

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa - *In Full*

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa places a strong emphasis on how policies and programmes are designed and provided for the betterment of young people.

It is based on the understanding that New Zealand already has a wide range of resources and opportunities available to contribute to supporting young people. The task is to release and apply those resources in a way that gets the greatest results and generates the most opportunities.

The youth development approach can be applied across all of Government's portfolio areas. This Strategy document now forms a policy platform for public sector agencies when developing policy advice and initiatives relating to those aged within the 12 to 24 years inclusive age group. Its holistic nature encourages a strong emphasis on partnerships amongst the groups that contribute to young people's development.

The Strategy uses four elements to apply the positive youth development approach:

- a **VISION** - a statement of what we would like to see happen
- six **PRINCIPLES** - the foundations of the youth development approach
- three **AIMS** - the Strategy's key and overarching directions
- four **GOALS** that can be used as tools across key social environments and government areas.

ACTIONS are also suggested, which link to the aims and goals and can be used in implementing the Strategy or as a checklist.

APPLYING THE APPROACH FOR RANGATAHI - A TREATY-BASED RESTORATIVE PROCESS

The Government has an obligation to support kaupapa Māori approaches in the development of rangatahi.

A positive youth development approach is consistent with a kaupapa Māori approach. A restorative process is required for many young Māori who are disconnected from their whānau, hapū and iwi. The approach needs to support initiatives to reconnect young Māori with their whakapapa links and encourage kaupapa Pakeha (mainstream) institutions to be more responsive to the needs of young Māori. An example of this approach is *Kia Piki Te Ora O Te Taitamariki* - the Māori component of the *New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy*.

“Promote economic development in young Māori families to encourage a good education and get families to motivate and encourage so that they can achieve their hopes and dreams of the future. Let them know they are worth it.”

Eight secondary school students, Kerikeri.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE DIVERSITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The Strategy applies to all young people in New Zealand, in all of their diversity.

The social, economic, cultural and ethnic characteristics that shape this diversity and subsequent opportunities for young people include:

- their gender
- their age
- their ethnic background - Māori, Pacific, European/Pakeha, Asian and other ethnic groups
- their 'connectedness' to their culture (for example, language)
- where they live - urban, rural, provincial
- how they live and who they live with
- how long they and their families, have lived in New Zealand (for example, if they are recent immigrants)
- their fundamental beliefs and values (or world view)
- their religious affiliations and spirituality
- their sexual orientation and identity
- their physical, intellectual or learning ability
- their mental health
- their level of educational achievement
- their socio-economic background
- their lifestyle interests, such as sports, recreation and music
- their dependency on and responsibilities for others
- their paid and unpaid work, including self-employment and family responsibilities.



The Strategy provides for the specific needs that result from this diversity to be considered and applied. Key issues for specific groups of young people are highlighted on pages 40-43.

LINKS TO OTHER YOUTH POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Young people's lives are the subject of many existing policies and strategies. This Strategy deals with the 'big picture' of young people growing up and provides a common platform for all other youth-related policies.

National youth strategies that have either been developed or are being developed and link closely to this Strategy are:

- the Agenda for Children
- the *New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy - In Our Hands* and *Kia Piki Te Ora O Te Taitamariki - Strengthening Youth Wellbeing*
- *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum*
- the Youth Health Action Plan
- the Youth Offending Strategy
- the Care and Protection Blueprint for Children and Young People.

Other related, broader strategies and policy frameworks that have been considered in developing this Strategy and that will add to the ongoing work programme include:

- the *New Zealand Health Strategy*
- the *New Zealand Disability Strategy*
- the *New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy*
- *Inclusive Economy*
- Sustainable Economic Development
- Capacity Building for Māori
- Capacity Building for Pacific peoples.



The Strategy's Vision

A country where young people are vibrant and optimistic through being supported and encouraged to take up challenges.

The Principles of Youth Development

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa is based on a 'positive youth development approach' and a common understanding of what needs to happen for young people.

The youth development approach has six key principles:

1. Youth development is shaped by the 'big picture'.
2. Youth development is about young people being connected.
3. Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach.
4. Youth development happens through quality relationships.
5. Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate.
6. Youth development needs good information.

In combination, these principles contribute to the desired result of positive youth development, where young people gain a:

- sense of contributing something of value to society
- feeling of connectedness to others and to society
- belief that they have choices about their future
- feeling of being positive and comfortable with their own identity.

*"Sometimes we may feel insignificant, and we need to be encouraged to say what we think, speak up and out."
16-year-old female, Stanmore Bay, Whangaporoa.*

A positive youth development approach:

- forms the platform for consistent youth policies and programmes and for improving our ability to achieve better outcomes for all young people
- seeks to foster the ideal environment for young people to learn, grow and contribute, thus supporting them to move into responsible adulthood

- acknowledges individual young people’s evolving capacity to initiate change and the interaction of the wider social and economic factors that either restrict or enable positive outcomes.

1. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS SHAPED BY THE ‘BIG PICTURE’

This principle reflects the fact that wider social and economic contexts and dominant cultural values set the big picture within which young people grow up.

Social and Economic Contexts and Trends

Young people’s experiences - the act of ‘growing up’ - are shaped by wider social and economic contexts, whether they be fluctuating economic situations, wars, family histories, natural disasters or changing political systems. For example, young people entering the labour market in 1991 (at the peak of an economic recession) had a harder time than earlier groups in finding a job and were more likely to experience the related negative effects.

These social and economic contexts and their related institutions and structures provide an historical and current context to life in New Zealand and shape the outcomes for young people.

Cultural Context

All aspects of young people’s lives take place within a cultural context of how things are done, who does them and why.

This context is complex and dynamic, as many influences merge to shape the spheres of young people’s lives. The cultural mix can include ethnic culture, organisational culture (for example, school), and youth sub-cultures.

Treaty of Waitangi

The Treaty of Waitangi is significant in defining us as New Zealanders and in setting out our relationships and responsibilities.

The Treaty maintains the protection of Māori as both tangata whenua and citizens of New Zealand. By recognising Māori rangatiratanga, it supports collective action for Māori to organise themselves and relate to other parts of the community.

This is how Māori maintain their identity and protect and develop themselves - and is essential for rangatahi (young Māori) development. As a mutually benefiting partnership document, the Treaty can help in sharing the strengths between the indigenous (Māori) understandings and the many non-indigenous (Tauīwi) people.

Past Government policies have acted to dislocate many Māori, heavily affecting their communities’ ability to support the healthy development of their young people. This legacy has strong implications for prioritising support for rangatahi development within the general thrust of building the capacity of Māori communities.

International Obligations

As a member of the United Nations, New Zealand supports the human rights provisions of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. New Zealand is also a party to the six core

international human rights instruments. These are:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC).

UNCROC is the principal children’s treaty that encompasses a full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It reaffirms the fact that children, because of their vulnerability, need special care and protection. UNCROC applies to all children and young people up to 18 years and acknowledges the primary role of the family and parents in the care and protection of the child.

There are four general principles enshrined in UNCROC. They express the philosophy it conveys and provide guidance for national programmes of implementation. The key provisions focus on:

- non-discrimination
- best interests of the child
- right to life, survival and development
- views of the child.

UNCROC establishes a new vision of the child and young person. It combines provisions aimed at protecting them through positive action by Government, parents and communities, with the recognition of the child or young person as a holder of participatory rights and freedoms.

Values/Belief Systems

People’s values and beliefs vary. However, they are underpinned by a generic value and belief system that embraces the values of honesty, integrity, respect and compassion.

“You need to reach the young people on a personal basis, come to their level and become familiar with their cultures, lifestyles and everyday lives. Many people live in various different home environments, you need to acknowledge this and cater to everyone’s needs.”
Eight secondary school students, Auckland.

Positive youth development is closely linked to recognising spiritual wellbeing, which encompasses ‘the values and beliefs that determine the way people live, the search for meaning and purpose in life, and personal identity and self-awareness’².

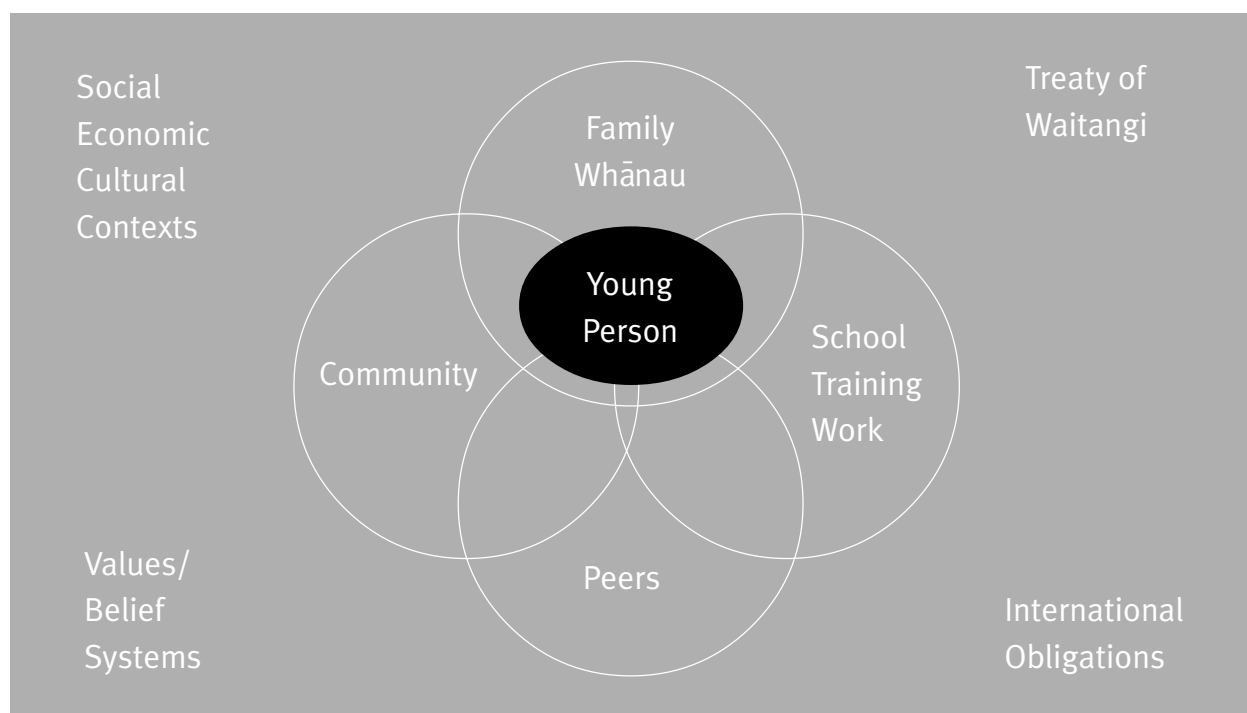
2. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE BEING CONNECTED

This principle acknowledges that healthy development is shaped by young people having positive connections with many social environments.

Positive youth development doesn’t take place in one social environment at one given time. Typically, the more settings where young people feel welcomed, valued and understood, the better.

² *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education, 1998.

Figure 1 The where - the social environments that shape youth development



As Figure 1 shows, the main social environments are:

- the family and whānau (the most significant)
- the community
- the school, university, training institution or workplace
- peers.

For this reason positive youth development is closely linked to healthy families, strong communities, healthy schools and supportive peers. In a Māori context, it is closely linked to strong whānau, hapū and iwi.

Strong connections to these environments can combine to form a supportive web that protects and fosters development. Negative experiences in one environment can be reduced through quality support in others.

Family and Whānau

Warm, accepting family relationships make a difference in the lives of young people, particularly when they are linked with clear limits, age-appropriate consequences and parents taking an interest in where young people are and what they are doing.

The combination of warmth and limits seems to make the difference, whether the family is single parent, two parents, divorced, extended or reconstituted. Parents, and others who act as

parents, are vital and have a big effect on the young people they care for.

Schools/tertiary education/employment

Outside the family, young people spend most of their time in schools and undertaking further education and training. Feeling positive about school and building sound learning skills greatly improves their chances of doing well in other parts of their lives, especially at work.

Teachers can be a big support, particularly for young people who are not getting a lot of support at home. In the shift to an increasingly knowledge-based economy, acquiring a sound educational foundation, including tertiary education, is critical to future wellbeing. Increased competition at all levels has reduced businesses' capacity to absorb lesser-skilled workers.

Work (paid and unpaid) can provide young people with important opportunities to learn skills, make a contribution through social connections and, in paid work, earn money. Young people are increasingly juggling both paid work and educational study. Research shows that those who are unemployed or underemployed, especially for long periods, experience worse mental health than those who are fully employed. Meanwhile, unpaid work, while a source of potential skill development and a significant contribution to many communities, does not earn the status of paid work.

A positive work environment for young people provides:

- contact with adults who are likely to interact in ways that promote social confidence and competence
- opportunities for skill development
- financial rewards that reflect the nature of the work and are equitable with others
- opportunities for interacting with peers in purposeful activities
- a recognition or a belief that the work is of value
- a sense of purpose and achievement.

Community

Communities take many forms, including those related to geography, ethnicity, religion and interests.

Outside school, young people have most contact with their neighbourhoods - an important part of the community setting. The support available within those neighbourhoods, for young people and their parents, can determine whether outcomes are positive. Neighbourhoods that aid positive development often include:

- a safe, crime-free environment
- housing in good repair with no overcrowding
- stable, long-term residents
- adequate educational and recreational facilities
- little local criminal involvement, weapon use, and drug use and sale
- good employment levels
- neighbours and local people who watch out for young people and provide supervision, informal limit setting and support (this can include local businesses and services such as police, church and youth organisations)
- local people who provide work opportunities after school and recreational opportunities.

Peer groups

Healthy relationships among young people with similar experiences or interests are very important for positive development. Within peer groups, young people can gain:

- friendship and support
- role models
- opportunities for leadership
- feedback they can't get from parents or teachers
- a place for developing and expressing autonomy
- opportunities to test decision-making skills in the absence of adults
- a natural setting for talking, negotiating, socialising and exploring future options
- opportunities for leisure.

3. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS BASED ON A CONSISTENT STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

This principle acknowledges that youth development addresses both ‘risk’ and ‘protective’ factors, as well as the range of skills young people need.

A strengths-based approach recognises that both ‘risk’ and ‘protective’ factors are acquired throughout a young person’s development.

- **Risk factors** increase the likelihood of difficulties in life and poor health and wellbeing.
- **Protective factors** enhance life opportunities and promote good health and wellbeing. They can reduce the impact of unavoidable negative events and help young people resist risk-taking behaviours.

It is important to design policies and programmes that both build young people’s capacity to resist risk factors and enhance the protective factors. For example, some young people experience difficulty at some or all stages of their development (and are frequently referred to as ‘at risk’). They can have a range of ‘youth problems’, such as offending behaviour, truancy, unsafe sexual behaviour, self harm, and drug abuse.

Additional help for these young people needs to be consistent with the youth development approach - that is, it needs to avoid defining the young person as ‘the problem’. This entails reducing risk factors while promoting protective factors. Any intervention or treatment, therefore, should help them reconnect with the four social environments, experience caring positive adult role models and provide opportunities to participate in activities around them.

*“Good youth development programmes need to have non-judgmental attitudes and acknowledge the changing structures of our society. Good youth development programmes need to celebrate the achievements of young people ie focus on the good and positive rather than pointing out the negative.”
Five young people, Guides, North Canterbury.*

Effective programmes that address specific youth problems share similar characteristics because of the many common factors that contribute to the problems. A consistent strengths-based approach highlights these common aspects and helps ensure that policies and programmes for young people are effectively co-ordinated across a range of sectors.

The skills young people need for healthy development include:

- social skills - being able to communicate with others, appreciate others’ perspectives, and resolve conflict peaceably
- emotional skills - knowing how to recognise and deal constructively with a range of emotions
- physical skills - being able to cope positively with physical and sexual development and manage fertility effectively
- autonomy skills - understanding how to make decisions, seek advice, live independently and support themselves

- work skills - developing a career, gaining relevant skills and qualifications and managing effectively in the workplace
- intimacy skills - being able to develop and maintain close relationships, both friendships and romantic
- education - having a positive attitude towards education, motivating themselves to study and set and reach educational goals.

COMMON PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Large net of social support from wider family, teachers, school, workplace, church, youth organisations and leaders
- Faith that life has meaning, optimism, aspirations, hopes and plans for the future
- Parenting that combines warmth with clear limits and firm consequences
- Safe, supportive neighbourhoods
- Staying longer at school and achieving well
- Involved in extracurricular activities and having many interests and hobbies
- At least one close friend
- Mainly law-abiding friends with positive interests
- Thinking skills, including problem solving and seeing things from others' perspectives
- Positive social interactions with other people
- Attachment to the community and one's culture
- Meaningful employment.

COMMON RISK FACTORS

- Low self esteem, poor social or coping skills
- Chronic illness, mental health or behaviour or learning problems
- Lack of social support from family, neighbourhood and wider community
- Truancy, academic failure and dropping out of school
- Heavy use of alcohol and other drugs, especially where this is self-medication
- Parenting that is: overly harsh; sets insufficient boundaries; inflexible with regard to changing needs with age; overly permissive; abusive; violent; and neglectful
- Chronic marital conflict, particularly where it is in front of the children, destructive and/or involves violence
- Experiencing divorce while growing up
- Low income in the family
- Multiple problems or disadvantages in the family, including poor accommodation, mental health problems, unemployment, violence, addiction, crime and poverty
- Sexual abuse as well as emotional, physical and verbal abuse, bullying or neglect
- Transience, high mobility.

4. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS THROUGH QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS

This principle acknowledges the importance of supporting and equipping people for successful relationships with young people.

“...letting young people have a voice and making sure that the opinions of everyone are heard and not just ignored but taken into account when decisions are made about our future.”

*Ten secondary school students,
Palmerston North.*

Healthy youth development does not result from rare or special qualities but from the everyday magic of daily interaction amongst individuals, families and communities.

The way that people relate, listen and respond to young people is important and different relationships are more important at different life stages. For example, as young people move into adolescence, relationships with friends and schoolmates become increasingly important and having at least one close friend becomes a protective factor. Other people also start to increase in their significance.

Relationships between young people and their parents are most effective when the parents:

- relate to their children with warmth and acceptance
- set limits on where they may go, what they may do and who they may mix with
- can negotiate and adjust these limits to provide increasing opportunities for young people to make their own decisions.

In all their relationships with adults, young people like:

Young people growing up in difficult family circumstances can find that supportive relationships with ‘other’ people in their lives help them find their feet. These people could be wider family members, such as aunts and grandparents, church and youth leaders, or teachers.

Relationships with parents are continually important, even as young people become more independent.

Effective training in relating with young people can contribute to supporting quality relationships. Specific training is important for:

- the many adults who interact with young people on a personal level (parents, caregivers, siblings, relatives, neighbours)
- adults who work with young people on a professional level (doctors, teachers, police officers).

Training young people in peer communication skills is also a valuable way of supporting healthy friendships and relationships with adults.

- to be treated with respect
- concern
- good listening
- clear limits.

Training in relating to young people can include:

- understanding the changing world of the ‘young person’
- understanding youth culture and sub-cultures
- processes for triggering their participation
- practice at relating to them as equals and partners.

5. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS TRIGGERED WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE FULLY PARTICIPATE

This principle acknowledges the importance of providing opportunities for young people to increase their control of what happens to them and around them, through advice, participation and engagement.

People learn most by doing and reflecting on their doing. Likewise, people build trust through having opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and skills.

We can contribute to young people’s healthy development by creating opportunities for them to influence, solve problems, inform, shape, design and contribute to an activity or idea. Effective participation can lead to more ‘ownership’ of the activity/idea and help ensure that policies, services and programmes meet young people’s needs.

*“The key component of good youth development is trust and having someone to go to, to talk to and someone who will support and understand them.”
16-year-old female, Te Puke.*

‘Involved’ young people build not only their individual capacity but also the community’s capacity to respond to change. Working in effective partnerships with well trained adults, they contribute to community change and are on their way to becoming innovative, flexible and creative citizens and employees.

‘Participation’ has different meanings depending on the communities and social environments to which some children and young people belong. For example, a Māori conceptual framework of participation includes tikanga (cultural practices) and notions of collectivity.

Youth participation has been described as the “involvement of young people in policy and programme development, in having a say about what is done and being involved in decisions about what is done”³. A participatory approach requires an intentional process that progressively grows young people’s capacity to contribute.

UNCROC acknowledges this in its definition of ‘evolving capacities’- “an acknowledgment that children’s development towards independent adulthood must be respected and promoted throughout childhood”⁴. Evolving capacity emphasises the pathway to maturity and supports the argument that once a child has sufficient maturity or understanding, they should be making decisions for themselves.

Effective youth participation is based on the principles of young people:

- being informed
- having an effect on outcomes
- organising themselves
- making decisions or being involved in making decisions
- being involved in follow-up.

It can be promoted under five categories:

- organising - opportunities for planning and organising events
- advocacy - opportunities and training in highlighting an issue to the wider community
- leadership - training opportunities in leadership
- service - opportunities to contribute to the wider community’s wellbeing
- governance - opportunities to share in a group’s decision-making/policy-setting processes.

³ Youth Participation: Concepts and Structures. Ewen, J. In: *Youth Studies Australia*, Spring, 1998.

⁴ *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Hodgkin, R and Newell, P. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Childrens Fund, 1998, p80.

The Strategy's Aims

The three aims provide a medium-term focus for the Strategy.

Aim 1 All young people have opportunities to establish positive connections to their key social environments.

Aim 2 Government policy and practice reflect a positive youth development approach.

Aim 3 All young people have access to a range of youth development opportunities.

The Strategy's Goals

The goals provide a framework for applying the approach to the many settings and organisations that contribute to youth development.

STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

GOAL 1 - Ensuring a consistent strengths-based youth development approach.

This goal is about shifting the collective thinking about young people from a problem-based to a strengths-based approach.

It acknowledges the role of risk and protective factors and promotes a consistent understanding to help develop a more coherent and co-ordinated set of youth policies and programmes.

"I think it is ultimately important to support young people in their decisions and challenges."

A secondary school student, Blenheim.

"Let the adults realise that supporting their youths' decisions whatever it is, is the most important thing they can do, support from your adults really helps and it allows a youth to be an individualist and develop a character."

Eight secondary school students, Auckland.

QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS

GOAL 2 - Developing skilled people to work with young people.

This goal is about valuing the importance of quality relationships with young people. It highlights the need for specific training for adults and young people who work with and live alongside young people.

The goal acknowledges that these people play an essential role in young people's positive development - whether they are parents, grandparents, whānau members, caregivers, neighbours, co-workers or friends, or working with young people as voluntary workers and professionals.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

GOAL 3 - Creating opportunities for young people to actively participate and engage.

Youth participation is about involving young people in having a say in developing, evaluating and reviewing decisions that affect them, their family, schools and tertiary institutions, their community and their country. It is more than just consulting young people.

AN INFORMED APPROACH

GOAL 4 - Building knowledge on youth development through information and research.

This goal includes sharing more and better information on effective programmes and providing more support in youth development research and evaluation. It also includes developing information to educate and inform young people and adults on aspects of youth development and youth participation.

“It is so important to give youth all the opportunities possible so they can develop themselves socially, emotionally and physically to be the best they can be. Support in anything you do is a vital part of carrying something through, there’s nothing like a pat on the back for hard work.”

Eight secondary school students, Auckland.

“Government agencies should consult youths on their policies relating to youths. If the recommendations of youth are accepted, they should be told so, as this will increase future responses.”
Six secondary school students, Auckland.

