

# Maximising well-being post COVID-19

Dean Stronge<sup>1</sup>, Alison Greenaway<sup>1</sup>, Robyn Kannemeyer<sup>1</sup>, Chris Howard<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>MWLR, <sup>2</sup>MBIE

## KEY INSIGHTS

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Much has changed in New Zealand since the New Zealand Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Research<sup>3</sup> undertaken by social researchers from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment provides insights into how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that means for their, and New Zealand's, continued well-being.

### Children

Parents, grandparents, teachers, and caregivers spoke of the impacts they observed in their children or the children in their care, and for the concerns they had for children due to the COVID-19 pandemic response. A key theme from parents was that spending time with their children over lockdown brought them closer together:

*I really treasure those times that we hung out or we did some – papier mâché, for example, in lockdown and it's really nice and we quite often look at that and kind of reflect on that. And I think it's definitely helped – my daughter's just turned 9 actually and it's been – I feel it's easier to speak with her when she's feeling anxious or upset. I feel that closeness that we had during lockdown has allowed that. It wasn't a bad thing before, but I think for me that's strengthened (MWB101).*

*We spent a lot of time with my [6-month-old] young son but it was great, lots of time at home with him. We were very fortunate. If not for the lockdown we wouldn't have had that kind of time with him at all. In that respect it was good (MWB37).*

*We all quite enjoyed it, and the kids, they didn't want to go back to school. We'd all got used to hanging out at home together all the time (MWB55).*

However, as one person noted, lockdown was either 'the best of times [or] the worst of times depending on your circumstances' (MWB73). Inequality and poverty were significant issues raised by participants, having been highlighted by the pandemic response. Addressing socio-economic inequalities would have positive flow on effects for children and was seen by participants as a key focus for New Zealand's post COVID-19 recovery:

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<sup>3</sup> A background and methodology report is available from [StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz](mailto:StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz)

*...people's experience of COVID is really shaped by how much access to resources they have; whether they've got a safe home to hunker down in; where they go for fresh food; who can help them; who's got spare resources to help them; whether being shut down with the family is generally a good thing or actually just a terrible thing... (MWB7).*

Parents and caregivers noted that young children have quickly adapted to the COVID-19 experience:

*And the kids coped quite well with it. Obviously the little one had no idea, but the older one, we called it a 'germ holiday', and she was really good about we don't touch people we don't know, and we wash our hands as soon as we get home, and we take our clothes off and we wash them. She's getting the same messages from us as with day care teachers when she went back to day care. She kind of embraced it (MWB71).*

*Just one thing that we still notice with – especially with kids when they come into the museum, is how quickly they've all been conditioned to sanitise their hands and do all those sorts of COVID related activities....Yeah, so it's really interesting how quickly kids have sort of adapted to that new way of life that you have to sanitise your hands, you have to sign in, you have to do all the things (MWB64).*

However, they also recognised children were affected by the stress and uncertainties of the pandemic response and were concerned about what the long-term effects would be – observing that access to mental health services for children were uneven:

*My daughter recently [didn't] want to go to kindy, and when I spoke to her during the school holidays when we had a quiet moment, and we were able to talk about it she said that she's worried that if she doesn't sneeze into her arm that somebody will get sick and then they won't be able to come to kindy and it will be her fault. So, a lot of that pressure I think – I've heard that it was affecting kids but to actually hear it from my own child, it really hit home (MWB31).*

One negative impact of lockdown commented on by parents was the amount of time children were spending on devices, which they felt was detrimental to their children's well-being:

*Kids, they just – I mean it's not like when I was a kid where mum would just say 'get outside and play' and you'd be out there all day and you'd come back when the sun was down. Kids just don't think like that anymore. The only thing that they think they can fill their time with is the screen. They want to watch TV, they want to watch You Tube, they want to play a game on the phone or a computer, they want to do Minecraft. They don't even think about going outside first. And while it's quite helpful and they're distracted and their time is occupied, it's like they're totally overstimulated for that whole time they're on the screen and afterwards the anger and the frustration. It's not a very pleasant household to be in when all the children have to put their screens down to have dinner or because mum wants to take you out for a walk (MWB91).*

*I suppose that my children spend a bit more time on devices than they used to because it became a bit more normalised than just a way of being able to continue doing work. And that's where the education was coming from. And so, they are more into their devices than perhaps I'd have wanted them to be at the beginning of the year, but it has just become the new normal (MWB2).*