nights a week, take on managers duties and have to keep up with a full-time course at uni. THEN on top of that studylink tell me that I earn too much to be applying for living cost so now I have to earn what I can myself because working part-time has screwed me over !! ... Sometimes I wonder why I haven't had a stomach ulcer yet. I stay up all hours of the night, go to all lectures, complete all assignments and WORK.*
- *I worked 70- 80 hour weeks for a year. Why? Because I was a student trying to pay my way through Uni and getting paid \$12.75 per hour just didn't cut it working part-time or even 40 hours per week. The end result was I burnt myself out big time, developed a stomach ulcer (at 19!) and had to quit study. I still haven't finished my degree.*
- *Adults don't seem to understand that there is a significant amount of stress and pressure placed upon us in terms of how well we do in NCEA, which university to select, how to pay our way through university, applying for jobs etc. It's really hard to start up your life and I don't think the laws being created by those whose lives have already smoothed out and they're just living each day with comparatively little life decisions being made.*
- *I would like to see adults more understanding and compassionate to our views and opinions as well as more supportive throughout the time of adolescence.*
- *Arguably, the hardest decisions of our lives need to be made at the hardest time in our lives.*
- *We need people to support us and to help pick us up. Just because we're becoming adults, we're making that transition doesn't mean we're ready to carry so many weights on our shoulders; we don't just want to be told to get on with it and that it's JUST GROWING UP.*
- *Give people hope, and young people will be more positive. Treat young people as responsible citizens not as prisoners, and they will act responsibly.*
- *Young people are the IPod generation - Insecure, Pressured, Over-taxed, and Debt-ridden. Many Individuals are resilient and can pass through youth well, avoiding mental health issues but on a generational level things have never been worse.*

2. Depression treatment needs to be aware of youth specific needs.

- *I have depression and I have found that although there is DEFINITELY still room for the government to improve their contribution to the awareness and help available to sufferers.*

- *The support for the sufferers is not really there. If an eighteen year old becomes sick they are sent to a mental hospital with patients who have been there for years and suffer some serious conditions. There is no pretty little house that they can take some time out in and relax to get their life in order. Being in a place that can make you feel enclosed like there is no way out.*
- *You need to help young New Zealander's realise that if they are feeling down that they have help and asking for help isn't bad. You won't be grouped in with the extremely mentally ill. That you can get better with a little help and it won't affect the rest of your life.*
- *They need the facilities, say for people under 30 that are separated from older patients and allow them the best treatment possible.*
- *It's so easy to keep filling these scripts and labelling everyone with some medical condition. I'm sure many patients only had situational depression. These are strong drugs that really affect the brain, and if they're not required, then all they're doing is numbing the brain receptors and potentially causing damage.*
- *I think counselling and personal development/support should be made more available to youth.*
- *Youth in general don't have that ability [mental capacity]; some resourceful ones will, but others will go years without help, sliding through the cracks, until their depression and failure at school has been noticed.*
- *Perhaps more residential support for people who ask for help. Personally I was admitted into Hillmorton Hospital, and was discharged after less than a week. I didn't get any support after I left ... I left Hillmorton not knowing what to do with myself at all, and feeling more horrible than when I went there in the first place.*

3. Young people can feel discriminated against by employment laws that they feel contravene basic human rights and contribute to financial stresses in their lives and feeling devalued.

- *An example of this is Roger Douglas' AWFUL proposal to bring back Youth Rates (remember people, he is 72 years old) ... this means that employers can pay workers between 16 and 24 less than the minimum wage, all in the idea to increase youth employment. Sure, this might mean that employers will hire more youth, but it's in a kind of sweat shop mentality- yeah! Then they can fire them after 90 days and hire someone else!*
- *I think that higher rates of employment for youth are key - and can help to reduce depression and other mental disorders. But that youth need to be treated as valuable as other workers. Patronising youth rates won't achieve this.*
- *If there was to be a youth rate I think it should be only for 16 and 17 year olds, and it should be no less than \$10 an hour.*
- *Youth rates are highly unfair because it affects people 16-24 years of age and by the age of 20 some people could already start their family meaning that they won't be able to support their household even on a minimum wage let alone lower than minimum wage.*
- *Just look at the spate of ageist laws passed recently - raising the driving age, zero blood alcohol for under 20s, raising the alcohol purchase age from off-llicences. Youth feel that the Government is targeting them, and using their age as a scapegoat, rather than tackling issues such as drink driving in a non-ageist way. Youth should be a time of fun, not a prison.*

- *And what I ask is how anyone can be expect young people to follow this common sense when the over-20's (the people who are meant to be our role models and mentors) have a different set of rules than everyone else.*
- *Why are we discriminating against young beneficiaries? Why should a 35 year old on a benefit have the right to smoke any more than a 19 year old or a 55 year old?*
- *Lower the voting age to 16. ...the only way they will listen are if young people can vote them out. Young people live under NZ laws, so it is absolutely fair that they can have say in the creation of these laws.*

4. Dealing with depression in adolescence is a key strategy to stop the escalation of more serious mental health issues eg suicide.

- *I think young people need to realise everyone has off days, and yes we all have several in a row. I don't think a single young person wants the label of mental health over their heads. When we reach out and ask for help we don't want drugs and medication.*
- *We want a hand up, encouragement and the support for us to realise this is normal, we don't need to encourage stigma and a label but rather that we learn ways to get around low moods, we learn ways to identify and look for solutions that we can fix.*
- *These can lead to bigger problems and too often end in suicide. It is not just about how much money they have, where they live and how smart they are.*
- *We don't want ways to create a generation reliant on benefits and medications to try and solve issues.*
- *When people are in there youth they are shaping the person that they will turn out to be when they grow up into an adult. Depression is a big deal! It changes the way people think and can be the difference between a citizen and a criminal. I think the government need to take more time helping out the young people with not just depression but all problems. Government need to stop the problem when it starts. Depression is a sad thing that everyone takes way too lightly*
- *Increase counselling and teaching people to be self-motivated is where to start. This will see drug and alcohol abuse drop.*
- *The past two months have been quite tough because 5 of my friends have died...4 of them committing suicide I believe the government can throw all the money they want at this problem, but it's not going to make it any better!*
- *It's a trap where you know what you're feeling isn't right and you get trapped in the thought that it's because you're not right.*
- *Also, there is such a stigma about asking for help. I was depressed in High School and knew about youthline but would never ask for help because I was too scared of being stigmatized. My dad had bipolar and I didn't want to be treated like he was by our family, and by his community.*

5. The part played by family, teachers and youth groups are critical to reducing depression and the media has a key role in decreasing the stigma associated with depression and mental illness.

- *Too many teens are hiding their depression. Maybe we need more teachers and people in schools who are approachable and who you can truly talk to.*
- *Maybe we need more effective youth groups and organisations ...that change teens lives' around.*

- *We need to do more research and put in place that will be effective for us here in NZ.*
- *The problem can only be solved with family support and love. Depression and other mental problems can never, in my opinion, be solved with any amounts of money or policies... you see, family (whānau) and love (aroha) are simple values of which money can not buy.*
- *At the moment the attitude is still that mental illnesses do not happen to normal people especially not until you are older, and there is a massive fear of the mental health people. If these are the people meant to be able to help then everyone needs to be able to understand mental illness and the seriousness of them.*
- *Because with more drugs being taken by our people, and some of our people experiencing some tough times, mental illnesses are not going to decrease in the near future. I think maybe if you ran an ad campaign with young people telling their stories getting others to realise it can happen to everyday people.*
- *Teens like us go through so many stages of mental self discovery; religion, ethics and relationships just to name a few. Just these basic human revelations can easily turn sour and send someone into a depressive state, and that's not even including the media's constant negative painting of youth ... especially after the London riots I'm expecting the media to try and nitpick youth problems a great deal more in order to try and find some 'relevant' news.*

STATEMENT: “Children growing up in households without much money can have fulfilling and successful adult lives”

RESPONSES

6. Positive attitudes, a good mind-set and supportive parents, communities and mentors go a long way to allowing a child growing up with not a lot of money achieve into adulthood. This doesn't mean that it is always easy?

- *At the end of the day it's all down to attitude isn't it?*
- *I'm not saying it's easy to live a successful life after coming from a past tainted with poverty, but if you choose to you can take the challenges in your stride and become a stronger person who knows how to fight for what you want.*
- *Those from a similar background that struggle have chosen not to see the world for what it COULD be, or taken the opportunities that were presented to them be it large or small.*
- *It all comes down to the mindset of the parent, or of the role models. Money is a factor, there is no denying that, but it does not dictate what you will become in later life. What does dictate what you become is the world around you; your environment if you will.*
- *The friends you relate yourself to, the family that stands behind you, and the classmates/teachers a child grows up with influence the mindset someone has when they leave school far more than how much money is in their pocket at the end of the day.*
- *I have learned what it means to save your money for something special and to work towards it.*

- *I was a child who grew up with no money in the house, and I think I'm a better person for it. I value everything that I have, and don't take anything for granted.*
- *It really does all come down to attitude, and your outlook on life, and how you were brought up.*
- *Growing up in households with little money can hinder the possibilities for these children to lead successful adult lives because society and environmental factors influence them to what attitudes these children have towards life.*
- *The morale of the parent is the most important thing. If a parent is always positive the child will have the mental capacity do well, but a child with parents who never condone good grades, won't do anywhere near as well.*

7. A strong theme through this response was every child has the right to succeed, but issues around inequality and a lack of access to resources, supports and opportunities can make it harder on some children to succeed into adulthood.

- *I don't think we live in a country of equality. We have such a large gap between those who are rich and those who are poor. Every single child no matter gender, ethnicity or socio economic background deserves equal opportunities at life.*
- *We need to put support around families with children rather than shunning them and cutting benefits. We need to realise every decision we make does not simply affect just one other person. This can start by not having youth rates =]*
- *At the end of the day some people have fewer options than others. We have a very real class divide in Aotearoa which needs to be tackled head on. Coming from a low-income solo mother whānau myself I have only got to where I am because I have been extremely lucky. I have smart parents, I got scholarships to good schools, I am of slightly above average intelligence, and I can hide the fact that I am from a working-class family. None of that is because I am special or made good choices or am especially clever. It's just the luck of the draw. Some people are not so lucky.*

8. A lack of money doesn't determine the ability of a child to have a successful adult life. However, this sometimes requires additional supports for parents, learning budgeting skills and making sacrifices for long term gains.

- *Its all about the way that the situation is presented to the child. I never considered myself 'poor'. I had to do chores to earn the smallest amount of pocket money. I had to make compromises/sacrifices/choices. If I wanted one thing, I had to sacrifice something else.*
- *I grew up in Papua New Guinea and didn't have much. Not having much really helped me appreciate the things I did have, and I am so grateful for NOT having excess stuff so that I could tell what was important in life.*
- *I do believe in making you own luck and it's entirely up to you to get out and do something with your life, no matter what background you come from. It's all about drive and motivation, which is instilled by parents and mentors. Some kids from wealthy families don't do so well either. It all falls down to your parents.*
- *It is amazing what a difference it can make having parents with a) extra time of b) extra money, or preferably both. It is these which allow your parents to spend time with you, pay for your education or interests if you have to, help*

- you get to work ... great parents still need the resources to implement their good intentions.*
- *'giving a shit about that guy/girl next to you' ... is likely to harbour that environment and run the common thread across all the social landscapes a child will encounter during development.*

9. Benefits play a role in supporting children as they are often left with the consequences of poor choices by significant adults in their lives. Although the benefit system should not be taken for granted. A focus on getting a good job should be a key goal for all children.

- *I personally think its people finding a reason to try and cling onto the government systems that are being supplied to. I'm not saying that child welfare isn't a legitimate reason for government grants ... money isn't the most important tool in a parents pocket.*
- *Children when growing up can feel like they were unlucky because they grew up in a family without much money,*
- *When the welfare of a child is at risk I believe it's better to err on the side of caution, rather than withholding support from those who could very well have a legitimate need for it.*
- *Now that I'm 18years of age I can see that I have been very lucky because I have learned a lot from things that you don't need money for.*
- *Young people need to be given more choices in life. If you're stuck in a small town then your choices are seriously limited. No jobs, average education, limited tertiary education providers, limited trade apprenticeship opportunities. So what are you supposed to do? Move away from friends and family to a city where there might be more jobs but you've lost your support networks and there is more competition for whatever jobs are available?*
- *There's the food problem. Mum and dad need to pay rent and power, so what little is left for food, is simply not enough. I'm a student and work part time and still find it costly to buy just the basics. So these children go to school hungry and with no lunch. I think people who haven't been among these situations themselves don't fully grasp the idea, and by cutting benefits putting more pressure on parents which relay on to children is keeping New Zealand in a state where poverty has such a huge gap between those who have adequate money.*
- *Unfortunately the DOLE has become appealing, for what? Parents on the DOLE are complaining that they don't get enough money, and lets face it. They don't. The problem being is that they would rather sit back and complain, blaming the government for all their problems, instead of thinking that this is not the way they want to live. Doing something about it and getting a job.*
- *I also think that a severe lack of jobs isn't helpful. I don't know much about economics- and, indeed, social policy- but I do know that (1) the easier it is to find jobs and (2) the more money those jobs pay (particularly relative to the dole), the more likely it is the jobs, not benefits, will be the 'default setting'*
- *I expect that, should I need the help of the state, the state will help me, but I absolutely reject this idea of a 'free ride'. There is no automatic right to be on a benefit. As our parents, grandparents, and generations before have shown, the only right that any New Zealander has is to work hard and be rewarded for that hard work.*

10. Dealing with the wider needs of a child and their family is usually more important than a lack of money alone.

- *Children growing up in households without much money can have fulfilling and successful adult lives ... if they stay off the dole, out of gangs and crime.... all of which increase with poverty.*
- *They can if a positive home environment is created. It's not that easy though because children interact with more than just the home landscape, it involves the school social atmosphere, familial atmosphere, everything formal and informal, and other various places...It's a very multi-factorial argument but I think that's the truth.*
- *The [biggest] gap is love.*
- *Yes there are the few that can see past the horizon of coming from a low socio-economic background but many, it just becomes a vicious cycle in which they live. When you look at factors such as poor housing, meaning it may be damp and cold in winter leading to children becoming sick. Then missing school, this automatically puts them behind children who come from a family with adequate money. From here on its just a never ending cycle unless there is a push at school for these children to achieve.*
- *I am lucky, I came from a family where we weren't rich but I never went without the basics, but I have family who have, and friends who have, and this is a first hand encounter on the trials there parents have had to go through just to get by*

STATEMENT: “**Children do best when their community actively values and supports them, their family and whanau”**

RESPONSES

11. A strong theme through this response was a sense of identity as a young person and being able to relate with their community, family and being valued.

- *Children do best when there parents care about them.*
- *Community Support = Healthy Communities = Healthy Families = Happy People!!!*
- *Parents need to be behind their children. Have you ever roamed up and down a child's sport match and seen the amount of verbal abuse and negative protest parents are giving there children ... Children need role models from parents first.*
- *children do better when their families and communities actively values and support them... but I ask myself this question; supports them in what? The answer: motivates them to reach their potential, make the most of the opportunities available to them, and do their best.*
- *It's not only about encouraging communities to actively support children and young people, but about ensuring that there are opportunities for which families and communities can support children and young people to aspire towards.*
- *Are class sizes, for example, small enough that students can develop strong interpersonal relationships with their teachers and mentors (who play a big role in valuing and supporting children and young people)?*

- *It's important that young peoples' achievements are recognised and valued. I think that this starts at the family level; parents and siblings, aunties and uncles, cousins, grandparents etc.*

12. To recognise the difficulties that many children face growing up a common theme of being able supported, particularly by their families and schools. This also requires good parenting supports and secure home environments.

- *Children do best when there parents care about them; send them to school with proper food and clothes; make sure they do their homework and study; make sure they are going to school and keeping out of trouble.*
- *Perhaps we need to look at teaching people to be better parents.*
- *Adults, businesses, district counsellors and politicians forget who will be living in their communities in 20 years time.*
- *Children do, do better when they have that support and the government needs to help encourage that! Things like more funding to community activities, sports groups, clubs etc...*
- *If our families and friends work hard to help us to achieve to the best of our ability, and motivate us to excel in areas that we are passionate (in the way that so many children and young people; including myself, are encouraged and inspired to work hard are set high goals and standards), and this effort isn't being matched by the wider, national community, then the efforts aren't only wasted, but our motivation drops.*
- *Parents need skills and resources to help become better parents and better role models. School are first when it comes to a community involving children. Getting schools on board, to help get parents on board. Schools could be the first point of contact within a community.*

13. Children also value having positive role models around them (family, community leaders, sports stars) and have aspirations. Recognising the positive input and successes of young people is an important way of fostering opportunities. We also need to be careful in selecting/ promoting role models.

- *Children want to be recognized when they have achieved goals, in school, sport etc. This motivates them to try harder, so therefore when their community values and support them they evidently do well.*
- *Its important Youth identity is acknowledged constantly, they can be valued through lots of ways: events, award nights, youth centres, jobs/training for youth, youth councils, [and by people] youth workers, teachers, doctors, famous people, MP's, whānau, businesses.*
- *Most people don't care and I don't see them as inspiring anything but greed and envy especially now.*
- *Domestic violence increases when they loose [All Blacks] so why are they always considered to be heroes.*
- *It's not only about encouraging communities to actively support children and young people, but about ensuring that there are opportunities for which families and communities can support children and young people to aspire towards.*

14. Transition from childhood into adolescence and adulthood is not always easy. Difficulties to get jobs and access tertiary education require families and whānau, and Government to assist in this transition.

- *The most obvious way of starting this, for me, is through schools; are young people achieving their potential (academically and beyond)? Are class sizes, for example, small enough that students can develop strong interpersonal relationships with their teachers and mentors (who play a big role in valuing and supporting children and young people)? Are young people aware of the opportunities available to them now and in the future? Are there enough opportunities available to children and young people?*
- *I do, however, think that any work or attempts to value and support young people in their communities are wasted and undermined if they don't feel valued and supported by the state; so, can I leave school confident that I'll be able to get a job? Decent pay? Without having to move to Australia? Will I be able to up-skill myself; get a diploma or a trade? a degree? And will it be affordable and realistic for me? Do I feel like my hard work as a student is being valued when the bar for entrance to tertiary study is constantly being lifted? And If (and, let's face it, this isn't always the case) I don't feel that I'm being valued and supported, do you think I'm likely to seek and make the most of the opportunities available to me?*
- *And this isn't an issue of any government or administration, but a wider-ranging consideration. If our families and friends work hard to help us to achieve to the best of our ability, and motivate us to excel in areas that we are passionate (in the way that so many children and young people- including myself- are encouraged and inspired to work hard are set high goals and standards), and this effort isn't being matched by the wider, national community, then the efforts aren't only wasted, but our motivation drops.*

APPENDIX A: KEYWORDS IDENTIFIED IN THE SUBMISSIONS

STATEMENT: “A significant proportion of young people suffer from depression and other mental health disorders”

KEYWORDS

Government, unemployment, education, standard of living, student loan, employment law, antidepressants, working conditions, 90 day trial, awareness, organisations, depression, supports, treatment, debt, studylink, tax, students, mental illness, poverty, youth rates, minimum wage, employers, jobs, equal pay, fairness, attitudes, hiring-policy, promotions, labour, qualifications, skills, fairness, salary, recognition, entry-jobs, environment, ageism, technology, study, hours, socio-economic, degree, health, stigma, solutions, resilience, medication, benefits, hospitals, campaigns, stories, awareness, prevention, suicide, teachers, schools, confidence, intelligence, media, medication, counselling, personal development, citizenship, criminality, counselling, drugs, alcohol, self discovery, religion, ethics, relationships, stereotypes, perspectives, pressures, NCEA, university, choices, rights, compassion, opinions, death, family, values, suicide, isolation, encouragement, transfer, responsibility, insecurity, stress, enjoyment, personal choice, being valued, voting, youthline, community.

STATEMENT: “Children growing up in households without much money can have fulfilling and successful adult lives”

KEYWORDS

equality, gender, ethnicity, benefits, opportunities, families, children, poverty, support, socio- economic, disparity, decision-making, youth rates, attitude, environment, parenting, network, government, role-models, school, welfare, attitude, goals, saving, accomplishment, appreciation, gratitude, luck, jobs, education, training, low-income, choices, network, sole parents, gangs, childhoods, crime, motivation, mentors, resources, health, amenities, nutrition, equality, society, vicious cycle, minimum wage, justice, definitions, households, stereotypes, policy, work-ethos, entitlement.

STATEMENT: “Children do best when their community actively values and supports them, their family and whanau”

KEYWORDS

community, identity, venues, organisations, support, family, being valued, opportunities, education, children, school, attitudes, time, alcohol, aspirations, politicians, values, public-figures, role-models, domestic-violence, sports, funding, parenting, behaviours.