

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD LIFE? SUMMARY REPORT

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD LIFE FOR YOUNG PARENTS?

A summary report in the What Makes a Good Life?: Children and Young People's views on wellbeing series. Office of the Children's Commissioner, November 2019

In October and November 2018, the Office of the Children's Commissioner - Mai World team and the Oranga Tamariki - Voices of Children and Young People team engaged with more than 6000 children and young people, to hear their views on what makes a good life.

As part of our engagement with children and young people on wellbeing we heard from 15 young people under the age of 18, who were themselves parents.

This summary report presents the key themes we heard from those 15 young parents through this engagement project. We heard how young parents envisage a good life for themselves and for their children, and about the barriers they face which can prevent them and their children from truly experiencing this good life.

We hope this document will inform policy and practice development for services to support young parents.

### **What does a good life mean for young parents and their children in Aotearoa New Zealand?**

Young parents' ideas of the "good life" were inextricably linked to the good life that they hoped for their children. Their goals and aspirations were centred on the wellbeing of their children. The parents we spoke to told us about their hopes for their children, including wanting them to have good values, be respectful and be well supported.

*"I just want her to know she can rely on people, she has the support, I don't want her to think she has to box herself out."* Young parent from Kaikohe

The things young parents identified that would support their version of a good life were the things that would allow their children to thrive. These included being able to get into work to support their family and child financially, and getting a good education to access more opportunities for themselves and ultimately their children.

### **We need to feel supported and valued to be good parents**

Feeling supported and valued was a key theme covered by all young parents who participated in the engagement. For some this meant support from whānau and friends, for others this could come from support services or the wider community. Feeling supported and valued helped young parents feel confident that they could provide the best for their child. Some young parents also spoke about the strength that having faith in God played in their lives.

*"Supporting parents with anger management"* Young parent from Auckland

*"Stable homes surrounded by positive people."* Young parent from Auckland

*"Support and love"* Young parent from Auckland

Many young parents were balancing multiple responsibilities, which can be really hard without the right support. Some talked about having to balance work, education and parenthood, leaving no time for them to take care of themselves or spend time with their children.

*"I'm 16. Me and my partner are both working. The only problem is trying to spend time with my son."* Young parent from Auckland

For some young parents, cycles of abuse and poverty were part of their upbringing. These young parents talked about wanting to break away from these cycles but often found it hard. A history of involvement with Oranga Tamariki (formerly Child, Youth and Family) followed them into parenthood, which also impacted on their ability to create and sustain the good life they wanted. Many were determined not to have their own children experience the same upbringing. This was reinforced by young parents not wanting alcohol and drugs around their child.

For the full report:

[www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/)

*"Stop bad unhealthy cycles."* Young parent from Auckland

*"Kids will blame themselves – carry cycle on and become what they have been through."* Young parent from Auckland

Young parents felt they needed support to be parents and support to achieve their goals and provide a safe and stable environment for their child. Many had dreams of working to provide for their families, but often felt they didn't have the appropriate experience or access to the kind of support that would help them get into the work force. Many young parents talked about not getting jobs because they didn't have any prior experience, and how impossible it is to get experience if no one would give them a chance. When we asked young Mums about the role of their child's father we got mixed responses. Some spoke about the father of their child needing more support to be a good parent.

### **Education will secure our future and our children's future**

Education was a huge part of what young parents felt made a good life. They felt that a good education had the power to transform not only their own lives but also their children's lives. Education also meant a pathway to further study and better jobs that would help support their family.

*"I wanted to come back to make sure I had all my NCEAs, I didn't think about it when I was younger, but when I had her – it just made me think about it way more"* Young parent from Kaikohe

They also had high hopes for their children's education and wanted them to have the best opportunities in the future.

*"I want her to have a good school, a good education."* Young parent from Kaikohe talking about what a good life would mean for her daughter.

### **We need to be financially secure and have our basic needs met**

Young parents talked about needing to have their basic needs met and achieving financial stability to allow them and their new families to lead a good life. This included "full pukus", a roof over their head and regular income. Meeting these basic needs meant they were able to do better for their child, which is what the good life ultimately looked like in their eyes.

Many young parents were reliant on others to help with accommodation and financial support, which

often meant living in crowded situations or lacking the resources or income to live independently.

*"It's just crowded at home because my mum took my brother's kids because they were doing drugs and stuff."* Young parent from Auckland

When young parents did not have access to the basics, they felt as though they had no time or energy to have goals or aspirations for themselves.

Some young parents were too young to receive any financial help from Work and Income, which meant they were not only reliant on others for somewhere to live but also financially. This also impacted on their ability to break free of negative cycles or environments.

*"I'm 15 and not old enough to get the benefit yet."* Young parent from Auckland

Not having to worry about things like having enough food or money to live would have a huge impact on these young parents.

### **We love our children and we want the best for them**

The common theme heard throughout all our engagements with young parents was the emphasis on their child. Their aspirations and ideas of success were centred on their baby; a good life for them meant being able to provide the best they could for their child. Education, support and having the basics were the main enablers the young parents saw to achieve their vision of the good life for themselves and their children.

### **More information on methodology and the overall insights**

This paper is drawn from the views of 15 young parents we engaged with as part of the 'What Makes a Good Life?' report. Please see the full report for the description of the approach, methodology and overall insights at:

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