

## **Youth participation in Aotearoa New Zealand: seven key principles translating evidence to practice**

This document sets out seven key principles to support youth participation in Aotearoa. The aim is to broaden the way we think about youth participation. It is not an exhaustive guide; it should complement, not replace, other frameworks which have a stronger focus (for example) on co-design or youth wellbeing. It is based on a version of Laura Lundy's 'voice is not enough' framework<sup>1</sup>, adapted to incorporate principles from te ao Māori and to consider wider societal factors. It is a work in progress, feedback is welcome!

### **1. Mana Tamaiti**

Principle: Young people have inherent worth and the right to self-determination. Whānau Māori have the right to self-determination under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the right to be involved in decisions affecting them.

Related concepts: Mana motuhake; children's rights

What this means in practice: Listening to the voices of children and young people is not an optional extra. Children's voices should be prioritised, and this carries a different weight to other parts of our mahi which involve listening to the voices of people we work with. Listening to children should not come at the expense of their other rights.

### **2. Whānaungatanga**

Principle: Any work we do which involves listening to the voices of young people should seek to build and strengthen relationships.

Related concepts: Whakapapa

What this means in practice: Every time we seek young people's views we should be seeking to strengthen relationships and provide that child with support from someone they trust. One-off consultations should be avoided if possible, and every engagement with children should be based on an existing relationship. Without the support of a trusted advocate, children and young people often struggle to have their voices heard.

### **3. Whakamanawa**

Principle: Listening to the voices of children requires creating a space in which their mana is upheld and they are comfortable expressing themselves.

Related concepts: Youth-friendly spaces; safe spaces

What this means in practice: Children and young people should be supported to share their views in comfortable spaces, not spaces which we decide or dictate. As much as possible we should do things on their terms, not ours. This includes elements of time: children and young people may need multiple opportunities to share their views and should be supported to do this in youth-friendly timeframes.

---

<sup>1</sup> More info: Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927-942.

## 4. Voice

Principle: Children and young people should be supported to express themselves in whatever way works for them. They get to choose the medium, not us.

Related concepts: Authenticity

What this means in practice: We need to do more than just ask children what their views are. Children and young people may not be comfortable expressing themselves verbally. We need to be creative about how we support young people to participate, and we need to think about 'voice' in the widest possible terms. This may mean partnering with others who can support children and young people to express themselves.

## 5. Audience

Principle: When children speak, adults should listen. Decision-makers need to understand why listening to children and young people's voices matters.

What this means in practice: When children and young people are asked for their views, there should always be an identifiable person or organisation with a responsibility to listen. Children and young people have the right to have their views taken seriously, not just listened to and then forgotten about.

## 6. Influence

Principle: When children and young people are asked for their views, decision-makers should be accountable for showing how those views were acted on.

Related concepts: Accountability

What this means in practice: Children and young people should always be told how their views influenced decisions. This doesn't mean that adults must always do what children and young people tell them to, but it does mean that should be able to show how young people's voices were taken in to account. This is an important part of keeping adults accountable and addressing the power imbalance between adults and children.

## 7. Ecosystem

Principle: In the long term, embedding children's voices in our work requires shifting the way children are viewed by society.

What this means in practice: One reason young people don't usually have a voice in decisions is because they are seen by society as vulnerable and in need of protection. But children and young people have unique insights and are capable of contributing to the world around them. They are not just 'adults in waiting'. In the long term, the key to embedding children's voices in our work is shifting the way society views childhood itself. This means sharing stories of the impact of youth participation whenever we can.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> More info: Fitzmaurice, L. (2017). 'Children's voices in system reform: A case study on children and young people's participation within the modernisation of Child, Youth and Family. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 29(1), 41-52.