

Christchurch City Council Youth Strategy



Robyn Moore
Youth Advocate
Christchurch City Council
PO Box 237
Ph: 372 2406
Fax: 371 1696
Email: Robyn.Moore@ccc.govt.nz

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Authored by Robyn Moore & Mary Richardson



CHRISTCHURCH
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INTRODUCTION

In July 1998 the Council adopted a Youth Policy which sets out the Council's commitment to young people, their families and communities. The development of the youth policy involved widespread consultation with young people, community groups and government organisations conducted between September 1997 and February 1998.

This Youth Strategy document signals the beginning of another phase in terms of the Council's commitment to young people. It is an attempt to carve out some strategic direction for the implementation of the Youth Policy. It holds the potential for some advances to be made in relation to young people and the Council's Youth Policy. Whilst committed to the development of strategies to increase the participation rights of young people, the Council recognises a need for young people to share responsibility for ensuring that the relationship is healthy and productive.

The document consists of discussion regarding some important Youth Policy ideas along with the development of accompanying strategies. It documents the Council's role and approach and sets out goals to respond to the needs of young people over the next three years. It consolidates the directions set by the Youth Policy and the experience and knowledge of the Youth Advocate. There are also strategies that will be familiar as many of the strategies are based on programmes or activities currently operating.

The strategies should not be interpreted as an all-inclusive list. There are a number of other areas where further information is needed to assist in developing appropriate responses. This is a working document, which will be developed and built on and refined over time. This document does not contain rigid plans or time frames,

as its aim is to provide guidelines for the Council and staff working to enhance the well being of young people. Not all strategies will be feasible or appropriate for all Units. Strategies should be selected according to needs and resources.

The possibility of realising the outcomes rests with many more variables than any of the strategies developed here. Strategies should be seen in the wider social, political, economic and environmental context.

The Strategy acknowledges that the Council works in partnership with government agencies and non-government agencies. The Council looks forward to continuing to work co-operatively with these agencies and looks forward to increasing youth participation within the Council's decision-making processes.

TARGET

The primary focus identified by the Youth Policy is on people aged 13-25 years.

Young people, 13-25 years, are involved in a series of transitions from puberty to physical adulthood and in many cases parenthood. During this period young people reach various “legal ages” which enable them to legally participate in certain activities and take on increasing responsibilities. For example they obtain the legal right to baby-sit, have a tattoo, vote, drive, work, marry and live independently.

Many young people make these transitions successfully others however experience great difficulty. Many young people experience unemployment, inadequate housing, poor health and feelings of hopelessness.

Young people clearly have special needs during this period of transition, which justify their consideration as a ‘target group’.

The youth population is not a homogeneous group. The Council recognises that the diversity of youth must be considered when developing strategies.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Young people, 13-25 years, comprise 20.94% (64,734) of the city’s population.

Gender

Forty nine percent of 13-15 year olds in Christchurch are female compared to 51% for the city as a whole (1996 data).

Ethnicity

Seventy-five percent of Christchurch young people classified themselves as European, 9.5% as New Zealand Maori and 2.5% as

Pacific Islands people. Seven percent of Christchurch young people classified themselves as Asian.

Income

Most young people with personal income are on fairly limited incomes. Fifty-one percent of young people have personal incomes of less than \$10,000 per annum. Nine percent of these have no personal income. Thirty-five percent are earning between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per annum. Only 4% are earning over \$30,000.

Labour Force Status

Thirty-nine percent of young people aged between 15 and 25 years are employed full time. Another 29% are not in the labour force. Many of these young people are students engaged in secondary and tertiary education. Ten percent are considered unemployed and actively seeking work. Another 20% are employed part time.

Health

Motor vehicle accidents contributed to 40% of young people’s deaths in Christchurch City from 1984 to 1993. Suicides and self-inflicted injuries contributed to 25% of deaths. There was a trend toward increasing youth suicide rates in Christchurch City over the period of 1984 to 1993.

Justice

According to the Police Youth Aid Section Annual Report for 1996-1997 there were a total of 1148 appearances (rather than offenders) in the Youth Court in Christchurch by young offenders. The Youth Aid Section has adopted a policy of identifying recidivist offenders and recommending custodial sentences where appropriate. The Youth Court has been supportive of this policy, resulting in 12 young people being sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from between two months to life imprisonment.

Source: Environmental Policy and Planning Unit, Christchurch City Council

PRINCIPLES

The strategies have been based on the following principles.

Equity

Young people should not be limited by race, cultural background, social background, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, age, physical and intellectual characteristics or economic status. Services and activities should be affordable, accessible and available for all young people.

Some young people will require special provision to enable them to take up opportunities.

Empowerment

The Council works to empower young people so they can exercise choice and be effective in asserting their views and aspirations.

Partnership

There is a wide range of community and government agencies with direct and indirect interests and objectives that are similar to those of the Council. A great deal of productive work already occurs on youth issues in Christchurch. The Council strategy will seek to support and consolidate such efforts.

Co-operation

Initiatives to make Christchurch a better city for young people will be most effective when programmes, activities and services are co-

ordinated and integrated. This requires co-operation across sectors, the sharing of ideas between different regions and countries, and the involvement of the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Treaty of Waitangi

The Treaty of Waitangi provides a constitutional foundation to enable Maori to reach their full social and economic potential. The Council recognises the Treaty of Waitangi and the practices of partnership. It will recognise and respond to the aspirations of all people: Maori and tauwi.

Effectiveness

The Council will seek to use limited resources strategically to ensure maximum impact on delivering positive change for young people. This drives us to select carefully the issues we work on and to specifically target programmes, activities and resources.

Research and Information

The Council produced the Youth Policy Study Document in 1996. The youth sector however is dynamic and constantly changing. It is important that the Council continues to seek accurate up to date information from which to plan initiatives.

CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL YOUTH POLICY

The Christchurch City Council is committed to developing, supporting and promoting initiatives which positively contribute to the safety and wellbeing of young people, their families and communities

Outcomes

The Christchurch City Council will work towards developing a city where:

- Young people's views and contributions to their families and their communities are valued
- Young people are cherished and their diversity is recognised, acknowledged and celebrated
- The views of young people are sought and taken into account in the development of the Council's policies and activities
- Young people have access to the information and resources required to meet their needs in the areas of:
 - Health, safety and wellbeing
 - Physical environment and design
 - Entertainment and recreation
 - Education and training
 - Employment
 - Family.

Scope

All Christchurch people aged 13-25 years, recognising that there are varying needs within this age group.

Roles

In working towards this outcome the Christchurch City Council will have the following roles

- To ensure that the views and needs of young people are taken into account in Council activities
- To advocate on behalf of, and with young people
- To resource, provide and support services for young people in partnership with other agencies where appropriate
- To be a co-ordinator, with the community, of activities which provide for young people

The Council will ensure that the views and needs of young people are taken into account in Council activities

Statements about young people as ‘the wealth of the nation’ and the ‘future of our city’ are common along with promises to invest in them. The reality is that many see young people as a problem group.

Young people generally have a restricted range of experience and skills, lower status in society, lower income and varying levels of responsibility and dependence. The perception of youth as lacking full adult status is used to both describe their position and to reinforce it.

With these things in mind the Youth Policy identified a need to ensure that the views and needs of young people are taken into account in Council activities. This will involve creating opportunities for young people to express their views and concerns to the Council.

There is a need to acknowledge that young people are not a homogenous group. The youth sector is dynamic and constantly changing. There is a diversity of opinion, needs and aspirations.

Given diversity and transitional nature of young people it is important to maintain an active network and regularly seek the viewpoints from a range of young people and provide a number of forums for youth engagement.

Strategies

Suggested one-off and ongoing strategies to ensure that the views and needs of young people are taken into account in Council activities include:

- Facilitating youth opinion and participation in policy development, programme delivery and service evaluation by ensuring young people are targeted in Seeking Community Views initiatives

- Investigating, reporting and making recommendations on matters affecting young people
- Arranging and attending meetings, discussions, seminars and conferences to gauge youth opinion and aspirations
- Fostering good networks with youth agencies and youth groups including undertaking community visits and other liaison activity.
- Involving Maori rangatahi in decision making planning and service delivery
- Involving young people with disabilities in planning and delivery of services and programmes
- Youth Council representation on the Council's Community Services Committee and other Standing Committees as appropriate.
- Including young people on the Council's working parties, planning groups and committees as appropriate
- Developing and supporting forums for deliberation such as the Youth Council and Global Voice Conference

The Council will advocate on behalf of, and with young people

The economy, families, social norms and many other aspects of life have changed markedly over the last 20 years, and are likely to continue to change rapidly in the coming decade. The economy has restructured in ways which have directly impacted on young people: many jobs which once were available to young people no longer exists. The types of families in which young people live, and which young people are now setting up, also differ markedly. Young people have little influence in the decision making process and lack means of voicing their concerns, despite being profoundly affected by social, economic and political conditions.

The Council has appointed a Youth Advocate as a means of ensuring that young people's needs and aspirations are taken into consideration. If the Youth Advocate position is to achieve its objectives the Advocate's credibility and independence must be rigorously protected. This means that the Advocate should not be expected to advocate for the Council as much as advocate for and with young people.

It is important that the Council also advocates at the city, regional and national level to ensure the needs and aspirations of young people are taken into account.

Strategies

The following strategies have been identified as a means to successfully advocate on behalf and with young people:

- Promoting awareness of youth needs and aspirations through press and other media
- Collecting, collating and disseminating information on issues affecting young people
- Issuing regular publications and occasional papers on youth issues
- Advocating for 'safety nets' for young people who are unable to find a place in the socioeconomy
- Encouraging organisations to include young people in decision making processes
- Developing resources which promote a positive image of young people
- Celebrating youth achievements through the development of Youth Awards
- Actively representing young people in situations where there are no young people present.

The Council will resource, provide and support services to young people in partnership with other agencies where appropriate

There is an extensive range of Council programmes and policies that affect young people. The Council is a major provider of facilities and services that contribute towards meeting the well being of young people, their families and communities. There is also a range of government, voluntary sector and private sector activity, which specifically targets young people.

Despite this there are still too many young people who face hardships, poverty and feel powerless about their futures. A mature and caring city cannot shirk the challenge of ensuring that young people are provided with adequate shelter, healthcare and material support and have access to education, recreation, activities and employment.

Services need to be relevant and responsive and appropriate to the needs of young people. Certain sectors of the youth population face substantial barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. Whether it is lack of understanding, restricted access or some personal disadvantage, these difficulties must be first identified and then overcome.

The Council has a key role to play in bringing together central government, other Councils, the community and business sectors and young people to address youth issues and develop integrated strategies.

Strategies

- Providing recreation, leisure and entertainment facilities, programmes and activities
- Resourcing and funding community youth initiatives through the Social Initiatives Fund, the Community Development Fund, Hillary

Commission Funding and Creative NZ Funding administered by the Council

- Identifying special programmes needed for youth or where existing programmes need to be modified or extended
- Providing the youth sector with funding advice
- Monitoring policy and programmes for their effectiveness and impact on young people
- Supporting the co-ordination of youth work
- Initiating projects designed to improve youth opportunities in Christchurch
- Developing strong relationships with Mana whenua and Maata Waka groups
- Supporting and encouraging groups targeting young people from different cultures and backgrounds
- Implementing Road Safety Strategies
- Providing information services, electronic data and education and lifelong learning opportunities through Christchurch libraries
- Providing training, leisure, employment and skill development opportunities in the visual arts
- Developing arts out reach programmes for young people especially disadvantaged young people.

The Council will be a co-ordinator with the community, of activities which provide for young people.

There are many contributing factors which affect the safety and wellbeing of young people, their families and communities including employment and unemployment, poverty, economic disparity, access to education and training, intervention programmes, and the availability of community and social services.

Because of the number of predisposing factors there is no single solution and no one service is likely to meet all the needs of all young people in the city. Therefore several approaches are required. It is therefore appropriate that a number of agencies are involved in providing and supporting youth services and youth initiatives.

The number of agencies involved in the youth sector means that intersectoral collaboration is essential for effective and evident provision of services. The Council must be able to work with and relate to youth, and be accessible to youth and to organisations that work with youth. Strong relationships with other agencies are essential for the success of the Council's objectives. At times the Council will need to take a leadership role to ensure efforts are co-ordinated.

Services provision is not always organised to ensure young people's development proceeds as smoothly as possible. Many of the difficulties faced by young people are compounded if they are from ethnic minorities or are differently abled. Language, cultural factors or physical disabilities should not create stumbling blocks. It is important that activities affecting young people reflect an understanding of diversity and the inequalities faced by people. For instance the issues, needs and aspirations of young people with disabilities, and nga rangatahi Maori.

Council will work to ensure that differences of culture, language, faith or traditions, or a lack of life experience, are not a barrier to participation by young people in the life of the city, or access to services.

Strategies

Strategies which will enable the Council to be a co-ordinator, with the community, of activities which provide for young people include:

- Facilitating a co-ordinated approach to the development of policies and service
- Enhancing our networking and overall relationship management with key non-government organisations and central government agencies
- Working with service providers and government agencies to ensure their services meet the needs of young people
- Assisting agencies with information and community education programmes so they are accessible to young people
- Encouraging organisations to provide accessible, affordable and culturally and age appropriate information and education activities
- Reviewing current policies and services in order to develop services and policies that will provide equitable outcomes for young Maori, young people from ethnic minorities and young people who are differently abled.

CONCLUSION

Christchurch City Council policies indicate a commitment to a city that is a good place to live, and a commitment to plan for the needs of the whole community. Young people are a significant sector of the community (20.94%) and should therefore be seen as a major part of the Council's business.

Young people are often viewed as problems, when in reality they are members of the Council's constituency. Some older youth are already voters, ratepayers and leaders, while the younger youth must be viewed as potential voters, ratepayers and leaders.

It is important for the Council to foster the enthusiasm of young people and to use this for the benefit of the entire community. If the city fails to provide opportunities for its young people their energy, creativity and community participation will be lost, resulting in economic and social costs for Christchurch.

The case for involving and targeting young people in the Council's activities and policy development can be divided into three categories: political, legal and social.

The political rationale for youth participation acknowledges the benefits of involvement such as:

- Improved services
- A strengthening of representative democracy by giving a voice to those unable to vote for political representation

- A raising of awareness within the youth population of political processes
- The creation of an environment where young people have the opportunity to develop the skills to make a positive difference to their city.

The legal rationale for young people's involvement in the Council's activities rests largely on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by the New Zealand government in 1993. The Convention has the status of international law, and grants a range of participation rights to people up to the age of 18 years. The Council is well placed to implement the Convention. The breadth of work carried out by Council units has a significant impact on the day to day life experiences of the city's young people.

The social rationale for young people's involvement in local government centres on young people making up 20.94% of the Christchurch population. This large group within the community should share the same fundamental right to participate. They should not have to argue their case for possessing the same rights as other Christchurch residents.

A city which is attractive to young people, and which involves, values and acknowledges young people creates benefits for the whole community.