



WON'T The Issues Politicians Talk About

... but that need **our voices** and **our vote!** **^**

The kids are alright

The renowned playwright Oscar Wilde is attributed as once famously saying that 'youth is wasted on the young'. Young people are often maligned today for wasting their lives with the proverbial sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll readily available to them in this modern world. If it's not young people binge drinking, then it's probably young people racing cars on our suburban roads. If it's not violent youth gangs roaming the streets, then it might be young people running away overseas and not paying off their student loans.

There is a growing perception locally and internationally that young people are lazy, getting into trouble and are generally a problem that must be solved. From the UK riots through to our 'crack-down' on boy-racers and their cars, there is a perception that young people are essentially trouble. Is this actually the case? Is this the reality?

Like the comical picture of a pussy cat looking into the mirror and seeing a lion, our perception may not be an accurate reflection of reality. The actual experiences of our children and young people can sometimes differ greatly from the messages and debates that happen in the public arena

In the lead up to the election, there will definitely be political debate about our children and young people. The debate around our young will likely be framed by this emerging trend of demonising young people in the media and in our society. But our young people can't all be that bad? Can they?

As you contemplate the political debates and various policies presented to you, we invite you to consider focusing on the *realities* that children and young people are facing rather than focussing on the perceptions and sexy headlines that politicians and the media will push. Here are a few specific realities for children and young people that our politicians might not talk about at length in the next few weeks.

- The National Standards framework is being gradually implemented throughout our schools. These National Standards will cover children aged 5-12 and will force teachers to rank students in reading, writing and mathematics. Yet these Standards have met serious opposition from significant lobby groups (eg, the NZ Principals Federation, the NZ Education Institute) ever since they were introduced by the National Party.
- Over half a million New Zealanders owe over \$11 billion in student loan debt to the government. Most of these people are our young adults. Steps are now being taken to try and recover some of this debt from Kiwis who have moved abroad.
- If we are to buy into the public discourse so far, teens are primarily blamed for the alcohol abuse we see in New Zealand. Yet this ignores the reality that as published in the recent 'Alcohol Law Reform Select Committee Report', approximately 90 per cent of heavy drinkers in our country are aged 20 and above.
- To those who are indeed the young and of voting age, please register to vote! To date, over 120,000 eligible voters between 18-24 years old have not yet registered. It will be a waste of time to familiarise yourself with the realities of these issues but not be allowed to actually vote.

These issues are critical for the *future development* of our nation, but they are equally important for the *immediate present*, as our young people today are often the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised in our society, perhaps even in our world. For the young and the young at heart (which essentially covers us all), it is crucial that we keep trying to engage with, and understand, the actual reality of each issue.

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

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Questions to think about before you vote:

- What do you know about these National Standards? What affect will they have on the children in your families and communities? What are the other political parties' policies on the education of our young?
- What kind of start in life do these young adults have with such huge student loan debts? What should the government do about this debt and about the people owing this debt? What are the political parties saying about student loan debt and tertiary education in NZ?

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