



Generation Zero

Generation Zero's Submission on: **WCC Strategy for Children and Young People**

We would like to commend the council on developing this strategy and taking steps to improve the experiences of children and young people in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. However, we feel that this strategy in itself has very little use if it is not accompanied by strong action from Council to solve systemic issues that are negatively impacting the lives of young people in this city, including the housing crisis, poor accessibility, and transport inequities.

Our Central City

- How do young people access the city and is it an option at the moment for everyone? Why not advocate to GWRC for free public transport on the weekends for kids and teenagers as Auckland has implemented? This builds independence and autonomy in our young people, gives young people the security to travel safely, and creates a culture of public transport users as the primary mode of transport.
- Youth hub - sounds great! How are you going to make sure this is accessible to all children and young people, not just a privileged few? Needs to be easily travelled to with affordable public transport, active transport, and safe, accessible footpaths.
- *“Significant projects like Let’s Get Wellington Moving and Central Library redesign will engage with young people and take their views into account”* - how are you going to do this? The Council has done a poor job of engaging young people in the past with important policies like the Draft Spatial Plan in 2020 where young people were severely underrepresented and drowned out in the consultation – despite the outcome of the Spatial Plan having long term implications of the future of young people in Wellington.

Hauora Across the City

- If you want to encourage children and young people to move around more to improve physical wellbeing, through cycling and walking etc., you need to invest in safe infrastructure. A painted cycle lane next to moving cars is not safe. A non-continuous cyclelane that weaves around parked cars, does not have a clear path through intersections, and randomly

terminates is not safe. The council needs to focus more energy on improving transport infrastructure, especially around schools and other places frequented by kids and young people.

- We strongly support the recognition that Wellington needs more third places, especially for young people, and look forward to seeing this actioned through projects like the Central Library redevelopment.

The Basics

- Housing stress, lack of access to healthy food, and mental health issues are symptoms of a broken system. Providing the services described in this strategy, like MSD programmes and a youth hub, are great, but they're an "ambulance at the bottom of the cliff" approach.
- Wellington City Council needs to take more ambitious, meaningful action to rapidly increase housing availability and quality to bring down the costs of living and improve the lives of children and young people. A Strategy for Children and Youth is meaningless if you are unwilling to take bold action on policies like the Spatial Plan.
- We desperately need the council to solve transport inequalities by prioritising low cost transport options like public transport and cycling. This will make getting around easier and cheaper while making our streets safer and more accessible, all while reducing emissions.

You Belong

- We strongly support the initiatives suggested in this section.

Pathways

- Wellington is becoming less and less accessible to young people who want to stay here to live and learn. Housing is severely unaffordable, inaccessible, is making people sick, and the cost of living is high and is rapidly increasing. It's hard to live a good life here without a private vehicle, which is expensive to maintain and contributes to our transport emissions, because public transport is expensive and not as extensive or reliable as it could be, and active transport infrastructure is for the most part non-existent.
- If the council wants to provide pathways for young people to thrive here and stay, they need to be bold and ambitious with solving these systemic issues because a small collection of youth focused programmes and a bit of targeted support is a bandaid, not a fix.

Participating in Change

- We support the suggested initiatives in this section and agree that they would be steps in the right direction towards increasing youth engagement in political processes and decision making. We especially support developing easy ways to make submissions, building relationships and trust with diverse groups of young people, and advocating to lower the voting age to 16.
- However, these initiatives will not go far enough. Our experiences as members of Generation Zero, a youth-led climate justice organisation, have shown us that local government is deeply inaccessible to young people. We have found there to be a high barrier of knowledge and understanding required before you can even begin to participate, and we have found the

Council's consultation processes to be largely un-democratic and demoralising in the following ways:

1. Consultation documents are dense, complicated, and the information is not presented in a variety of different media to make it more accessible and digestible.
 2. The process of submitting is often complicated and off-putting. For instance, the requirement to have an account on "Let's Talk" is a barrier. Consultation questions are usually structured in a way that makes it hard to leave general comments and makes you feel like, if you're not specific, your comment will be devalued.
 3. There are far too many consultations - it is difficult to keep up with and we feel constant pressure to "hold this space" and submit because if we don't, the voices of young people will be drowned out by the privileged people in Wellington who have the time to invest. It should be enough for a young person to tell you *once* to to **take bold climate action** - we shouldn't have to need to be there reminding you at every single consultation. We shouldn't have to tell you exactly where we want buses, or exactly how you should reduce emissions from the landfill for our contributions to be valued. There is an on-going assumption made by Council that if young people don't submit, it's because they don't care. *This is not true.*
 4. The consultation process is undemocratic and favours privileged people who are not suffering from housing stress, working multiple jobs etc. and have the time to commit to the process. For instance, engagement opportunities are often during the day when young people are at school, university or work. This favours people who are being paid by interest groups to participate, or who have the financial privilege that enables them to take the time.
 5. These opportunities can be intimidating and there is very little support offered to first time submitters, for instance during public participation. Young people are often forced to share their platforms with older people in "debate" style sessions that are uncomfortable and dis-empowering, and there seems to be very little acknowledgement from councillors and council officers that there is a severe power imbalance in these processes. The council is failing to provide a safe environment for young people to participate - for instance some of our volunteers have had experiences of being bullied by other submitters after making an oral submission without council officers stepping in.
- Unless you are going to seek out submissions from people who are not already a part of the system and have the privilege to be engaged in it, you're going to get a self-confirming system. Young people lack the resource, privilege, understanding, and time to engage via the council's standard processes that tend to favour older, affluent people. Council needs to invest time and money in actively seeking feedback from under-represented groups to ensure representative consultation processes. Making the occasional trip to a university to seek input from reasonably privileged students is not good enough.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on this strategy. We would like to make an oral submission.

Nga mihi nui,

Generation Zero Wellington

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