**13 Reasons How We Can Help Young People Survive and Thrive**



*Votive Boats – Charlie Baird* <http://www.charliebaird.co.uk>

“Let 13 Reasons Why turn to 13 Reasons How to make a difference to the wellbeing of our young people. These could be made a priority in this election year. We could make a big change in the terrible statistics of youth suicides in New Zealand and to the overall mental wellbeing of all young people” said New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists (NZAP) spokesperson, Lynne Holdem.

“We have been watching 13 Reasons Why showing the hazards of navigating adolescence in 2017 while we could help our real adolescents travel their own troubled waters to safer shores,” said Holdem. She asked NZAP members what they would prioritise in this year’s budget to save and enhance the lives of NZ youth.

NZAP members asked all political parties to consider the following:

1. **Mental health services funded to do the job properly:** to offer talk therapies, not just medication or a night in respite care, and then send them on their way ([People's Mental Health Report](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58f48f2459cc680bc7a237aa/t/58f5d384b8a79b4768cb93a8/1492505610169/PMHR%2B%28FINAL%29.pdf)). Distressed young people can be taught skills for emotional regulation and mindfulness [DBT](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectical_behavior_therapy) in one to one sessions or in groups. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinicians need to work with parents as well to support changes in the environment around the vulnerable young person.

[Health dollars](http://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/otago203813.pdf) allocated to 15-19 year olds is one third of allocation to 60-64 year olds. We could share health dollars more fairly as younger people do not need as much spent on physical health but badly need good mental health and addiction services.

1. **A youth-focused space** in each city, toprovide a safe, welcoming environment, a place of belonging, easy access to counselling support, development opportunities and youth-specific health services” ([Whangarei Youth Space](http://whangareiyouthspace.co.nz/services.html)). Offer community education to value our young people and invest in their future well-being.
2. **Health-wise schools:** a [health hub](http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetonoon/audio/201842285/%27we-need-help-with-students%27-mental-health%27-school-principals) with [social worker](http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/evaluation/social-workers-in-schools/), [counsellor](http://www.nzac.org.nz/), and [nurses](http://www.nzno.org.nz/) in every secondary school treating the increasing numbers of anxious and self-harming adolescents. Add professionals to work with their family members so the adolescent and their family understand each other better.
3. **Relationship and sexuality education**, for all NZ secondary schools, by well trained “youth friendly” educators, that is sex-positive and gives students the ability to critically think about sexual attraction, consent, ethics, relationships, the body, gender, pornography and the online environment. Teach the skills of resilience and wellbeing: mindfulness and breathing, and relationships – how they are formed and how they can be broken kindly. Implement [restorative justice](https://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/criminal/charged-with-a-crime/how-restorative-justice-works/) practices with anti-bullying and emotional development education for teachers.
4. **Parenting support** to educate parents about the [teenage brain](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oT1g6pRAMQk), empathic listening, validation and being there when teens are “falling apart” or “losing it” ([Family Connections](http://www.borderlinepersonalitydisorder.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Rajalin_DBT_FC.pdf)).
5. **Support** [Key to Life](http://www.keytolife.org.nz/)**, Youthline** and other community organisations, so good counsellors and other peer supports are available to youth while providing relationship training to the volunteers, as well as initiatives like [The Low Down](https://thelowdown.co.nz/).
6. **Community belonging:** let team sports, kapa haka, music, drama, dance, yoga, martial arts and other such groups develop emotional and social skills, and increase connection and resilience in children, youth and young adults. Connected communities, where neighbours know neighbours, welcome strangers and provide social belonging and connection are harbors of personal and community well-being ([Community Taranaki](http://www.taranaki.gen.nz/)).
7. **Lower the voting age to 16:** we need to listen and respect the views of young leaders in public conversations and lowering the voting age to 16 may be a way to empower that constituency and achieve a fairer age based access to resources and opportunities. Have a [Youth Parliament](http://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-parliament/) every year.
8. **Whanau Ora** services resourced to heal generational trauma of whanau and iwi, to strengthen identity and resilience in rangatahi and young people. Parenting courses available to young parents to strengthen identitity and well-being that are based in Maori values and practices ([Hoki ki te Rito –Ohomairanga Trust](http://www.ohomairangi.co.nz/parenting-programmes.html)).
9. **Addiction services available** to everyone that needs them so people with [adverse childhood experiences](http://www.acesconnection.com/blog/substance-abuse-doc-says-stop-chasing-the-drug-and-focus-on-the-aces) who seek comfort in drugs can address their trauma and get free of the downward spiral of addiction. This is especially important when young men are leaving jail and trying to integrate back into the community.
10. **Early intervention:** heal relationships in family and whanau by intervening at the first sign of domestic violence or child distress, not waiting until the situation is so bad that the children need to be uplifted. Keep children with parents or hapu wherever possible by resourcing [grandparents](http://www.grg.org.nz/) and other kin when they need to take children into care.
11. **Attachment: provide** informed early interventions for parents of new babies during their first 1000 days,focused on understanding relationships and developing empathy for children, not just behavior management techniques. Make “[Circle of Security](http://www.dayspring.co.nz/circle-of-security-parenting)” parenting available to families who need help to create security for their infants. Provide supportive parenting courses to bring commitment to change.
12. **A longer election cycle** to give politicians the courage to address homelessness, the increasing rich/poor class divide, earthquakes and weather vulnerabilities, and house price hikes that all create mental ill-health and split apart families.

Holdem says she wants to see harbours of community kindness, life-saver experiences and lighthouses of hope for young people to help them navigate adolescence’s tricky and troubled waters.

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