

Youth Council Research

Thames Coromandel District Council (TCDC)

Discussion paper on Youth Council Development - 1 May 2015

For Marlene Perry - TCDC

Overall thoughts...

While I realise you were after a recommendation around a model for the function of a Youth Council for TCDC the key thought I like to start with is that the relationships/culture that surround the Youth Council by all the parts of a council is the key ingredient in its effectiveness.

The model only provides a practical level of functioning, recruiting, housing and retaining a group of young people to be a 'Youth Council'.

Background

Currently, TCDC has the ability engaged and consult with young people across their region via the Thames-Coromandel Youth Collective, made up of the four 'Youth Forums' from across the district.

The current model operates more like an 'Informally structured or independent youth council' (see appendix 1) and provides the following benefits for young people and council across the district:

- a wide representation of young people's opinions and ideas
- provides great opportunities for young people to participate

TCDC would like to develop a 'Formally structured youth council'

Benefits of formalising a Youth Council for TCDC to enhance the current model would be:

- Strengthen the effectiveness of your council by young people's views being better represented and considered
- Strengthen the validity of any youth consultation information gathered as it would come from a recognised representative group

Ideally the development of a Youth Council by TCDC would be best if it builds on and enhances what is currently in place. The current youth forums and youth collective could act as a conduit to a formalised Youth Council, providing a base for youth engagement in those communities and a wider source of youth consultation for the Youth Council.

The Youth Council can then provide leadership opportunities for those forums and assist in developing engagement in civics for the council.

The current state of Youth Councils across NZ

Currently across NZ there are approximately 44 Youth Councils that are formally integrated in some way around council business and provide a youth perspective to

council. A number of other councils have a mechanism to gain a youth perspective but are not formally integrated.

Broadly speaking there is a number of different examples of how Youth Councils function within those Councils. However, the design of these Youth Council has generally been around what is best fit for the need of the council and what is most pragmatic in each situation.

What I have found

Over the past couple of weeks I have had conversations with my colleagues across NZ and a variety of 'Youth Council Coordinators'.

The following is some feedback that I believe to be relatively consistent from the conversations I have had:

- The formalising of the Youth Council provides good consistency in its ability to deliver for both the council and young people. As people and personalities change, the adopted 'Terms of reference', policies and procedures around these Youth Councils provide a base of consistency.
- The relationships/culture that are developed between the Youth Council, Mayor, CEO, Councillors, support staff and council portfolio leads is critical in the success of the voice of young people having a positive impact for the community and young people within it.
- The structure of the Youth Council and how it integrates with council is important as it needs to be what will best fit for your district from a practical implementation point of view with the resources and support available. However, the culture is more of a determining factor in terms of quality outcomes than structure.
- Having young people sitting on Community Boards appears to be successful if the young person is older and confident. In general these would not be a youth friendly environment and require support to be functional for young people.
- Geographical separation of rural communities is often a barrier for young people to participate. Three strategies seem to be in place for dealing with this: 1) Incentive & reimbursement for attending meetings. 2) Having Youth Council meetings on at similar times as council meetings so young people can car pool with councillors. 3) Centralising/keeping the pool of young people to an area that is more convenient to meet and putting efforts into wider consultation.

Below is a list of Youth Councils that are similar to TCDC in terms of being rural and geographically spread.

All are set up a little bit differently; have an element of how they operate that is good practise and have varying levels youth voice effectiveness.

Please feel free to connect with those coordinators.

Case examples

Gisborne District Youth Council

Gisborne District Youth Council (GDYC) has been formally in place for approximately 6 months. Previously, the council had an 'Informal Youth Council' via the Tairāwhiti Youth Voice, an independent body to council. Its intention is to be advisory group that can make recommendations to Council's committees.

The Youth Council to date has made submissions to the long term plan etc.

Good Practise Example

The council has done a good job at utilising existing policies and supports from the council model and implementing this for its Youth Council. This follows good youth participation principles (See appendix 2). Hence, things like remuneration and reimbursement have been a small incentive for young people to participate and assisted in reducing potential barriers.

Structure

The make-up of the GDYC will be the same as elected members to Council. Hence, the representation of the Youth Councillors mirrors the same wards as the Council and meets every 6 weeks (8 meetings per year).

Council has a policy that access/travel will not be a barrier to participation. Hence, travel costs are reimbursed and a small gratuity of \$120 is paid per meeting to the Youth Councillors.

There are 13 ward members (9 for Gisborne city and one each for Matakaoa/Waipaoa, Uawa/Tāwhiti, Patutahi/Taruheru and Waipaoa) and one chairperson who also act as the Youth Advisor to the Community Development & Services Committee.

The ward seats are for young people who live within that ward in the Gisborne district. The youth councillors selected for the seats are expected to voice the opinions of young people in their ward and to raise the issues of relevance locally. The chairperson is a separate position that oversees the functioning of the GDYC.

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Central Hawkes Bay Youth Council

The Purpose and role of the Youth Council is to strengthen engagement between the Central Hawke's Bay District and young people and build young people's knowledge of Council processes to enable them to participate in the Council's decision-making processes. Also, to build the Council's knowledge of the needs of young people's

positive development and how this can be achieved using a strengths based approach.

Good Practise Example

Youth voice is well integrated within various council managers/staff in work programmes. This culture of working with the Youth Council by staff is well imbedded at a number of levels. While the Youth Council is able to make submissions to 3yr & 10yr plans the real impact has been assisting in the shaping of council work right at the planning stage.

Structure

The CE and a Councillor are the Youth Council advocates. It is a formal Youth Council and is supported by a Youth Council Co-ordinator. Initially the intention was that each councillor supports and mentors youth council members. They meet regularly and could attend meetings and talk to or present any work they have been doing with the council. This was difficult to imbed. The Youth Council is now mainly made up of young people from Waipawa & Waipukurau. The council took some convincing that young people had a role in decision making and ideas for development in the District. But has now come around and now they ensure young people are included in decisions.

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Tasman Youth Council

The Tasman Youth Council helps with decision making and planning around the provision of services and facilities for young people. Young people are supported to have their say and have their views heard informally and through formal submissions to Council.

The Tasman Youth Council are also involved with organising and delivering community events, whereby providing local young people with an opportunity to entertain and be entertained.

Good Practise Example

I have been unable to connect with Paul McConachie from Tasman Council around the effectiveness of their Youth Council model. However, I understand from my South Island colleague that the Youth Council is main engaged in youth events. It has been successful at making submissions to council around projects of interest to young people but this is less common.

Structure

The Tasman Youth Council sits within the Community Development Department. Regular meetings with the Community Development Committee give both parties an opportunity to ask relevant questions and discuss solutions to issues.

There are four regional clusters - Waimea, Motueka, Golden Bay and Murchison. Each cluster carries out projects and initiatives relevant to the needs expressed by young people in their communities.

Each member is offered youth leadership and development opportunities to help them fulfil their role.

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Clutha District Council

The Clutha District Youth Council is made up of two representatives from each of the district's five secondary schools - Blue Mountain College (Tapanui), Catlins Area School (Owaka), Lawrence Area School, South Otago High School (Balclutha), and Tokomairiro High School (Milton) - plus two young people from Telford - A Division of Lincoln University, two young people from the workforce, and two councilors.

Good Practise Example

The integration of the Youth Council as a standing committee on council is well intended and provides a solid platform for the Youth Council to continue in perpetuity and signals good intent from the council for young people.

Structure

The Youth Council is a standing committee of the full Council, which enables its views to be regularly heard at the full Council table.

The Clutha District Youth Council put forward the idea of a mentoring programme between Clutha district councillors and youth councillors. The programme has district councillors offering support, advice and shared ideas to the youth councillors they were paired with.

The mentorships also have youth councillors joining district councillors at local community events and meetings.

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Appendix 1a

Three Primary 'Youth Council Models' that exist in NZ

1) *Formally structured youth councils*

More formally structured youth councils range from a formal decision-making role in a council to having formal aspects in their structure such as a formal selection process. Some youth councils can be considered as more formal because they mirror council processes like meeting procedures, but may not have a formal decision-making role.

Key features of more formal youth councils include:

- being called 'youth councils'
- a focus on formally structured meetings with set agendas, roles and procedures (such as making a motion)
- an adult councillor or Mayor being present
- public meetings being held where young people can attend
- meetings being held in council chambers
- formal positions within the youth council which are either voted or appointed (such as the chair, deputy chair, secretary and treasurer)
- formal selection processes where young people may apply or are elected or nominated within a set timeframe
- terms of reference which have been passed by council.

2) *Informally structured youth councils*

Informally structured youth councils have recently emerged in local government. These youth councils operate in a flexible and casual way.

Key features of informal youth councils include:

- often being called 'youth advisory group' or something other than 'youth council'
- having an original name which young people have come up with
- having stronger youth ownership of the group, such as young people involved in recruiting new members, setting and undertaking projects
- having an open and more informal process for recruiting new members
- a diverse range of young people involved
- young people having more influence in the direction and projects of the youth council
- may or may not have a terms of reference
- flexibility which allows the group's structure and activity to shift each year with changes in membership and new youth leadership.

3) *Independent youth councils*

New Zealand has a few independent youth councils, which have informal or formalised relationships with local government in their area. The independent youth councils may get their administrative support for a non-government organisation or from the council itself.

Many independent youth councils depend on the council for funding, which may have implications for what they can achieve or how they can get their voice in the community. Over the years, some independent youth councils set up by young people have become the youth council for the main council.

Key features of independent youth councils include;

- being established by young people with adults from the community in partnership or support (such as youth workers)
- having an original name which young people have come up with
- youth ownership of the group, it's purpose and activities
- having an open process for recruiting new members
- a diverse range of young people involved
- involvement from young people passionate about taking action on community issues for young people or lobbying for young people
- may or may not have a terms of reference
- may have formal or informal relationships with local government
- may receive funding support from local government.

Appendix 1b

Youth Participation Principles - <http://www.myd.govt.nz/working-with-young-people/youth-participation-in-decision-making/principles-of-youth-participation.html>

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