

Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa

ANNUAL REPORT

2017/18

**Advocating,
advancing and
promoting the
rights of all children
and young people.**



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ACYA: Annual Report 2018

Introduction

This year, Aotearoa New Zealand's 25th year as a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), has been a busy and challenging one for ACYA, for all the right reasons.

The public and political focus on children - their rights, wellbeing and voices – has continued to grow: 17-years-olds are included in the care and protection system and are to be included in the youth justice system; from July 2019 UNCROC and UNCRPD¹ will be incorporated into domestic legislation and apply, under New Zealand law, to all those children in the Oranga Tamariki system; and the Child Poverty Reduction Bill, currently before Parliament, will set measures for child poverty and require governments to establish targets for child poverty reduction.

Excitingly for ACYA, the Child Poverty Reduction Bill also provides for the development of a Child Wellbeing Strategy. ACYA has long recommended that Aotearoa New Zealand needs an overall plan or strategy for children, to promote greater consistency and co-ordination in the policies and practices that underpin good childhoods. We are hopeful that the proposed Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy will do just that.

However, strategies, policies and practices are only as good as the impact they have on the lives of children and young people. At a high level children's rights are about growing respect for children, young people and their

status in society. At the everyday level children's rights are about real things for all children and young people – family and culture, homes, play, privacy, identity, education, standard of living, safety and health.

Making the links between high level children's rights principles and what these mean in practice for children is what ACYA does. We promote understanding and implementation of children's rights because we believe respect for the inherent dignity of children is central to their wellbeing.

In April 2018, ACYA participated in an event hosted by the Prime Minister at Parliament to

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability

celebrate 25 years of UNCROC. Many of those attending had ACYA connections. We have come a long way, and we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those who have contributed to ACYA's work over the last 25 years and brought us to this point - ACYA, and its current Steering Committee, stand on strong shoulders.

However, there are many miles still to travel. This is where both the opportunities and the challenges for ACYA lie. ACYA is run by volunteers. While we are indebted to

organisations that support our work, especially the JR McKenzie Trust, IHC, YouthLaw, Save the Children and Barnardos, the increased focus on children's issues, together with the large volume of human rights reporting, pose real challenges to ACYA's day-to-day operation and sustainability. We continue to explore ways in which we can navigate and manage these challenges as we work, with others, towards an Aotearoa New Zealand where the rights of all children and young people are upheld and embedded in NZ law, policy, practice and wider society.

Planning

On 26 May 2018 the Steering Committee held a planning day in Wellington with an emphasis on planning for ACYA's future. We focused on what ACYA can, and should be, doing to advance children and young people's rights and, through their rights, their wellbeing.

Traditionally much of ACYA's effort has been on UNCROC reporting, and this remains a central focus of our work, especially as we begin to prepare for Aotearoa New Zealand's 6th UNCROC periodic reporting cycle in 2021/22.

In addition to child rights reporting, ACYA's aims, under our constitution, are to promote.

- understanding and implementation of UNCROC
- action on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's (the UN Committee) recommendations
- the voice and participation of children and young people
- anything else that will further respect for children, youth and their rights.

These aims and objectives are also reflected in our funding agreement with the JR McKenzie Trust, which is for:

- strengthened UNCROC architecture through:
 - greater awareness about children's rights, particularly within government
 - an effective UNCROC Monitoring Group
 - promotion of UNCROC (particularly the UN's recommendations) in government work programmes
- the development, publication and presentation of the sixth non-government civil society report(s) to the UN Committee.

As children and young people's issues gain greater prominence in public and political debate opportunities to promote their rights continue to grow. To make the most of these opportunities, while at the same time operating sustainably, ACYA needs to work strategically and in collaboration with others. Strengthening our relationships with others will also mean we are well placed to gather information and report on the reality of children and young people's lives during the periodic reporting process.

ACYA's role in the children's sector

As part of planning for the future ACYA has been considering our role in the wider children's sector; specifically, how we might support strong, co-ordinated NGO voices for children and young people.

In late 2017 and early 2018, together with the Child Wellbeing Network, ACYA hosted meetings to discuss how those in the children's sector collaborate and work together. The meetings included representatives from Save the Children, Unicef NZ, Child Wellbeing Network, Child Poverty Action Group, IHC, Barnardos, Plunket, Stand for Children's Services, NZEI Te Riu Roa, the Public Health Association, and other members of Tick for Kids. The meetings identified a real willingness to work collaboratively and to support each other's initiatives to advance children's wellbeing. As a sector we have common values and objectives, and it makes sense to pool resources, knowledge and effort.

Following these meetings ACYA gave serious consideration as to whether we could provide a co-ordinating framework for the children's

sector. We concluded that, at this point in time, we do not have the capacity to fulfill this role. ACYA will continue to contribute to co-ordination and leadership within the children's sector where we can and when initiatives align with our aims and objectives.

For example, in March/April 2018 ACYA co-ordinated the development of a joint children's sector submission on the Child Poverty Reduction Bill, working closely with the Child Poverty Action Group and others.

The submission received over 40 endorsements from a wide range of children's organisations and individuals. It made a strong impact on the Social Services and Community Select Committee, who acknowledged the level of support the submission had received from the sector. Although the Select Committee have yet to report back on the Bill initial drafts of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy suggest many of our joint recommendations are being taken into account in the strategy's development.

2017/2018 Reporting

During the 2017/2018 financial year ACYA submitted reports to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal Periodic Review. We appeared by videolink before the ICESCR Committee.

We participated in the UPR consultation hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We worked closely with Child Poverty Action Group and Save the Children New Zealand on both reports, as well as a number of other organisations and individuals.

We would like to acknowledge and thank Peace Movement Aotearoa for their assistance and co-ordination of these civil society reporting processes.

Children’s Convention Monitoring Group (CMG)

ACYA is a permanent member of the CMG and has played an active part in the development of the CMG’s terms of reference, as well as the CMG’s terms of engagement with the Social Sector Deputy Chief Executives (DCEs).

The CMG meets at least quarterly, and twice each year with the DCEs, to discuss progress on children’s rights. Through the CMG/DCE mechanism ACYA contributed to the development of the Government’s UNCROC work programme and can draw children’s rights issues to the attention of government officials as they arise.

The CMG will be reporting annually on progress on implementing UNCROC. ACYA’s focus in the CMG this year has been to promote the general measures of implementation, and this is reflected in the CMG’s first annual report “Getting It Right: Building Blocks”².

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Children’s Commissioner and staff within his office, particularly Sarah Morris and Donna Provoost, for their leadership of the CMG and their steadfast commitment to elevating the attention given to children’s rights within Government.

The year ahead

Looking ahead to the 2018/19 year, children and young people are front and centre of many of the reviews and policy developments underway: welfare reform, housing, changes to the education and justice systems, the mental health review and the Historical Abuse in State Care Royal Commission are just some of the initiatives that impact children and young people.

Many of these initiatives are relevant to the six priority areas the UN Committee identified as needing urgent attention in 2016:

- violence, abuse and neglect
- children deprived of a family environment
- standard of living
- children belonging to minority or indigenous groups
- child labour
- juvenile justice.

ACYA has much work ahead of us to promote understanding and implementation of UNCROC across government and wider society, and action on the UN Committee’s 2016 recommendations. There is a risk that children and young people’s rights will be seen as somehow separate from, rather than integral to, wider issues impacting children, young people and their families. Our goal is to see respect for the rights of all children and young people truly embedded in the legislative and policy settings that drive wellbeing, as well as in all State interactions with children, young people and their families. Children’s rights are about the “how” as well as the “what”.

The 2016 recommendations underscore the need for a particular focus on respect for the rights of pēpē, tamariki and rangatahi Māori and their whānau, under Te Tiriti o Waitangi as well as UNCROC.

²<http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/getting-it-right-building-blocks/>

Too many children with disability are missing out on enjoying their rights, as children, on an equal basis with others. Reporting under the UNCRPD takes place over 2019/20 and, together with IHC, ACYA plans to develop a thematic disabled children's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

The rights of Pasifika children and young people also require their own focus and advancement through and with Pasifika communities.

In addition, there are issues that were not identified as priorities in 2016 but which,

Committee membership and acknowledgements

ACYA has had a strong Steering Committee over the last year made up of very knowledgeable and wise individuals from a range of backgrounds, who are all committed to ACYA's kaupapa. We know each other well, and have worked well together.

ACYA's Steering Committee for 2017/18 was:

- Andrea Jamison (Chair, CMG)
- Vanushi Walters (Vice Chair)
- Jennifer Walsh (Secretary)
- Nicola Taylor (Treasurer)
- Sarah Te One
- Mereana Ruri (Country Focal Point)
- Trish Grant (CMG)
- John Waldon
- Barbara Lambourn
- Amanda D'Souza.

In April and July 2018 respectively we co-opted Claire Achmad and Jacqui Southey onto the Committee. Claire and Jacqui each bring enormous knowledge and experience in children's rights, and we are exceptionally fortunate to have them on board. Both are members of the CMG.

arguably, cannot wait until the next report in 2022. Youth mental health is one such issue.

Finally, there are longstanding issues that need to be kept sight of. As the care of children and young people is examined there will be opportunities to assess the fitness of purpose of the laws that set care standards and protect family connection and identity. Maybe our 1955 adoption law will finally be reformed?

The year ahead for ACYA promises to be as busy, exciting and challenging as 2017/18.

Unfortunately Marlane Welsh-Sauni resigned from the Committee in early 2018 due to a conflict of interest having taken up a position with Oranga Tamariki. We would like to thank Marlane for her contribution to ACYA.

We have a number of Steering Committee members stepping down this year, all of whom have made significant contributions to ACYA, over a number of years. ACYA owes an enormous debt of gratitude to:

- Sarah Te One
- Vanushi Walters
- Jennifer Walsh
- Trish Grant
- Barbara Lambourn
- Amanda D'Souza.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to each of them for their time, dedication and contribution, and wish them all the very best. Although they are stepping down from the Steering Committee they will not be lost to ACYA. We are establishing a list of ACYA Steering Committee alumni and will continue to call on them as we need to.

Administrative and financial relationship with YouthLaw

For the past two years YouthLaw has provided administrative support to ACYA, which has been invaluable to our operation. We would like to thank the YouthLaw Management Committee for their support and Karen Davis, Velda Chan, Vanushi Walters and Jen Walsh for the excellent service they have provided us with. Due to personnel changes at YouthLaw, and the

need for ACYA to strengthen its Wellington-based support, this arrangement is coming to an end. ACYA has always had a strong connection with YouthLaw and we look forward to this continuing in other ways in the future. We are in discussion with Save the Children about administrative and financial support.

Conclusion

ACYA is in good heart. As the UNCROC 25th anniversary year draws to a close it feels as if we are moving to a new era where respect for the rights of children and young people is just the way we do things in Aotearoa New Zealand. We look forward to continuing to work, with others, to make sure that is, and remains, the case.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou.

Andrea Jamison
ACYA Chair, 2017/18.
27 September 2018