

Community Workshop Report

19th April 2003

Introduction

This is a report of a community workshop held on 19 April. One hundred and six people attended the workshop. The report is divided into four sections;

- Current trends
- Desired outcomes
- Critical factors for achieving the desired outcomes
- Barriers to achieving the desired outcomes

1. TRENDS

Workshop participants were asked to identify current social trends. These trends are grouped here under the specific areas they relate to. However, we can also identify some themes which emerged across all areas.

- Workshop participants have identified issues for young people as being of ongoing concern. They noted the difficulties some young people have in school and in gaining employment, and also the continuing demand on youth mental health services.
- The overall ageing of the population was identified as a trend that has implications in many areas of service planning and delivery.
- The increasing pressure on community and voluntary sector groups to meet the demand for their services was another trend. Workshop participants noted that this is due to the pressure of people's lives, as well as factors such as demand for funding and lack of volunteers.
- Trends were identified which relate to the ability of many Christchurch people to attain a reasonable quality of living. Issues around housing, income, training and employment and health were noted as areas where there are increasing pressures.
- The increasingly diverse nature of the Christchurch population itself was identified as a trend which both challenges the ability of the community to forge connections and to support all its members.

1.1 Health

Workshop participants identified several trends that relate to the health of Christchurch people. These are:

- People are living longer and the population is ageing overall. This has implications for health and social service agencies that are unprepared to cope with increasing demands.
- There are concerns about the ability of the current health system to cater for the needs of an increasingly large number of older people.
- A lack of exercise and poor diet is resulting in an increased incidence of obesity and diabetes.
- Youth mental health services are overloaded, and therefore young people with low grade mental illnesses do not always receive the assistance they need. Furthermore, youth mental health issues are not always identified.
- Some services are unable to meet demand. These include child mental health services, and youth residential drug and alcohol services.
- The use of alcohol and drugs is prevalent amongst an increasingly young group of people.
- Addiction to gambling is a growing trend in Christchurch.

1.2 Knowledge and skills

Workshop participants noted the trend towards young people experiencing increasing pressure in the education system. In particular:

- An increasing number of children and young people are being excluded from school.
- Student debt is penalising large numbers of students who are trying to improve their opportunities for employment. Young adults with student debt are unable to negotiate mortgage repayments.

- There is an increasing dependence on foreign fee-paying students. This reflects an under-investment in our academic institutions.

1.3 Safety and security

Trends relating to safety and security were:

- Youth crime is decreasing, but is still at a relatively high level.
- There is an increasing intolerance of young people in the inner city.
- People are becoming more fearful that they will become victims of crime and that their children are not safe on the streets or safe from sexual predators.
- There is an increasing feeling that people cannot trust their neighbours.

1.4 Paid work

Workshop participants noted trends relating to skills, employment and the role of paid work:

- Youth unemployment continues to be very high despite the overall trend towards a lower unemployment rate for the rest of the population.
- Unemployment rates are declining. There is an increasing availability of both low skilled and low income work, as well as high skilled and high income work. Semi-skilled workers, however, still tend to have fewer employment opportunities.
- There is a shortage of qualified trades-people, and few apprenticeship opportunities.
- Some communities are missing out on employment options because of language difficulties and racism. For example, former refugee communities experience difficulties gaining access to employment opportunities.
- How we view 'work' is changing. People no longer expect to have one job or one career, or to work for one employer throughout their working lives.
- There is an increasing trend for people to earn their incomes from multiple jobs. The traditional 40 hour five day week is a thing of the past.

- Overall, households are working in paid employment for more hours per week than in the past.

1.5 Economic standard of living

Trends relating to the economic standard of living include issues around housing, the changing population, income and debt:

- The ageing of the population means that there will be fewer young people supporting an increasing number of older people.
- There is a growing number of people who identify themselves as members of a “sandwich generation”; people who are caring for their grandchildren as well as their own elderly parents.
- A growing number of families and individuals are experiencing the effects of poverty.
- Parents with young children (either parenting alone or together) are increasingly living in poverty.
- The gap between the rich and the poor is widening and, although unemployment is decreasing, people in low income jobs are caught in a poverty trap.
- Increasing expectations about access to material goods and services is placing strain on individuals and families who cannot afford to participate in the mainstream consumer culture.
- The easy availability of credit is encouraging people into debt that they cannot service.
- Student loans are an increasing burden for many people.
- The pool of affordable rental accommodation in Christchurch is decreasing. Rents continue to increase as a consequence of the housing shortage.
- Buying a home is becoming less likely for many people as it is becoming more difficult to save a deposit.
- There is an ongoing need for short term emergency housing in Christchurch.

1.6 Social connectedness

Workshop participants identified many trends relating to social connectedness. In particular, they highlighted issues for the voluntary sector, isolation of some groups, and decreasing levels of participation:

- There is a tendency for some ethnic groups to gravitate to particular suburbs (for example Somali people to Linwood, and Asian people to Avonhead). Some participants indicated concern that this could result in a 'ghettoisation' of some communities.
- Young Asian students attending English language schools in Christchurch do not receive adequate social support.
- Retirement villages and homes are not set up to meet the social service needs of residents.
- There is a decreasing level of participation in community organisations which results in a breakdown of social cohesion. People feel more isolated and less connected to others in the community.
- The increasing reliance on the Internet means that people without access feel cut-off and isolated from the outside world. These are the same people who may already experience isolation for other reasons.
- Many social services focus on individuals rather than on addressing issues within families or the wider community.
- The way that community services are funded encourages fragmentation and duplication. For example, it is easier to get start-up funding than ongoing funding for an existing organisation. There is increasing competition for funding and this means that many services are seriously under resourced.
- The isolation of some groups means that some families are receiving assistance from six or eight agencies that are not communicating with each other.
- Overall, there is a positive trend towards increased co-operation amongst voluntary sector groups.

- Organisations with a preventative focus are finding it increasingly difficult to attract funding.
- Much of the funding to the voluntary sector is driven by the funder's needs rather than the needs of the community.
- Funding compliance costs are increasing. For example, resources are required to account for funding and to comply with increasing occupational health and safety requirements.
- There are fewer volunteers available to do the work in the voluntary sector. More people need to work in full or part-time paid employment and so they have less time available for volunteering. The casualisation of the paid workforce has also impacted upon the availability of volunteers.

1.7 Culture and identity

Trends relating to culture and identity concern the increasingly diverse nature of the Christchurch community, and the needs raised by this change:

- Ethnic diversity in Christchurch is increasing. This is a result of the number of Maori, Pacific peoples, migrants from Asia, and refugee groups from Africa and central Asia.
- There is a growing need for greater tolerance and acceptance from Pakeha members of the community towards other ethnic communities.

1.8 Environment

Environmental trends identified by workshop participants included the demands for public transport and the need to improve the air quality:

- The use of private cars is increasing which results in more demand for parking.
- Public transport alternatives are poor and do not meet current needs.
- There is a growing need to plan appropriately for growth and development in Christchurch. The development of new residential suburbs and commercial

development within residential areas does not meet the social needs of residents.

- Winter smog and the need for clean air are priorities.
- People's health continues to be compromised by the air pollution over Christchurch in winter.
- There is increasing community awareness of the environment and the need for sustainability.

1.9 Sport and recreation

Trends related to sport and recreation focused on the pressure on people's time and changing patterns of diet and exercise:

- Young people are becoming less physically active.
- Changing work patterns are affecting people's ability to play organised sport.
- There is an increase in indoor recreational activities including the tendency of many people to go to shopping malls for relatively passive recreation.

2. DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR CHRISTCHURCH

Workshop participants identified the outcomes they believed were desirable for Christchurch. Themes emerging here included:

- The ability for all people to participate in opportunities whether in employment, education, community activities or sport and recreation.
- The physical environment to be safe and healthy for everyone.
- Services to have adequate resources to be able to respond appropriately to diverse needs.
- Outcomes to be achieved through appropriate collaboration amongst all involved.

2.1 Health

The desirable health outcomes identified by workshop participants concerned support for individuals coping with mental health issues and the wider issues relating to general health care. Specific outcomes identified were:

- Community-wide access to adequate health and dental care.
- More programmes like 'Like Minds Like Mine' that focussed on removing the stigma associated with mental illness.
- A greater emphasis on health promotion and encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own nutrition and exercise.
- Increased participation in activities by older people.
- More community supports in place for people with mental illnesses who have been de-institutionalised.
- Fewer gaming machines in Christchurch.

2.2 Knowledge and Skills

Workshop participants noted the desirability of an education system that is responsive to individual and community needs. In particular, they wanted:

- An education system that is innovative, inspirational, and which values children.
- A school system where all children and young people achieve their potential.
- Education to be delivered through a partnership between the education sector and the wider community.
- Rationalisation of the tertiary sector that as a result of competition has too many overlaps and duplication of courses offered.

2.3 Safety and Security

Workshop participants identified some desired safety and security outcomes. These were:

- Christchurch people feel safe in their homes and on the streets.

- A reduction in the actual crime rate.
- A decrease in the level of fear many people have of crime.
- A closer relationship between the police and the community.

2.4 Paid Work

The desirable outcomes for workshop participants around paid work focused on the need for a skilled workforce and appropriate working conditions. They wanted:

- Every person in Christchurch to have access to paid work and for workers to be paid an adequate 'living wage'.
- The reinstatement of a six day working week, so that no one had to work on Sunday.
- For Christchurch to have an appropriately skilled and educated workforce.
- Diversification of industry to counter the over-emphasis on computer and technology fields.

2.5 Economic Standard of Living

Related to the issues raised about paid work, workshop participants also raised issues about the affordability of housing and other basic needs. They wanted:

- All Christchurch people to live in affordable housing. This would include a range of housing options to suit all needs including the need for short term emergency housing.
- All people to have their basic needs for shelter, employment, education and health services met.

2.6 Social Connectedness

All the workshop participants saw social cohesion as a desirable outcome. In particular, they wanted:

- People to feel that they belonged to, and were able to contribute to the community.
- All citizens to have access to services and facilities in the city.
- No crime, poverty or abuse.
- Local government, central government and the voluntary sector to collaborate. Community projects and events to be nurtured, and higher community participation in these to be encouraged.

2.7 Culture and Identity

Workshop participants wanted:

- Christchurch to be a more inclusive city where all ethnic minorities are welcomed, respected, and have their contribution to the city recognised.
- Diversity to be celebrated.
- Christchurch to value fairness and equity.

2.8 Kaupapa Maori

Workshop participants focused on the role of the Treaty of Waitangi and the desired outcome for Maori. They identified that they wanted:

- Greater recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi including recognition of Maori as Tangata Whenua.
- More emphasis on whanau responsibility.
- A greater proportion of the Maori population gaining skilled employment positions.

2.9 Environment

Workshop participants wanted Christchurch to be a healthy place to live. In particular, for:

- Christchurch to be a clean, healthy place to live.

- Everyone to have access to clean air and pure water.
- Everyone to be able to access the parks and open spaces within the city.
- Fewer cars in the city, and the provision of cycle ways, attractive walkways and efficient public transport.
- No new residential suburbs.
- Sustainable management of Christchurch resources.

2.10 Sport and Recreation

Issues identified by participants focused on participation and responsibility. They were:

- Greater involvement of the community in sports, recreation and the arts.
- More community events that provide opportunities for exercise.
- No one to be excluded from sports and arts facilities on the basis of cost.
- Christchurch people to take greater responsibility for their own health and fitness.

3. CRITICAL FACTORS FOR ACHIEVING DESIRED OUTCOMES

Workshop participants identified three main factors that they considered to be critical in achieving the desired outcomes. These factors were the provision of resources, appropriate planning and having the right people in the right positions.

3.1 Resources

All workshop participants identified the provision of adequate resources to be critical to the achievement of desired outcomes. Most fundamentally, this included funding for essential services such as health, education, and welfare.

However, participants also identified adequate and long-term funding of the voluntary sector as a critical factor. They suggested that this would not require

additional funding, but could instead be achieved through the reallocation of existing resources. They felt funding bodies could allocate funds based on real need with robust evaluation and accountability and auditing processes (while ensuring that this did not mean an increase in compliance costs).

3.2 Planning

Good planning was identified as a critical factor in achieving desired outcomes. Workshop participants suggested that attention could be paid to planning at all levels; central government, local government, and the voluntary and community sector. Consultation and collaboration between these sectors was identified as essential to good planning, as was consultation with clients or consumers of the services.

Participants suggested that planning would need to be evidenced based. That is, they wanted existing research to be used to inform policies and programmes.

Workshop participants identified the following characteristics of good planning that are critical to the achievement of outcomes:

- Root causes are identified.
- Programmes and strategies address root causes not just symptoms.
- It is holistic and accounts for the 'big picture'.
- It includes preventative as well as crisis intervention approaches.
- Good monitoring and evaluation systems are built in.
- Accountability is multi-directional.
- It takes into account initiatives of other departments/agencies and strives for collaborative relationships.
- There is a recognition that 'one size does not fit all'.

3.3 *Right people in the right positions*

Workshop participants identified the importance of having the right people in key positions. This included front-line services as well as leadership positions within central government, local government and the community sector.

4. BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

The barriers to achieving the desired outcomes reflected the critical factors for success. They were a lack of resources, inadequate planning, and having the wrong people in key positions. Participants at the workshop also identified a number of other barriers, which are summarised here as barriers to individuals, families, the community sector, local government and central government.

4.1 *Barriers for individuals*

Workshop participants noted that individuals are often not valued for who they are, but for what they have. Therefore, individuals who cannot contribute to the formal economy (because of unemployment, mental illness, or caring for children) are valued less by our society.

Apathy and self-centredness were identified as barriers to achieving social connectedness in our predominantly individualistic culture. Individuals may also experience isolation and dislocation because of a high level of transience.

4.2 *Barriers for families*

The workshop discussed the barriers many families may experience in achieving desired outcomes due to poverty, poor parenting skills, a lack of knowledge of how to access assistance, and a lack of role models. It was felt that families may experience a sense of shame about their situation and that pride may prevent some families from asking for assistance.

4.3 *Barriers for the community sector*

Workshop participants felt that the fragmentation of the voluntary sector could be a barrier to collaboration and joint projects. They also felt that the Privacy Act discourages the sharing of information.

Lack of resources for the voluntary sector was identified as an important barrier. These resources include money, personnel, skills, knowledge, volunteers, and time.

The lack of ownership of community issues by communities was identified as a barrier to achieving desired outcomes. Related to this, it was also felt that there is a limited voice for agencies that do not receive central government funding.

4.4 *Barriers for Local Government*

The barriers for local government were identified as an apparent lack of integrated planning for the future well being of Christchurch residents. Furthermore, participants felt that territorial behaviour by Christchurch City Council and Environment Canterbury was a barrier to achieving outcomes.

4.5 *Barriers for Central Government/Departments*

The trend for public expectations of health, education and welfare support to always far outstrip available resources was identified as a barrier for central government.

Workshop participants felt that departments tend to work in silos and do not recognise the holistic needs of individuals, families and communities. The lack of ability to cater effectively for some groups, such as women and beneficiaries, was also identified as a barrier.

Participants felt that there needed to be some recognition by government departments that poverty exists in New Zealand, and that the gap between rich and poor is growing.