

Youthtown Voice of NZ Survey

Executive Summary



YOUTHTOWN

Background

In May 2012, Youthtown launched its inaugural nationwide survey of 13-18 year olds: Youthtown Voice of New Zealand. The aim is to give young people a voice on the things that matter most to them.

Point Research prepared a literature scan, held focus groups with young people and consulted a wide range of youth organisations before developing an online questionnaire with a positive youth focus.

Every year the survey will ask young people about:

- How they are going on a range of dimensions associated with positive youth development and wellbeing
- The things that matter most to them
- How they see their future

In addition to these baseline questions, there will be a section with questions that align with the National Youth Week theme. In 2012 this theme was 'Love the Skin you're In'.

Method

The survey was conducted online during Youth Week (May 2012). Participants were sourced primarily through an online panel, Buzzchannel, and via the Youthtown website. A total of 55 open and closed questions were asked, covering:

- Their lives
- Relationships with family, friends and school
- Their thoughts and plans for the future
- Thoughts on the issues that matter most to them

The survey was open for two weeks. It was incentivised with an iPad prize up for grabs for all participants.

Respondents

A total of 804 young people took part. Of these 493 (61%) were from the panel, 254 (32%) from Youthtown, and 43 (5%) from other sources.

The respondents were largely aged 13-18 years.

The 7 C's

Connection

Connection with whānau, family and friends

Young people need positive relationships and caring environments to grow and thrive. They need to feel cared about by their family and connected to their school and need to have caring adults to turn to with their problems and supportive friends with positive values

The most influential protective factor for youth is positive relationships in key settings. This includes connectedness to people at school and their family, having someone in their family they can talk to about their problems and having friends with healthy attitudes towards risky behaviours. This research found that 88% of respondents had supportive friendships and at least one friend that care for them.

Peers have an important role in the healthy development of identity, autonomy, intimacy, sexuality and achievement in teenage years. This research found that 53% think their friends are a good influence on them and 54% think their parents think their friends are a good influence on them

Online communication strengthens existing friendships. This research found that 89% belong to Facebook and most respondents prefer face-to-face catch ups to talk about serious problems but many also use technology to discuss serious issues and hard times.

Research shows that having parents present at key times during the school week fosters positive opportunities for teens. This research found that most (94%) of young people have a parent or adult in their family who they feel really cares for them, 76% had a parent or adult in their family who tells them when they are doing a good job, 89% had a parent or adult in their family who believes they will be a success, 85% had a parent or adult in their family they can look up to. Three-quarters (76%) have a parent or adult in their family who they can talk to and confide in when they are having a difficult time.

Studies of parent- adolescent interactions have shown that the healthiest families allow the young person to develop a sense of autonomy while keeping their emotional bonds connected to the family. This research found that 71% think their relationships with their parents and caregivers are very good, 20% felt they had moderately good relationships with their parents/caregivers and 8% felt they had poor relationships with their parents/caregivers

Conflict between family and young people may increase in early adolescence but studies show that disagreements between youth and their family tends to be over personal day-to-day issues not major values or priorities. This research found that 69% of young people say their family think they have a good relationship with them. One-fifth (21%) described their relationship with their family as being more positive than what they thought their family would and 26% thought that their family would describe their relationship more positively than they do.

Connection with teachers and school

There is a strong link between teacher expectations and the student's performance. Safety at school is an important protective factor; young people who do not feel safe and welcome at school do not do well in school and are less likely to go on to develop supportive relationships to help them thrive. This research found that 65% of young people think their teacher really cares about them, 83% have teachers who tell them when they are doing a good job, 79% believe their teacher thinks they will be a success, 68% they can look up to their teacher and 64% feel inspired by their teacher. A large group also indicated that they did not have this support; 24% felt they could not talk to a teacher at all if they were having a hard time.

Schools have a significant influence in supporting and strengthening protective factors in children, families and communities. Three key factors for developing resilience in children have been identified as caring relationships, high expectations and academic standards and opportunities for participation and contribution. Over half of those (51%) who participated in this survey think their relationships with the teachers at their school are very good, 42% think their relationship with teachers are moderately good and 7% felt they had a poor relationship with the teachers at their school

The climate of a school and the climate of classrooms have a significant impact on young people and their ability to learn and achieve. This research found that one-third think their teachers think they have a very good relationship with them eight per cent, however, think their teachers would see their relationship as poor. Most do not think their teachers see their relationships as positively as they do. Half (50%) described their relationship more positively than they think their teachers would describe their relationship with them and 18% think that their teachers would describe their relationship with youth as more positively than they do.

Connection to other adults

Youth who have poor connections with their parents/caregiver are in need of a caring adult in their life to feel connected to. This research found that nearly three-quarters (74%) of young people indicated they have an adult outside of their family or school who really cares for them, 70% had an adult to tell them when they are doing a good job, 70% had an adult who believes they will be a success, 71% had an adult they can look up to and 67% had an adult who inspires them. Nearly half (48%) do not have this support. Some did not feel they had someone who they could talk to or confide in when they were having a hard time.

Caring and supportive relationships enable us to feel valuable. When young people experience a problem and need support they tend to reach out to a friend, teacher, mentor or family member they feel close to. More than half (54%) of the participants in this survey think their relationships with the other adults in their lives are very good, 38% felt this relationship was moderately good and 8% felt their other adult relationships were poor

Secure attachments to parents/caregivers that develop in early childhood are an important protective factor. If this bond does not form then the young person needs to develop an attachment to a significant other adult in their life. This research found that one in five young people indicated they are more positive about their relationships with other adults than they think adults are about them, 54% think adults have a good relationship with them, and 7% think adults would describe

their relationships as poor. Young people do see things differently. 21% are more positive about their relationships with other adults than they think adults are about them and 19% think that the adults in their lives would describe their relationship more than positively than they do.

Character

It has been found that across all demographic groups that high self-esteem is directly related to parental approval, peer support, and academic success. In this research, three-quarters of respondents scored themselves highly on character measures. 28% say they are a positive example to others and 28% are willing to keep trying to master something. One quarter, however, do not believe they are a positive example to others.

Young people need positive relationships and caring social environments, having supportive friends with positive social values provides an important protective factor. This research found that the character traits most valued in friends were trustworthiness (30%), honesty (22%) and loyalty (16%).

For young people an emotional connection, real humanity and achievement are the most important aspects of the people they look up to and admire. Nearly half (48%) said that they look up to someone famous or well known, musicians (44%), sports people (19%), TV stars (12%), other actors (11%), cultural heroes (5%), family (4%), politicians (4%) and writers/authors (4%). In addition, 19% look up to people who are skilled, 12% look up to success and 11% admire intelligence

Caring and Compassion

Caring and compassion is a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. Most young people in this research scored themselves highly on measures of caring and compassion: 41% said they would help someone if they saw them struggling and 43% said they already help other people.

Contribution

Many young people who took part in this research agree they have a lot to offer the world. Four in 10 (40%) strongly agree that there is a purpose to their life and 45% agreed that youth have a lot to offer the world, however many did not feel that in general society thought that young people had a lot to offer the world.

Young people who regularly engage in volunteerism have been shown to have elevated moral reasoning than their peers, and feel more committed to the betterment of society, and as children were exposed to the disparity or those who are less fortunate than them. This study found high levels of helping out and volunteerism: 85% helped their friends with something within the past month, 94% helped out at home with chores, 57% had the responsibility of helping to look after younger children and 49% volunteered at school in tasks such as peer support and mentoring.

Confidence

High self-esteem is an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy. Self-esteem is enhanced by having the approval of others, especially parents and peers and success at school. In this study, one-third did not score highly on measures of confidence. One-fifth (20%) felt that people did not notice when they are not around and only one-fifth felt that people listen to their opinions.

Competence

Young people who have had opportunities of success in their lives believe in their own ability for continued success. Most young people who took part in this survey believe they are reasonably competent, although nearly one third do not get a chance to use their skills in challenging ways. Further, 29 % like and are good at sport, 11% like and are good at music, 5% like and are good at cooking/baking. Nearly three-quarters (73%) actively belong to a club, sports team, church or religious group or another group, 84% are involved in music, arts, literature, sports or other hobbies, and 82% really enjoy belonging to the groups they are involved with.

Young people want opportunities to do other activities such as sport, music, dance and drama.

Young people identified the main barriers preventing their success as educational, a fear of failing, and a lack of money and jobs.

Culture

Many young people engage in a period of exploration where they want to learn about their culture and ethnic heritage. This process of exploration is linked to increased self-esteem; they develop a sense of personal identity that also includes their ethnic identity. Although two-thirds of young people in this research feel positive about their culture, less than half feel connected to their culture.

Youth Week

Identity

For young people, establishing a sense of identity requires exploration and experimentation to understand who they are and where their future self is going. Most studies suggest that major developments in identity occur in late adolescence. Most young people (80%) in this research feel good about whom they are and the things that make them different from others.

One in ten young people in this research indicated they would like to change their appearance or body image.

Attraction

Other studies have found that that approximately 6% of young males and 13% of young females reported having had same sex attractions, a non-heterosexual orientation, or engaging in same sex activity during adolescence. This research found that around 7% of girls and 11% of boys said that they were attracted to either the same sex or both sexes. Some said that they were not sure, or preferred not to answer. Although the numbers are small, those that acknowledged that they are attracted to people of the same sex or both sexes were slightly less likely to feel good about their sexuality than those attracted to the opposite sex.

Happiness

Adolescence is often characterised as a time of moodiness, storm and stress. Most young people in this research see themselves as happy, with half rating their happiness as "8" or more out of 10. Nine per cent, however, do not see themselves as particularly happy. The two things that make young people happiest are spending time with friends and spending time with family.

Future

Adolescence is the time when young people begin to make important decisions about their place in society, such as their career, and commitments to other people are made. Nearly one-third (32%) of young people in this research strongly agreed they know what job or career they want, however more than half (53%) are concerned about getting a job.

Only 4 out of 10 think they “probably” or “definitely” see their future in New Zealand

What matters

The biggest impact on young people’s lives is where they live and spend most of their time, such as communities, neighbourhoods and schools.

This research found that the biggest challenges that impact on young people’s lives is education (23%) and finances, including debt, student loan and having no money (15%). Similarly, young people identified the biggest issues facing their **immediate world** (e.g. their community, family, friends and school) as finances debt, student loans, and having no money (15%).

They think that the biggest issues facing **New Zealand** are money (12%), the economy (12%) and the environment (8%), and the biggest issues impacting on the **world** are war (15%), environmental issues (10%) and poverty (9%).

Young people want to make the world a better place. They see this happening by us caring more for each other (20%), ending war and violence (12%), caring for the environment (11%) and being more accepting and tolerant (11%).