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| Speak Up- Kōrerotia  Children’s rights and wellbeing after COVID  21 April 2021 | |
| Male | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access media station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana,  E ngā reo,  E ngā hau e whā  Tēnā koutou katoa  Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”.    Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.  Ko “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” tēnei, ko Sally Carlton ahau. Today we’re talking about children and the impact of COVID-19 on children’s rights and children’s wellbeing. We’ve got two guests with us today who are really well versed in the experiences of children and children’s rights: Erin Gough from the Office of the Children’s Commissioner and Carol Mutch who is a researcher and a lecturer at the University of Auckland, if you could please tell us a wee bit about your involvement in this space. Carol, perhaps we’ll start with you. |
| Carol | Kia ora koutou, thank you for the opportunity to talk here. So I’m a Professor of Education at the University of Auckland but after the Canterbury earthquakes I became particularly interested in how schools dealt with it and especially in how they enabled children to cope with what they had been through and how, for that long time after the earthquakes, children were still exhibiting trauma and anxiety and yet there wasn’t a lot of support.   And that then burgeoned out into doing work, not just about the earthquakes, but work in Japan related to the tsunami and moving onto Vanuatu after they had had a cyclone and Nepal after their earthquake and so on. So I became a little bit of an expert in what are the things that adults, mainly teachers and parents, can do in order to ensure that the rights of children are looked after. Then of course we had COVID-19 which brought us into a completely new version of how do you help children through these various crises and traumas that they’re facing. |
| Sally | A wealth of experience that you’re going to be sharing today then, thank you. Erin, how about you? |
| Erin | Kia ora koutou, yes thanks Sally for the opportunity, it’s really great to be here. It’s really interesting listening to you Carol because I was in Ōtautahi for the earthquakes as well and that sort of kickstarted my advocacy journey from a disability perspective in terms of advocating for Christchurch to be the most accessible city that it could be. That got me really involved in human rights and I have a law background as well so kind of put those two things together and ended up working for the Human Rights Commission in 2015 and moved to Wellington after that. And since then have been really interested in how we can kind of progress human rights of all kinds and the kind of intersections between disability and children’s rights for example, or the kind of intersectionality between different groups of marginalised people and so I’ve been lucky enough to have that human rights working experience and that’s how I’ve landed up here at the Office of the Children’s Commissioner where I’ve been for about 18 months now.   I’ve recently taken over our rights work programme and one of the things that we do here at the Office is these reports on children’s rights and how we are kind of progressing things for children and we thought that given the impact of COVID over the last year, that the latest report… it would be really good to have that as a topic and so that’s what I am looking forward to talking about today. |
| Sally | Fantastic. Erin, you mentioned that report: perhaps you could talk us through just a wee bit and introduce it to us? |
| Erin | Yes sure, so it’s called [*Getting it Right: Children’s rights in the COVID-19 Response*](https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/childrens-rights-in-covid19/). And so basically to give you a bit of background: it’s the third report of a series of thematic reports on children’s rights issues and as well as the Office of the Children’s Commissioner, other organisations have contributed to it as well, as part of their role in the Children’s Convention Monitoring Group, which I can also talk about. So we have the Human Rights Commission, Save the Children, UNICEF New Zealand and Children’s Rights Alliance which is a group of child rights sector organisations and so as a group together, we’ve written a report and our aim with it really was to kind of encourage government to learn some lessons from their COVID-19 response in regards to children and to make some recommendations as to how policies and practices in various areas could be improved in that response. Both looking back to the COVID-19 period but also going into the future as well to ensure that children have their rights upheld and their kind of wellbeing enhanced. |
| Sally | Fantastic. And Carol, I think you are involved with, is it UNESCO rather than UNICEF? |
| Carol | Yes, so another hat that I wear is as the Educational Commissioner for the National Commission for UNESCO. So of course a lot of our interests and projects will overlap with many of the things that Erin talked about. It’s a great opportunity for me to hear a little bit more in detail about what Erin has been doing and we may need to have a dialogue off air to follow up some of these things. |
| Sally | Great. It’s always nice when we can make those connections through the show; actually, it happens quite a lot. Erin you mentioned there the Children’s Convention Monitoring Group. This might be a good opportunity just to talk us through what is that and what is happening with children’s rights here in Aotearoa at the moment. |
| Erin | Yeah sure. So the Children’s Convention Monitoring Group is a group that has formed over the last maybe ten years to kind of monitor the implementation of children’s rights in Aotearoa under the Children’s Convention. And the Office of the Children’s Commissioner in particular has a statutory mandate to monitor and advance children’s rights under that Convention which New Zealand has signed.   So we convene Children’s Convention Monitoring Groups come together to discuss how we can do that and one of the key relationships that we have actually is with a group of deputy chief executives across government. So that’s kind of the group in government that’s responsible for implementing the Convention and we’re about to just come to the end of our five-yearly cycle on that. So we will be giving some feedback on the draft government report going into the next review and thinking about the work programme items ahead as to how we can keep progressing things in that space.   So we have a really good relationship in terms of advancing children’s rights in that way and I guess it’s about continuing to encourage government to do that. |
| Carol | I just wanted to ask you a question, Erin: I mean, I know you’re going to talk about the report more but do you think we have made a difference over the last five years? I mean, can you see that things are changing? |
| Erin | I think in these spaces sometimes you kind of look back and you get a little bit disappointed at the lack of progress sometimes but then you kind of look into it a bit deeper and you see there have been some really positive developments over the last five years. So some examples that come to mind are: we have a Child Poverty Reduction Act now; we have a Minister for Child Poverty who is the Prime Minister so that’s at the highest level possible in government; we have a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, so we have an overarching framework that we can measure progress against. And we have the Convention mentioned in legislation in the Oranga Tamariki Act alongside the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.   And as well as that, I would say there is a greater interest in getting the views of children and young people and sort of progressively realising, I think, that children and young people have value in what they have to say and are not just another stakeholder group. They are a group in and of themselves that have a right to have their views heard.   So I am optimistic that we have made some change and we are headed in the right direction but as you know, there’s plenty still to do. |
| Sally | How about you Carol, what would be your take on that question? |
| Carol | Well the reason I asked is yes I am aware of those higher-level things but still I find in my work and in reading the media, that there still seems to be a lot to do be done and I understand that it takes time to make change. The biggest thing of course is attitudinal change. So I was really interested in hearing Erin say that she feels that people are valuing children’s voices more. I mean, if I think back for example to the Canterbury earthquakes, it took a long time before anyone actually realised that they had some useful contributions. Everyone now holds up the Margaret Mahy playground as this wonderful thing but there were so many other opportunities for children to engage in post-disaster opportunities that were never taken up.   So I think that attitudinal change will then hopefully mean that some of those policy things will become a little more embedded. But yeah, poverty, housing issues, educational disparity… there’s still a long way to go. |
| Sally | It’s an interesting one isn’t it, will that attitude change the policy or will that high-level policy help in changing the attitude?  Erin, you mentioned the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and I know there are six wellbeing outcomes. It would be great, seeing as this show is all about children’s wellbeing, if we could maybe talk a wee bit about that Strategy and what are those wellbeing outcomes that we’d like to be seeing? |
| Erin | I’m not the expert on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy necessarily but I can kind of give a high-level overview of kind of how, from my perspective, I see it working. So essentially it’s an overarching framework that has six outcome areas that we want to see for children. So the first one is that *children are loved, safe and nurtured*. The second is *they have what they need*, so that’s things like access to nutritious food, access to housing, those kind of basic life things. *Are happy and healthy*, *are learning and developing* – so that’s all about education. *Accepted, respected, connected.* And *are involved and empowered*.  The last two areas are probably the most interesting in that they are not as quantifiable to be measured. So like, what does it mean to be “accepted, respected, connected”? What does it mean to be “involved and empowered”? I think the involved and empowered one, it really connects well to taking children’s views seriously and again, like recognising that what children have to say is valuable because they’re fully fledged humans and they have a right to express those views.   But in those outcomes areas are a range of actions that government has committed to achieving over the next few years and I think the idea is to periodically review the progress against those with the idea that policy changes across those areas can be made. Like Carol said, to what extent that happens remains to be seen and there is still plenty to do but it is a real win to have this overarching framework because it means that you can point to it and you can measure progress against that and that’s a really important step to take. |
| Sally | You’re talking about how we might be able to quantify and kind of measure any steps that are taken towards attaining these outcomes, but one thing that I saw when I was putting together this show is that there’s kind of a lack of useable data around children here. And I would be interested to hear what exactly does that mean and what you like to be seen in terms of data and statistics. |
| Erin | Yes you’re right, there is still a big lag, I think, in a lot of areas and we found that in putting together this report, for example, that government agencies sent through a lot of great information around the COVID-19 response but a lot of them couldn’t exactly say how it affected children as a specific group and provide the data to go along with that and so it made it hard to see how their response actually took the needs of children into account specifically.  And again, talking about intersectionality, there’s massive disability data gaps for example and so it means that disabled children, we don’t have a lot of data as to the outcomes for them or some of the situations for them and how things can be improved there. So it’s that kind of idea that if you are not counted, you don’t count. And so I think there is a piece of work to be done to kind of get comprehensive data that can be desegregated according to all these different characteristics, I guess. |
| Carol | To me one of the problems is - and I know that you have to do this because you need to have government departments that specialise - but children are seen as parts. You know, there’s an educational part of them, there’s a health part of them, there’s a wellbeing part of them and no one actually sits and joins up the dots and says children are holistic beings where we need to think about the housing that is healthy for them, access to easy healthcare, an education that suits them and their needs and if they have particular needs either in learning disabilities or other types of disabilities, or English is not their first language and so on. We have all these group agencies who look after parts of a child.  I’m hoping that this is what our Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy will kind of promote - that there’s a much more holistic way to view this. And that we can then bring in the data that tells us. I mean, something as simple as transience. Now the impact of transience on children and young people, if you move more than once or twice - and the figures will tell us that we may have children who may move six or seven times in a year, you know, post-crisis or post-disaster exacerbates that - and suddenly we lose track of them. We don’t know where they have gone, their family can’t enrol in another health service, they may not have been picked up by the schooling sector.  How do we, as I say, join the dots, see that looking after children and young people as much a holistic activity and everyone has to have it in their mandate and all the relevant data needs to be aggregated in some way. |
| Sally | Certainly as somebody who is a bit external to this sector, looking at the Wellbeing Strategy that’s got things like “they are loved and cared for”, that seems to me to be a really positive outcome because that is a lot more holistic than that physical needs-based approach. Whereas thinking about if they’re loved, if they’re connected - they’re sort of more intangible or unquantifiable outcomes. That is a more holistic way of looking at it hopefully. |
| Erin | Yes and I think one of the things that we’ve tried to do at the Office is when policy people are making policies and using the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy as the framework - which they should be because that’s the overarching framework now for children and young people in New Zealand - it’s like, what does it actually look like in their policy process? How should they consider children when they are thinking about policy, as Carol said, in health or education? How should they take that holistic view and also think about how children are accepted, respected, connected in that context, are involved, and empowered in that context?  So we created a bit of a two-page policy tool to assist with that which will hopefully just add to the *kete* of resources that people can use to progress things in this space. |
| Sally | And just finally before we have our first song: How many children are we talking about? How many children are there in Aotearoa and can we break that down further by things like ethnicity and in the context of this talk particularly, children who are living in hardship and extreme hardship? |
| Erin | So I can give you the figure for children in Aotearoa as I understand at the moment is 1.18 million, so a little less than a quarter of our population. In terms of ethnicity and all the segregated stats, I don’t have that off the top of my head but one of the stats that Judge Becroft uses as Children’s Commissioner is 70/20/10. So he talks about 70% of children in Aotearoa New Zealand are doing well, then there’s… and they’re living their best lives, so to speak. 20% of children are struggling at least some of the time to have those basic needs met. And 10% of children are kind of in chronic, ongoing disadvantage. So some of the things you were talking about in terms of poverty and material hardship, that’s a chronic ongoing experience for them. Carol, I don’t know if you have any more specific stats than that? |
| Carol | No I use that 70/20/10 when I’m talking with my students and I found that that’s a very useful reference point to then be able to unpack what the 20 means and what the 10 means and so on in terms of extreme hardship versus children who are struggling in some areas but are managing some parts of their lives. I think we do also need to focus on the fact that 70%... so 70% of children are able to access their education and help and so on that they need. It’s just that that’s not yet good enough but it’s good to know that we at least have 70% but we need to edge that figure up somewhat. |
| Erin | Yes definitely and in terms of poverty, you know, the latest child poverty stats show that for example there are children within the 10 and the 20% that are even more disadvantaged. So Māori children for example are four times more likely to live in poverty, disabled children are three times - and then you think about the intersection between those two things. So what’s the picture for disabled Māori children, for example, or disabled Pacific children? You know, like, there’s compounding factors which will affect children’s experiences across that range of stats. |
| Sally | And just one final question: When we’re talking children, are the stats looking at anyone under 18, is that the kind of official way of doing it? |
| Erin | Yes. |
| Carol | Yes. |
| Sally | Ok well we’ll have our first song then which was Carol’s choice, she chose Cat Stevens’ ‘Where the Children Play’. Super appropriate for this topic. |
| Carol | There’s a story behind why I chose ‘Where do the Children Play’. At the beginning of 2020, I was in Bangladesh and as we know it’s a very low income country, struggling with a range of issues, and as I was walking along I saw children playing in junkyards, on the streets kicking a ball and so on. And the line that came into my head is ‘where do the children play’ and it did make me think that yes, we have some terrible statistics in New Zealand but how lucky are we that our children… they have got somewhere to play. So this is getting us to think about how lucky we are to be in the location that we are, to be born with many of the advantages that we have and must not waste that, we must ensure that everyone in this very lucky country has the opportunity to do that. |
| Sally | And what’s actually interesting is this is the third show in a row that someone has chosen a Cat Stevens song. |
| Carol | It might be my age! |
|  | **MUSIC BY CAT STEVENS – WHERE DO THE CHILDREN PLAY** |
| Sally | This is Speak Up – Kōrerotia and today we’re talking about children’s rights and the impact of COVID. We haven’t actually got too much into the impact of COVID so far but this section we’ll be diving into that a bit more with Erin Gough and Carol Mutch. So, maybe we could talk about some of the experiences of children during lockdown, and I guess in the year or so since then. There’s so many different angles we could take here but perhaps Carol, maybe we will kick off with you and then we’ll just jump in with the many other aspects of it that we could talk about. |
| Carol | My take on children and young people’s experiences during lockdown is perhaps encapsulated by an article that I recently had published which was about the exacerbation of educational disparity because of COVID-19. And I started by article by saying that on TV we saw children with their latest MacBooks in their designer kitchens with their parents hovering around supportively encouraging them to learn from home but that was not the reality for all. And one of the statistics that the Ministry of Education put out when they were setting up all the home learning, was that 50% of schools had said they didn’t think that their students could adequately access home learning - either have the devices or had the internet access to enable them to participate in education.  Now as we know, suddenly there was a flurry of hardcopy packs and setting up television channels and so on but it highlighted how many times has it gone unseen that there’s 50% of children who might not be accessing certain aspects of education and we needed COVID-19 to perhaps really throw that into relief.   We’ve since been interviewing teachers, parents, students of all ages and so on and have got some good stories to tell, but Erin can go next. |
| Erin | Similar to what Carol was saying, I guess this is one of the things that we highlighted in the report that we did on children’s rights in COVID and I guess I’d sum it up as yes, there was a variety of experiences. So for some children, online learning allowed for greater flexibility and agency over that time and they really enjoyed being able to learn in ways that they could have greater control over than being in a traditional classroom setting.  So for example, just a quote that we have here that’s in the report: “Sleeping in was great, I never have to get up at 6am for school, it was awesome and I did school at 10am not 8.30am”. So that was an 11-year-old girl from our *Life in Lockdown* report which was a survey that we did of children and young people about their lockdown experiences. We asked them what they enjoyed about lockdown, what was difficult for them and what was something they will always remember.   For some children, it was a really positive thing to be able learn online in different ways - but having said that, like Carol said, this wasn’t the experience for all. Not all students were able to learn from home and in our COVID report we highlight a number of reports from ERO, for example, from our own kind of survey research and from media around how this affected different groups of children.   So for example, disabled children in particular, again, they had their own particular challenges in learning from home. Some of them at that time, they didn’t have the access to the same support services that they did at school all of them and particularly for parents who were trying to work as well, trying to meet their learning needs on top of that was really, really challenging without the supports that they have at school. So that’s just one example in terms of how, for some children, it was actually a really difficult time from a learning and development perspective. |
| Carol | At the extreme end of course, what we found was that for some of our saddest families - I don’t like to call them dysfunctional, that’s a clinical term but there are a range of circumstances that lead families to be in such circumstances - it took away children’s safety because coming to school was a physically, emotionally, psychologically safe place for them and they were thrown back into those environments where a lot of stress was going on.   And that stress for the adults in their lives was exacerbated of course by losing jobs and the fear of COVID-19 and all of the things that went with that. So again, as I say, that’s at the extreme end. Also at the extreme end, some of the young people that we talked to in South Auckland, of course their parents lost their jobs, often they were the ones who then had to go out and find some work in order to keep the family functioning and those jobs were usually in very low paid, long hours and possibly exposing them to COVID-19.   I remember one of the girls said that when she came home from her job, her fear was that because she had been out when everyone else was in, that she might bring the virus home. So she took off all her clothes, scrubbed herself from top to toe, washed her clothes before she even went into the house. Well I suppose she had to go into the house but before she contacted the rest of her family, she was absolutely terrified. She needed to have the job, she had to leave school, she needed to have the job but the fear, the constant fear of bringing the virus into her extended family was just like a black cloud that hung over her. So we had some really sad stories that we heard about.   However, can I tell you some good stories. Also in that same area, one of the things that really, really delighted us was that yes, young people slept in but they told us the stories of they didn’t even wake up until 11am and they were doing their assignments at 1am, they did like that. But we had a range of things that young people got involved in.   So one person, for example, thought about other young people who might be feeling lonely and have no one to talk to, so through her various social media networks, she set up these little chat groups. So if you were home on your own or you needed someone to talk to, she’d put them into groups where they could talk to each other and make new friends and play simple games and so on. Not fancy computer games but just ways of interacting and I thought that was really nice.   Someone else actually went to the trouble of setting up a petition against gay conversion therapy. She said that it was that she had the time when she was at home to read about these things online and to think about them and went to the trouble of setting up that petition that we have heard about since. So there were some really positive outcomes where young people were taking the opportunity to think about others and think about how they could contribute to social justice and things like that. So I think what Erin had said, there’s no one narrative, there were a range of different experiences and even those who might have been struggling found ways to help other people. |
| Sally | I imagine one thing, as well, in terms of that range of experiences, spending so much enforced time with family and whānau. Well for some people that would have been fantastic and for some people that would have been really, really tough and I can think about some of the young LGBTQI+ people that I know who would have found that a little bit hard. Because again, like you mentioned Carol, leaving the home enables them to be more in touch with who they feel they are whereas at home they might have to repress that somewhat. I imagine that’s probably got a lot of range of experience there, too. |
| Erin | That’s definitely something that we found in our report as well, yeah, for Rainbow children and young people in particular, lockdown did pose specific challenges to their rights because of the fact that they had to isolate at home with people that may not potentially be the safest people to be around and so that was of concern. But then at the same time you would say for some children and young people, having that time with their families and in a way that they haven’t been able to before because their parents usually work and not everyone is at home over that period of time, meant that they were actually able to build relationships with their family and whānau in ways that they haven’t been able to before. And that’s one of the key findings from our *Life in Lockdown* survey was a lot of children and young people said that one of the things that they really treasured about lockdown was the time they got to spend with their families and the people in their bubble.   So there’s some questions there about how can we change how we work in society to make sure that there is that flexibility for people, not just in kind of an emergency situation, that that’s just a built in part of life so that everyone can have quality time with people that mean a lot to them. |
| Carol | I think that COVID-19 has actually shown us that we can live differently and how we engage with children and young people is one example. Another issue that we found that especially with younger children, that there were many well-meaning parents who in fact increased the anxiety levels of children and so I think we’ve got some education to do around yes, we have to protect children’s vulnerability but at the same time, by wrapping children in cotton wool… There were children who, for example, were so fearful they wouldn’t even leave their home on a walk or whatever.   So we need to find a nice balance between getting children the right information so that they understand what’s going on, but not building up the fear level so much that it sort of traps them in this anxiety cycle. We found when children went back to school, some of our interviews with teachers, what they spend a lot of time dealing with that anxiety and trying to find strategies in their classrooms. One classroom I know set up a little cave with a toy bear so when you were really frightened you could crawl into the cave and you could hug the toy bear until you feel better and then come out. So there was an awful lot of anxiety. So how do we educate people to find that balance between providing information at the right level but giving children strategies to work through this, to build resilience and so on, to take small risks that aren’t going to harm them in any way so that they can face whatever the future might throw at them. |
| Erin | Yes and then I guess also, like, what does that mean for how mental health services or support services are provided to children after these kinds of events, as well, at a systemic level. |
| Carol | Oh yes and again, coming back to the Canterbury earthquakes, how long did it take before Mana Ake was rolled out. In fact, it was after the Kaikōura earthquake before system-wide in Canterbury and North Canterbury, that something was available to children and young people who were still suffering the trauma of years before. We have to make sure that we take those lessons on board because as a country that’s one thing we’re not very good at is learning lessons from the past. We seem to just repeat some of the mistakes we’ve had. But here we have plenty of evidence to say there are better ways of doing this - both preventative better ways - being proactive, as I say, about building these skills - and retroactive in terms of well we know what has worked in the past and how do we scale that up and roll it out in a way that’s going to have much more impact. |
| Erin | Yes, I agree, we seem to have a culture of being able to respond really, really well when these crises come up but then not necessarily being able reflect back on the lessons learned and also future-proofing for when something else happens again. |
| Carol | I agree. |
| Sally | I noticed from your report, Erin, that there was a marked increase of people contacting things like YouthLine and LifeLine during the lockdowns and if we’re talking about mental health and wellbeing here, putting some of those proactive measures in place that seek to counter this anxiety before it occurs. |
| Erin | Yeah we already know that New Zealand has very high youth suicide rates, for example, and so how these kinds of things are going to exacerbate that and we already know that the mental health system is under huge amounts of pressure and children and youth people and other groups can’t access the services that they need to access. There has to be some plan to invest in those things; we can’t just keep the expecting the already under-pressure system to respond adequately, I guess. |
| Carol | And I think, too, it’s about thinking outside the square. Just because delivery of particular services has always traditionally happened in one way… I mean, we know young people do engage in social media and social media - of course with cyberbullying and so on, it does have its downsides - but there are apps that young people can use to sort of check in on their moods and how they’re feeling and make connections. We need to make the best use of creative thinking and new technologies and so on, that may be able to stop some of these things before they exacerbate.   The problem is that children who… or young people who have these issues, find themselves on waiting lists that are six, twelve months long and there’s no intervention in between. So there must be ways in which we can use, I would imagine at a low cost, ways to roll out what opportunities for them to learn some strategies, to engage with likeminded people who would be able to be their support group and so on, so that we’re not suddenly the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. |
| Sally | Just before we go into our next song break, have either of you noticed in your research around children in lockdown, if there were any kind of marked differences between how groups were faring in terms of hardship. So I imagine that children who were living in hardship already, they wouldn’t have had the same access to the internet, to the devices, even things like having a warm and comfortable home to hang out in, would have made it a much harder experience than for others. |
| Erin | Yeah one of the key kind of messages of the report, of our report, I guess, is that COVID did exacerbate already existing inequities and so that’s even more of a reason to do more for children, it’s not an excuse to do less. Because the children that were already doing it tough, have had another layer of marginalisation added through this experience which means that they’re now doing it even tougher in some ways. Through, like Carol was saying, loss of jobs for example, not living in safe, healthy houses. There’s a whole range of issues across those sorts of things that have got worse because of COVID that we need to address as well. |
| Carol | Yes, I had some of the young people in one of our studies talking about… One interview stays in my mind, where the girl says oh yeah, I kind of went, ‘Lockdown, cool, don’t have to go to school, stay home, sleep in’, she just lived with her father and her siblings. He lost his job and then suddenly there was no income and the stress mounted and she was the oldest sibling who had to look after the younger ones. She just talked about this rollercoaster of things that happened because they couldn’t go out, there was no money coming in, the children were trying to access their online schooling, she was trying to do her own schooling and look after her younger siblings and it just seemed to go on and on and on and she just felt that the national lockdown just didn’t seem to stop when it reality it was four or so weeks.   Of course, being an Auckland student she went into lockdown several times later as well but it was hearing her talk from the “I’m really looking forward to this” to “how this has changed her life” and the fact that she, in the end, she just I had to give away schooling, couldn’t do it. “The teachers would send me messages and I’d just go, ‘I can’t go there, I just can’t go there. Life is just chaos in my house’”. We haven’t followed her up, it would be interesting to see whether that was a long-term thing. |
| Sally | It is sad, isn’t it, to think that giving up schooling, it’s such a detrimental step to be forced to have to take. |
| Erin | And that will have impacts for her life. Education is such a protective factor for so many things and just to think that a young person has to make that decision or the good of their family will have long lasting effects. And I guess that’s something to keep in mind in the years to come, as well; like, just because we’re COVID-free in the community now, doesn’t mean that there won’t be long-lasting effects that we need to address in the future. |
| Sally | This is a very appropriate time then, Erin, to introduce your song which is ‘Talking About a Revolution’ which I imagine you chose because that’s what you feel we’re going to need to have to do? |
| Erin | Yeah! I’m always, you know, ready and willing to take part in the revolution and I guess that’s why I do the work that I do, I guess, it’s kind of all building towards, as Carol said, doing life differently. And I think there are moments in time - the Christchurch earthquake was one and this is another - where we have an opportunity and a window of time to do things radically differently and I just hope that we take it. |
| Sally | Well that actually segways perfectly into our final segment which is going to be the challenges and the opportunities that these crises bring us to make a difference. |
|  | **MUSIC BY TRACY CHAPMAN – TALKIN’ ABOUT A REVOLUTION** |
| Sally | This is Speak Up – Kōrerotia and we’re talking about children’s rights and wellbeing after COVID. We just finished up that final segment thinking about the revolution and what we would like to be seeing as things move forward. We’ve kind of touched on the fact that disaster, generally speaking, the Canterbury earthquakes and now COVID, provide both an opportunity and a challenge for furthering wellbeing and rights and just to wrap up this kōrero today, I’d like to think about some of the opportunities as we move forward from this. |
| Carol | Well I’ll start with an idea that I’ve been playing with that has come out of my research and I see it happening in little pockets, is that we learned after the Canterbury earthquakes and after the Mosque massacre and after many of the other things that have happened, that when communities come together, they are able to move forward with more strength. And so I think something we could spend a lot more time and would benefit children and young people but also benefit adults and everyone who is a member of a community, is that we need to do the community building, connectedness, networking, mapping the resources and so on. And I’ve been playing with this idea that I’ve called community anchors, where you take facilities or networks that already exist in a community like a school or a church or a mosque or sports centre or a cultural centre, where people come and gather and meet each other, so they’re strengthening those ties but they’re also building skills like becoming informal leaders by looking after a committee or running an event or those sorts of things and how we make much more use of that so that people feel comfortable knowing their neighbours, they feel that they can talk to people who are different from themselves because they’ve met them in a different context, they’re not frightened by someone who doesn’t look like them. They know where people with different skills and resources are, they know where to go for things and so on. So that we have a much richer community where everybody feels included and welcome. So that’s my dream.   It’s not going to require lots of government funding and fancy policies and so on but really making the best of things that already exist in communities and how do we see that as a local government priority where you support your local communities to feel better about themselves. Now that of course there’s a whole lot of factors out there, various communities… just driving around the North Island recently and I see that where you shut down a dairy factory or timber processing plant or whatever it is, suddenly a whole small town is decimated because the thing that held them together is no longer there.   So when we make some of these high-level decisions, I think we need to think more about those community… the consequences of those things and put in those opportunities for keeping some sense of community connectedness. Because who will suffer? Children and young people will certainly suffer. They just grow up dispirited and without any hope for the future. And if that’s the one thing we can give them, it’s hope for a future that will allow them to have their potential.  Sorry, that was a rather long-winded one. |
| Erin | No that’s great and I think building on that, one of the things that we highlighted in our report was that there have been rapid policy responses that the government and others made during COVID. Things like housing the homeless; things like providing financial safety nets that weren’t there before to lessen the impact of loss of work, for example; willingness to provide those flexible working arrangements; willingness to think about learning in different ways, utilising technology, as you were saying before, Carol.   There have been a range of innovative things which have happened in terms of how communities have come together, how we made use of streets in ways that we haven’t done before, all those sorts of things. It shows that there is a willingness to do things differently and to accelerate action and shows that these things aren’t in the ‘too hard’ basket, we just need to think innovatively, and like Carol said, to resource communities to do that.   One of the communities that we highlighted in our report that did that really well was Māori-led responses. |
| Carol | Absolutely. |
| Erin | They took matters into their own hands in a lot of ways and got resources to whānau that needed it, they got iwi checkpoints set up, for example. But in that, it kind of showed the government missed opportunities to work with those communities and that they did those things in spite of the system rather than because of it. And the need to learn from that and to resource communities so that it isn’t just communities trying to work around government, there’s a sort of partnership approach happening there. |
| Carol | Absolutely. |
| Sally | I’m also really glad you brought up that Māori-led response, I think that’s been such a positive that has come out of COVID. |
| Carol | And it also was highlighted in the Kaikoura earthquakes, the Canterbury earthquakes and so on and I think it’s something that Māori-led response shows you some of the things that I talked about, the power of empowering people to step up to leadership roles where they can organise knowing what resources are available in your community and that’s a perfect example. A local marae and iwi-led response and so on. And so how do people for whom that’s not their community or their way of operating, learn from those principles and say we can do this for our community.  Also if I think of churches in South Auckland, they are now taking quite a strong role in terms of the response to COVID-19, especially dealing with the rollout of vaccines and so on. How do you find an anchor, a place or a network or something, that’s the strength of that community that helps to lead forward? |
| Erin | Definitely, I think we saw that with one of the subsequent outbreaks which there was a limited information about the Pacific communities and how churches and hubs in those communities were able to get communications out to Pasifika communities about getting tested and that led to a massive increase in testing and has led to those communities leading the stats in terms of a number of people getting tested and kind of being part of our team of five million and keeping all the rest of us safe. But yeah, it’s about empowering communities and resourcing communities to be able to do that. |
| Sally | I think something that would make a lot of sense - but has also come through very clearly in what you are saying, as well - is that if we are designing, building, debating for children, everybody is going to be benefiting from that. If we are providing information for children at a level that children can understand, then everybody else is going to understand that as well. But whatever we are doing, if we are designing with children in mind, everyone is going to be benefiting. |
| Erin | Absolutely and that’s one of the things that we advocate here at the Office is that if you centre children and their whānau in responses, then everyone benefits. |
| Carol | Yeah there’s a nice whakataukī, the English translation is “The child is the heart of the matter”. |
| Sally | Perfect. Well, what a wonderful place to finish up. I’d like to say kia ora, tēnei kōrua, thank you so much for sharing your experiences and wisdom today in what’s been a really thought-provoking and robust show, thank you very much. |
| Carol | Thank you. |
| Erin | Thanks for the opportunity. |