

**YOUTH PARTICIPATION WITH LOCAL  
COUNCILS**

**A SNAPSHOT OF OFFICER REFLECTIONS  
INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING**

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fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts

## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgments.

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## **Abstract**

The study incorporates work carried out by the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement Project (ARCYE). The ARCYE project is part of the Auckland Sustainable Cities, 'Investing in Child and Youth Development' (ICYD) workstrand which began in 2003 and was completed in June 2006. The researcher interviewed officers of the seven cities and district councils in the Auckland region and the Auckland Regional Council, all of whom had a child and youth focus within their organisation. The interviews examined the drivers for youth participation from a local government perspective. They shared their experiences in engaging youth to participate in Council sponsored or supported initiatives. The objective was to find out what the benefits of youth participation were for Councils and also for the participating youth. The research supports the proposition that for the Auckland region's economic growth to be sustainable, the next generation of leaders, skilled workers, entrepreneurs, educators and parents must be critically involved in today's discourse concerning the region's development. Therein is the rationale for local government to engage young people.

The research posits that the 'whole of government' (central government and local government with community) focus on investing in child and youth development is not random. Rather it is a strategic effort to prepare young people to become responsive to their region's growth and development. The downstream benefits may see engaged youth as a captive audience being open to influence from adults. The value or benefit of including young people in decision-making opportunities therefore needs to be carefully considered within a context of young people's apparent diminished status within society. Youth participation with local councils needs to be real: Young people participating and contributing to the improvement of their communities. As a corollary youth rights within an adult-controlled and managed society requires careful monitoring to minimise the exploitation of young people by adults.

# Chapter 1

*No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.*

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations (2005)

## **Introduction**

This thesis examines 'Youth participation with local councils in the Auckland region: a snapshot of officer reflections involving young people in decision-making opportunities'. The study, focused on the Auckland region, seeks to establish whether youth participation in the region's seven local city and district councils and the Auckland Regional Council serves the purposes of youth, or of the councils, or both. Given that central government has prioritised the Auckland region as the region most suited for sustainable development (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2003:19), the urgency to engage youth in local council participation opportunities warrants examination. While one rationale for youth participation with local councils is that this will assist to meet youth development needs. Another rationale might be argued that youth participation is an important prerequisite for councils to prime the region's youth sector to meet the social and economic growth demands already much apparent in the region.

The benefits of youth participation therefore might accrue to the local councils and central government. It would seem that an engaged and participating youth sector

would be more acquiescent to the ‘whole of government’ (local government, central government, and the community) overtures concerning youth’s contribution to the region’s future economic growth. This might happen by young people gaining necessary knowledge and skills through education and training.

The thesis is set out in five chapters. The introduction summarises important themes and background information. It also provides an insight to sustainable development in the Auckland region, significant linkages from the global setting to the local setting, the Auckland region. The role of local councils and their relationship with central government is inextricably linked to sustainable development, so this is examined in some depth. In order to consider the issues and conclusions presented in this thesis, chapter two, the Literature Review, provides the theoretical framework, which gives evidence for the arguments about the benefits of youth participation with local councils. The focus is on participation and its relationship to youth development, from a global (international) to a national (New Zealand), to a regional (Auckland) context. The third chapter considers the methodological approaches used and the essential elements of the research carried out in 2005 as a by-product of the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project.

The results of the research are presented in Chapter Four. Highlighted through analysis are the various findings from one-on-one interviews and focus groups with local councils’ officers concerning their engagement of young people in council-sponsored or supported participation initiatives. Importantly, the analysis of the

findings will provide what is essentially a snapshot of local councils' officers' experiences. The fifth and final chapter synthesises the preceding chapters to provide a summary of the different arguments presented, with the research findings. Also presented are implications and recommendations for local Councils to consider.

### **Rationale for Sustainable Development**

The global (international) to national (New Zealand) to regional (Auckland) rationale for youth participation in local government decision-making is unavoidably tied to sustainable development. An assessment of sustainable development in New Zealand and its links to youth participation in local councils' decision-making opportunities is provided here to give a chronological time, place and context. This is necessary to set out the environment in which youth participation in the Auckland region can be examined.

The international focus on sustainable development dates back to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 (Stockholm Report, 1972). There, 113 nations represented the beginning of concerted global efforts to deal with environmental problems. The subsequent 'Declaration on the Human Environment' was adopted to "inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment". The General Assembly of the United Nations mandate established the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983 to look ahead at critical environmental and development issues and to propose the means for the global community to address

them. The Commission's definition of 'sustainable development' is, "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (United Nations, 1983).

In 1989, the United Nations made the formal decision to convene the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). In 1990, national interdepartmental commissions and working groups were created to prepare for the conference (preparatory commissions). At the same time, the World Health Organization established a Commission on Health and the Environment. UNCED, also known as the Earth Summit, was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The Rio Earth Summit produced Agenda 21, a global action plan for sustainable development for the 21st century. Agenda 21 endeavoured to address the social, environmental, and economic implications of development. The Agenda also provided strategies and programmes that nations can use to promote responsible and sustainable development of the planet. Underpinning Agenda 21 is the assumption that, "Humanity has reached a critical and defining moment in its history. The social, economic and environmental aspects in terms of sustainability require addressing otherwise we all run the risk of compounding the economic divisions within and between countries that only serve to increase poverty, hunger, sickness and illiteracy" (UNCED, 1992).

The Agenda assumes that it is not too late for nations to work collaboratively to improve the well-being of those who most require assistance. Maurice Strong (Secretary-General of the Conference) in the preamble to Agenda 21 states, "No

nation can achieve this on its own"...and Strong further added that, "Together we can [achieve this], in a global partnership for sustainable development" (United Nations, 1992). A decade later, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) held in Johannesburg, South Africa marked a similar gathering of nations' representatives to re-energise the global commitment for the achievement of sustainable development.

In 2002, the New Zealand Government released the document "The Government's Approach to Sustainable Development". This was followed by the more recent document "Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action" (Department of the Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet, 2003). These two documents complemented two other documents "Monitoring Progress Towards Sustainable Development New Zealand" (Statistics NZ, 2001) and the report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, "Creating Future: Sustainable Development" (2002).

These documents importantly placed New Zealand in a global context and aligned much of what was being discussed at the international level to the local New Zealand setting. The Department of the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet (DPMO&C) provided a way forward for New Zealand in a developing and formalised manner (DPMO&C, 2003). The way forward required that central government and local government adopt a 'whole of government' approach in their engagement with communities. They could develop and implement a programme of action with a

focus on water quality and allocation, energy, sustainable cities and child and youth development (Hobbs, 2003).

The Sustainable Development for New Zealand (SDFNZ): Programme of Action report (DPMO&C, 2003) identified that every New Zealander young or old has a role to play in developing an innovative and productive New Zealand. It further indicated that this could be best achieved through collaborative action for the wellbeing of future generations (Hobbs, 2003:5). The same report documents the direction, thinking and way of working required as being:

- Looking after people.
- Taking the long-term view.
- Taking account of the social, economic, environmental and cultural effects of decisions.
- Encouraging participation and partnerships (DPMO&C, 2003: 6).

For central government to shore up support for its sustainable programme of action for New Zealand, local government, NGOs (Non Government Organisations) and communities all need to play their part (DPMO&C, 2003:6). The catalyst role brokered by the United Nations through their work on sustainable development has proved to be both prophetic and fortuitous. The international community including New Zealand has only in more recent times realised the implications of ageing populations' and unsustainable oil stocks, and the need for nations to employ long-term planning strategies.

The United Nations through the 2002 World Summit in South Africa endeavoured to focus attention on global issues and impacts of such issues as ageing working populations. The examples of reduced work forces, environmental and development issues, poverty, child and maternal mortality have all been mooted by the United Nations for the international community to share research and learnings. The researching benefits those countries that are prepared, through investment planning, to address the deficit areas that they identify. (DPMO&C, 2003:7).

While central government took stock of the international to local context of sustainable development, the revamping of the Local Government Act (2002) provided the necessary linkages to the 2003 SDFNZ report. The concentration on the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of wellbeing catalyzed the course that local and central government and other partners would take if future generations of New Zealanders were to enjoy a sustainable quality of the human environments. Through the Local Government Act (2002) local authorities are encouraged to engage with all sectors of the community; to consult with communities to seek their views on community matters.

The programme of action is central government's modifiable blueprint for how sustainable development in New Zealand might occur. It outlines a number of initiatives that contribute to achieving sustainable development. With the advent of the revamped Local Government Act (2002) and the publishing of the SDFNZ report (2003), some important understandings have proffered partnership between local

government and central government to invest in child and youth development (2003:11). The significance of partnership to investing in child and youth development as stated in the 'Programme of Action' document emphasises that 'rather than being ends in themselves, the partnerships aim to deliver the higher level social, economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes of sustainable development' (2003:11). The different initiatives undertaken in the 'whole of government' approach is significant. They will purportedly provide better understanding about the complexities of investing in child and youth development, and understanding of how the initiatives will contribute to the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of wellbeing.

The anecdotal evidence to date is that the children and young people have been one of the least consulted sectors in New Zealand society. The revamp of the Local Government Act (2002) allows for a simpler interpretation that focuses on collaboration, cooperation and partnership to enable better consultation with young people. In the Local Government and Community Branch (LGCB) working draft document, 'A Guide to Developing Sustainable Communities' (LGCB, 2004:7), the importance of a sustainable development approach is emphasised by the Local Government Act 2002, which requires local authorities to take a sustainable development approach when promoting community outcomes identification, undertaking its business and working with other interested stakeholders.

Both the Local Government Act (2002) and the Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action (2003) can be seen to propel the question of youth participation in local government decision-making. However, there needs to be a significant amount of relationship building between local authorities, central government, NGOs, communities and youth, for youth participation to be meaningful. Central government has taken into account the social, economic, environmental, and cultural consequences of its decisions by considering their long-term implications. It seeks innovative solutions that are mutually reinforcing, rather than accepting that gain in one area will necessarily be achieved at the expense of another. It is using the best information available to support decision making and is addressing risks and uncertainty when making choices (DPMO&C, 2003).

Central government has been working in partnership with local government and other sectors to encourage transparent and participatory processes. It is considering the implications of decisions from a global as well as a New Zealand perspective. Importantly, central government is decoupling economic growth from pressures on the environment, while respecting environmental limits, protecting ecosystems and promoting the integrated management of land, water and living resources (DPMO&C, 2003). Arguably, government is seeking to create a significant working partnership with appropriate Maori authorities. This is to seemingly empower Maori in development decisions that affect them and in turn show that central government is endeavouring to respect human rights, the rule of law and cultural diversity (DPMO&C, 2003:10).

### **Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement Project (ARCYE)**

The focus on the Auckland region as a hub for testing sustainable development initiatives is well-established (DPMO&C, 2003). One such project is the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement Project (ARCYE Report, 2005). This project, originally named the 'Auckland Regional Youth Citizenship Project' undertakes to examine the importance and relevance of engaging young people to participate in local authorities activities.

The seven local authorities of Rodney, North Shore, Auckland, Manukau, Waitakere, Papakura and Franklin, and the Auckland Regional Council, have committed personnel to the ARCYE project. The project which began in 2003 has a three year life-span and will end on the 30 June 2006. The purpose of the project is to present best practice approaches to engaging young people in decision-making opportunities. One aspect of the key outcomes of the project concerns local authorities using the resulting data from demonstration initiatives to share what is learned across the Auckland region and beyond. Another aspect is the key learnings from Council officers with vast experience engaging young people. While the local demonstration initiatives will provide youth input to the project, the opportunity to canvass local authorities' staff about their youth engagement experiences will also prove valuable to the overall project outcomes.

The research brief for the ARCYE project was modified to include a self-reporting survey of best practice child and youth engagement initiatives undertaken by local

authorities. This would inform individual and focus group interviews which would be carried out with local authorities staff that have experience engaging young people in local council activities. The project also complements and contributes to a number of key regional and national initiatives. This includes the implementation of the Local Government Act (2002) by local authorities, assisting the ongoing community outcomes process and the preparation of Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCPs). An example is providing expert advice to the Sustainable Communities Case Study, 'Youth in Community Outcomes' (ARCYE Report, 2005).

The three key demonstration initiatives identified to provide learnings were, "Kids Voting", a programme of citizenship led by Auckland City Council (Auckland City Council, 2002); "Youth in Community Outcomes", a Sustainable Communities case study led by Papakura District Council, and "Citizenship in Schools", a civics and democracy education package for primary and secondary schools, alternative education and training institutions. Waitakere City Council is leading the citizenship project with primary children, while Manukau City Council is leading the citizenship project with secondary schools, alternative education and training institutions. All of the initiatives are based upon a framework of sustainable development that 'increases the knowledge, skills and confidence of young people to participate in processes and decisions that impact on them and provide them with opportunities to be involved' (ARCYE Evaluation Checklist Report, November, 2004:4)

The overall ARCYE project importantly provides children and youth with the opportunity to, 'participate in local and central government decision-making (where there is a social, economic, environmental and cultural element) in a way that is valued and respected, and makes a contribution to themselves and others, now and in the future, and succeeds' (ARCYE Evaluation Checklist Report, 2004:4). Because a high level of economic growth is required so that New Zealanders can enjoy and sustain a relatively good quality of life then all must have a stake in their city and region's community and economic development (Hobbs, 2003:5). This requirement has realised the 'whole of government' approach in which local government and central government in partnership with communities to begin the necessary dialogue required to meet the aims and objects of Sustainable Auckland Cities. Therefore, investing in child and youth development from a central government perspective stems from the belief that New Zealand's options for sustainable development in the 21st century will largely be determined by its population (DPMO&C, 2003:7).

The ARCYE project developed out of 'Investing in Child and Youth Development,' one of four key areas identified as being a major sustainable development issue (DPMO&C, 2003:23). The other three key areas identified in the 'Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action' are Quality and Allocation of Water; Energy and Sustainable Cities. The rationale for 'Investing in Child and Youth Development' relates to young people 'experiencing success and wellbeing...so that they are more likely to be parents who bring up their children to also be successful and productive' (2003:23). The ultimate goal of Investing in

Child and Youth Development is ‘all children and young people have the opportunity to participate, to succeed and to make contributions that benefit themselves and others, now and in the future’ (DPMO&C, 2003: 23).

The collaborative partnership between local and central government is innovative and aspires to a new way of working. While there has been interagency collaboration in the past, the ‘whole of government’ approach is fast becoming more formalised. The sustainable development approach around partnerships is to combine efforts and resources towards common aims; share information and expertise; understand different points of view; make better decisions and create more ‘win-win’ outcomes (DPMO&C, 2003).

As local councils and central government agencies focus on their working relationships and invest their resources in child and youth development, they have had to consider the sustainable development aspects of their endeavours. One definition that has taken stock of youth development with a sustainable development approach is that, ‘sustainable development in the context of child and youth development, is about young people contributing to a sustainable dialogue within their communities, together with their local councils so that their development needs, their communities’ development needs are being met and importantly do not compromise the ability of future generations to consider and meet their own needs’ (ARCYE Report, 2005:12).

## **Youth Imperative**

With a fast growing economy relative to the rest of New Zealand, it is expected that the Auckland region's economic development needs will, to an extent, be met by those young people presently engaged in developing their knowledge and skills. Over 36 % of the total population of New Zealand is aged 0 to 24 (Statistics NZ; June, 2004), significantly down from 1986 when the figure was 42%. However, Manukau City goes against the trend of an ageing New Zealand, with about 43% of its population below the age of 25. Notably, the two largest city councils in the Auckland region, Auckland and Manukau, are also the first and third biggest cities in New Zealand.

While the numbers of children and youth may be growing at present, by 2021 the estimated percentage of the population aged 0 to 24 will have fallen dramatically to around 31% of the total population (Children and Young People: Indicators of Wellbeing in New Zealand; 2005:14). Given that the Auckland region is a genuine testing site for youth participation, it is important to consider who in fact the youth population of the Auckland region is.

Interestingly, the issue of defining 'youth' is a constant frustration, even for those who work in the youth sector. In the Children, Young Persons and their Families legislation (1989), a child is defined as being less than 14 years, while a young person is between 14 and 16 years inclusive. A person aged 17 who is charged with a criminal offence is an adult in both the District and High Courts. However, the

social workers who work with the young persons from 14 to 16 years are *Youth Justice Social Workers*. Given that there are also medical definitions such as adolescents and pop definitions including ‘teenagers’, or ‘teens’, and more recently ‘tweens’, the language is often confusing and unhelpful depending on the context and those involved within it. It is important therefore to define ‘youth’ for the purposes of addressing the different associated terms, which include adolescent, teenager, teen, tweens, child, young person, young adult, rangatahi and taiohi.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines “young people” as people aged 10 to 24 years and also identifies two subgroups within the young people category. These are “adolescents”, who they define as being 10 to 19 years and “youth”, who are defined as being 15 to 24 years old. The United Nations General Assembly has also defined “youth” as being within the 15 and 24 age range. However, the United Nations distinguishes between “teenagers”, who they define as being 13 to 19 years of age, and then use the term “young adults”, who they define as being 20 to 24 years. Given the variable terminology used to define “youth”, alongside other terms that might also refer to “youth” within different contexts, it is important to consider the local New Zealand context and the terminology concerning “youth”.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs (2002) defines youth as those people aged 12 to 24 inclusive. Manukau City Council (Jolley, 1998) in their Policy for Youth Development, and in its later Youth Policy review (Kaihe, 2003) define youth as being between the ages of 10 and 25. The rider Manukau City Council puts on the different

definitions is that it is not intended to supersede those age ranges specified in such documents as, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, First Call for Children and Agenda 21.

The complexity of a single definition of youth is highlighted in Manukau City Council's youth development policy where Tainui Kaumatua has suggested that a person is considered young until they have proved their worth to their whanau, hapu or iwi. This means a young person could be construed as being any age from puberty to the age of 20, 40 years or perhaps even 50 (Simms, M, 1998:p5-6; Jolley, R, 1998:4; Kaihe, 2003). Similarly, Pacific Island nations people within the scope of the Council's policy for youth development 'will determine their definition of who is a young person according to their own traditions and values regarding their ancestral heritage' (Jolley, 1998:4; Kaihe, 2003). This is problematic and is highlighted by Tiatia (1998) in "Caught between Cultures" which studies the identity angst of New Zealand born youth of Pacific Island ancestry by endeavouring to use age as the basis for defining youth.

Tiatia refers throughout her literature to a sample group of youth aged 16 to 25. However, defining youth in a 'Pacific sense' and 'village setting' such as Samoa is not necessarily age-aligned. In the 'village setting' the determining of youth may be more centred on one's marital status, whether a person is at school or has the ability to carry out particular duties for one's family, aiga (extended family) or village; or in the case

of a female, having the first child. In New Zealand, youth is determined largely by the prevailing monoculture.

Because there is some conflict between the traditional and the westernised concepts of what constitutes 'youth' in New Zealand, simply making distinct-age categories to construct 'youth' will always be contentious (CATIE Website, 2005). Whether Maori, or for that matter Pacific Island peoples truly buy in to the government imposed constructs of 'youth', especially within the home and community contexts, requires further research. One example of the importance of carrying out such research would be discussing whether Maori and Pacific Island' young people might be missing out on social and economic opportunities due to their 'youth status' being carried beyond westernised age bands. Institutions such as schools further distinguish youth from other older or younger cohorts.

Invariably, from country to country and within countries, cultural or traditional dictates will test those involved in youth research. The prevailing consideration in the context of this thesis is the setting of New Zealand, and the context of youth acting within what is essentially a westernised civilization that is predominantly the New Zealand European Pakeha society. Therefore for the purposes of this study the broader definition of youth as provided by the Ministry of Youth Affairs (2002) which defines youth as being those people aged from 12 to 24 will be used. The terms 'young people', 'children' and 'young adults' are used to identify who the author is discussing, when reporting on the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project.

## **Participation Imperative**

Youth participation and the value of youth having access to decision-making opportunities has been the topic of examination by numerous experts and is the source for many youth development theoretical perspectives. New Zealand theoretical perspectives include contributions from Keelan, T. (2000); Taylor, N. & Henaghan, M. (1997); Henderson, P. (2000; 2000b); Ministry of Youth Affairs, (2002); Garbarino, J. (2000); Harrington, J; (2002) and Martin; L. (2002). Overseas writers on youth participation and youth access to decision-making opportunities far outweigh the local contributing writers. Writers including Pittman, K. (1993); Willow, C. (1997); Pick, Y. (1999); Cutler, C. & Frost, R. (2001); Shier, H. (2001); Rocha, E. (1997); Brown, J; et al (1999); Marques, C. (1999); Hume, C. and L. Cheng. (1995); Calvert, M., Zeldin, S. & Weisenback, A. (2002); Hallett, B. (1999); Hetzel, S., Watson, S., & Sampson, L. (1992); Roche, J. (1996); Robinson, J. (1997); Hart, R. (1992) and Hart, R., Espinosa, M., Iltus, S., Save the Children (2001) and Lorenzo, R., (1997) offer much to the local New Zealand context in as much as they provide theories and modalities to critique and compare with what is happening at the international setting compared with the Auckland region.

In New Zealand some of the significant literature about youth participation include the “Child and Youth Toolkit” (Ministry of Social Development; Local Government New Zealand, 2004), the Ministry of Youth Development’s “Keepin’ it real” (2004) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs “E Tipu e Rea: Taiohi Maori Development” (2002). These documents provide local authorities’ staff with important key

messages concerning the many and varied ways officers can support youth participation importantly from within a New Zealand context (Ministry of Youth Development, 2004). Given the global and local linkages, as well as the focus on sustainable development the local context is important as it is acknowledged that, ‘although sustainable development has wide international acceptance, it is important that New Zealand develops solutions and approaches that reflect our unique geography, culture and ways of doing things’ (DPMO&C, 2003: 6).

From the Oxford Dictionary (1997:1108) ‘participation’ is ‘the action or fact of partaking, having or forming a part of’. In “The Development Dictionary: a guide to knowledge as power’, Rahnema makes the assertion that participation can be seen as transitive or intransitive; either moral, amoral or immoral; either forced or free; either manipulative or spontaneous’ (1997:116).

Youth participation in local government decision-making requires an examination of the setting and the different environments and drivers for youth to participate with their local councils. While local councils employ aspects of democracy and citizenship in the different initiatives they plan and implement [sometimes together with youth] there is evidence to suggest that the youth input to the initiatives is minimal. However it would be fair to comment that more often than not, the planning and implementation of initiatives is carried out by adults and that often the initiatives are short-term ones due to budget constraints. The three year Local Body Elections cycle to some degree influences the sustainability of projects as new elected members review and prioritise

the programme of works that they wish to support during their three-year term in 'Council'.

While many adults feel that young people should simply concentrate on being young and enjoy their 'childhood', many youth are saying that simply being 'younger' should not be a prohibitive factor in their ability to influence community and local government decision-making (Peteru, 2002:1). Involving youth in local government decision making processes is seen to be a legitimate effort to promote the inclusion of youth in society. There is merit therefore, in looking at how the participation of youth in decision-making processes now might have positive outcomes for everyone, not just for youth or local councils.

Participatory democracy provides a platform in which all people might exercise their rights to participate in decision-making opportunities. Those who exercise their rights as citizens by acquiring political knowledge, finding out about their council, its structure, role and decision-making processes are the minority in the Auckland region. These people use their knowledge in an informed way to become involved in decision-making opportunities at community consultations, by writing letters to the editor, writing submissions to their local council, or even actively participating in a protest march. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while there are few adults who critically participate in democratic citizenship, there are even fewer youth participants. This equates to low voter turnout at local and general elections and

sporadic attendance by both youth and adults at community consultations, with their respective local councils.

The fact that youth do not have a profile at most community and local government decision-making forums is arguably because there is no status in being young, as young people in the main are not perceived as voters, potential voters, or held in such a regard as to compel those in places of authority to take note of them (ARCYE Report, 2005:15). At present, young people effectively remain on the sidelines, on the periphery of social inclusion, surplus to the discourse relating to decision-making. The issues of youth participation therefore take on a much more political and economic focus to examine who in fact benefits from youth participation.

Youth participation in local government decision-making opportunities is timely given the decision of the United Nations to designate the decade of 2005 – 2015 as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ARCYE Report, 2005:6). Also the subsequent near-universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC, 1989) recognises young people’s rights as individuals and respects young people’s dignity. New Zealand ratified UNCROC in 1993 supporting the principle that young people should be entitled to express their views on all matters that affect them and to have those views taken seriously. Article 12 of the Convention makes it clear that, “participation is a substantive right of all children and young people” and that while “democratic participation is not an end in itself; as a procedural right, it represents the means through which youth can take part in and

influence processes, decisions and activities in order to achieve justice, influence outcomes, expose abuses of power and realise their rights”.

Local council officers in the Auckland region who engage youth in decision-making opportunities generally accept that these young people are potentially the region’s future community leaders, business leaders, skilled workers, educators, politicians, parents, and guardians of human environments. However, there are inhibitors to participation by youth in decision-making with local council officers. Costello, Toles, Spielberger and Wynn (2000) point out that just because an organisation provides a level of service to young people, this does not necessarily equate to a youth development approach being adopted by an organisation. While the local councils in the Auckland region provide a high number of sponsored activities for young people, there has been a call for a more focused targeting of programmes for young people that will increase their knowledge about their community, their council, the workings of government and society in general (ARCYE Report, 2005:12). Democracy and citizenship opportunities are mooted in the ARCYE report as being the most effective method of engaging young people in decision-making opportunities (2005:11).

Democracy and citizenship opportunities it is argued provide young people with the tools to gain a critical awareness of their position within society (Ausyouth, 2001). It also assists youth to understand how their individual and collective voices might contribute to the decisions made at the community and local council levels. Youth can develop their capacity to understand how they might become active contributors to

decisions on matters that will have an impact on them. Ausyouth (2001:10) contend that the participation of young people in the decision-making structures of youth development organisations is one of the real challenges to implementing a positive youth development approach. It is therefore imperative for those with a focus on youth development to be vocal in their respective agencies, organisations and groups and to clearly state their focus and how they intend addressing it. Simms (1998:35) in reviewing Manukau City Council's Policy for Youth Development posited that, 'one of the most important and most intangible factors in the successful delivery of services to youth is the attitudes of the adults who work in this area. Youth workers, advisors, and policy makers need, above all, the kind of energy that can only be sustained with institutional support'.

Therefore, the issue of democracy and citizenship opportunities through training and education is an important consideration (Holden & Clough, 1998). The mechanism or process to establishing respectful relationships between youth and adults is very much weighted in favour of adults and whether adults see any value in what young people might contribute. Importantly, if young people are not interested in being involved with adults in the various local council initiatives then this puts the emphasis on adults, who do have the power and authority in society, to consider why this might be. Political correctness and traditional hierarchies, it is argued, contribute to a cultural silence (Freire, 1970) for already marginalised youth in the Auckland region.

The push-pull effects of competing loyalties and raised expectations for many youth, from their family, peers, school, tertiary institutions, training institutions, workplace and cultural dictates within a dominant mono-cultural society, places great demands on youth. While many may try to be acquiescent to gaining an understanding of their place in society, the push-pull tensions presumably act to confuse and sometimes negatively influence decisions that young people make at various times in their youth. Consideration must be given to the meaningful outcomes that have been derived from youth participating in local council-sponsored or supported decision-making opportunities. The methods in which they are engaged to participate in those initiatives are also important as engaging youth with local councils can be tokenistic, manipulative or decorative acts (Hart, 1992). A number of theorists including Arnstein (1969), Hart (1992), Shier (2001), Rocha (1997) and Westhorp (1987) have proposed models or evaluation frameworks that provide criteria for legitimate ways to engage youth actively. These are examined in some detail in Chapter Two.

### **Social and Economic Imperative**

The Auckland region's economic growth to an extent is reliant on an educated, knowledgeable and skilled work force (2003:24). Even in the current climate of successful business activity, there is a marked increase in the business sector's concerns that gaining skilled workers with the knowledge and education to meet future demands may already be too late. The alternative to not having a skilled workforce means increased international competition for them. While other countries may be strategically planning to address the global downturn of skilled

workers through enticement packages, the evidence of the New Zealand government doing the same is less well documented.

A revamp of the skills-based immigration policy might also assist to offset the impact of what will be a reduced global work force beyond 2011. Other factors to consider apart from the cushioning effect of the 'baby blips' and revamped immigration legislation will be the compounding impact of a skills drain (also known as the 'brain drain') of New Zealanders to Australia and to the United Kingdom. While there may be some significance in New Zealanders with much-needed skills going overseas to ply their trade, there needs to be some distinction made between this group of New Zealanders and the cultural norm of New Zealanders regularly completing their 'OE' (overseas experience).

The Government-driven initiative to engage young people in participation opportunities suggests a social and economic rationale pure and simple. This is evidenced in the report 'Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action' (2003:24) where 'positive child and youth development is aligned with the government's strategic goals of economic growth and innovation'. The significance of the statement is emphasised by central government announcing that 'reducing the number of children and young people without foundation skills and qualifications is essential if the future workforce is to have the skills it will need to participate and contribute to the economy' (2003:24).

These statements, in context, make reference to New Zealand's ageing population and what will be a considerably smaller workforce. At present there is an argument that, 'the significant proportion of the future workforce is under-prepared for the demands of the workplace and the knowledge economy'. The Department of the Prime Minister's office and Cabinet go on to state that, 'We must take the opportunity to invest in children and young people because they are the parents, workers and adult citizens of the future. Essentially, skilled workers in sustainable employment are critical for funding the services associated with an ageing population' (DPMO&C, 2003: 23).

The role of local government therefore becomes important as central government in many ways is too removed from local communities. The local district and city councils in the Auckland region have many points of engagement with communities and some councils more than others have strong connections with young people. Central government recognises that they are but one player in a complex equation and must partner with others to influence child and youth development (2003:26).

### **Role of Local Government**

The Local Government Act (2002) provides guidance from which individual councils can draw their interpretation of the Act to serve their respective city or district. The Act importantly speaks clearly about the partnerships with many and varied stakeholders to achieve the aims and objectives of communities. Local Government New Zealand in 'The Local Government Act 2002: An Overview' (2003) defines

sustainable development as being an approach to decision-making, as well as being an ideal outcome. In the Act, the four aspects of wellbeing, the social, economic, environmental and cultural, must be taken into consideration where the future needs of local communities and their wellbeing are considered in consultation with a wide ranging host of community entities (2003:16). There is an emphasis on local authorities to form partnerships with central government, the community, the voluntary sector, Iwi Maori, and the business sector, to develop combined approaches and plans to promote well-being, to all sectors of society. This is markedly similar to that espoused in the central government document 'Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action' (2003).

The purpose of local government in relation to the Local Government Act (2002) and its linkages with the Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action (2003) will provide both clarity and a rationale for a collaborative approach to youth participation. The purpose of local government is a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities, and b) to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future (Local Government Act New Zealand: An Overview, 2003:15). Representative democracy is described as being the governance model under the Local Government Act whereby communities elect people to the governing body of their local authority (such as Councillors) who then on behalf of their communities make decisions as to what will promote community well-being.

The three elements of the governance role for elected members representing the community are setting policy, monitoring and review. Section (12) of the Local Government Act (2002) specifies the powers of local authorities and how these powers are to be used:

- 1) A local authority is a body corporate with perpetual succession.
- 2) For the purpose of performing its role, a local authority has:
  - i. full capacity to carry on or undertake any activity or business, do any act, or enter into any transaction; and
  - ii. For the purposes of paragraph (a), full rights, powers and privileges.
  - iii. Subsection (2) is subject to this Act and any other enactment, and the general law

In the case of Regional Councils (e.g. Auckland Regional Council or ARC) undertaking significant new activities, they must first consult with the respective territorial local authorities (local district or city councils) within their regions to seek their agreement. It is the responsibility of local authorities and regional councils to establish ongoing channels of communication and provide mechanisms for promoting collaboration (Local Government Act, 2002).

In the past the Annual Plan process was the most significant planning tool for council and communities. However, its significance will be lessened by the introduction of the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). The LTCCP has been described as ‘the heart of the new planning framework’...and ‘the key mechanism for local authorities to work with communities’ (Local Government New Zealand, 2003:33).

The Local Government Act requires local authorities to be robust in seeking the views of communities to contribute towards the LTCCP as future district plans and community recreation strategies (as examples), will be coordinated by the LTTCP. While the Annual Plan process was the predominant planning tool for a Council's works schedule for any one financial year, the Annual Plans of local authorities will now be driven by the LTCCP. The Annual Plans will still be carried out, but in reality, they will be little more than a list of activities with a budget assigned to each of the activities (The Local Government Act 2002: An Overview, 2003:27).

### **Conclusion**

First the study is not so much about 'youth' as it is about adult attitudes towards youth. By taking the focus away from 'youth' and focusing instead on local council officers there is an opportunity to provide a different perspective that takes into account those officers' views on engaging youth to become participants in local council sponsored events. Officers have been provided with the opportunity to reflect inwardly on their attitudes, and the attitudes of others who engage youth in activities. This is something of a reversal of the clichéd goldfish bowl analogy where often it is youth who participate in 'lab type' conditions such as youth forums where their behaviours and comments come under the scrutiny of adults (Manukau City Council, 1994)

Importantly, a youth imperative concerns youth and whether they are valued in society and taken seriously for what they have to contribute in decision-making

opportunities. A significant part of the study concerns young people's status within society itself. While it might serve someone's purpose to include youth in decision-making opportunities these initiatives invariably occur in an adult society. If it were an equal society there would not be a requirement for youth to participate; they would participate as of right. While many young people do not yet have the capacity to participate in decision-making environments, there is an important question concerning the fact many adults, mainly Iwi Maori and Pasifika peoples do not participate in local council decision-making opportunities.

Economic growth globally is experiencing the impact of an ageing workforce and a downturn in the number of skilled workers available. Over the next 10 to 20 years there will most likely be competition between countries to attract skilled workers. This means that some countries more so than others will have a more attractive package including incentives to coax workers to their shores. New Zealand as the preferred destination for skilled workers is a concern in light of the impacts this might have on the current generation of young people. Should the young people not find it attractive to be participants, engaged in local council activities, or participants in environments such as education or training to become skilled and knowledgeable, then they may not be engaged at all.

Their [youth] development needs and their community and city needs may not be met. Therefore any strategy to address the real possibility of a downturn in the region's workforce must also consider contingencies to address the different

scenarios that might be played out in future contexts. Participation is not without difficulty and this will be examined in some detail in Chapter Two. The implications regarding sustainable development and youth participation in the same space needs to take into consideration the power relationship between adults and youth. While many adults have the best interests of the young at heart, sometimes the methods resemble smothering and patronising behaviours that only inhibit young people's abilities to become involved.

The possible implications of not engaging young people today to facilitate their understanding of sustainable development is perhaps to consider a future New Zealand workforce dominated by skilled workers from overseas. In contrast to this scenario is the possibility that New Zealand's young people and in particular those in the Auckland region becoming disenchanted with the competitiveness aspects and consider instead the lure of working overseas. Alternatively, they become disenfranchised and perhaps jobless, disconnected to their communities and to New Zealand society. Several themes emerge as being significant relating to examining the thesis topic 'Youth participation with local councils in the Auckland region: a snapshot of officer reflections involving young people in decision-making opportunities'. They are: the complexities of participation; youth and decision-making; rationale for sustainable development; aspects of wellbeing, the social, economic, environmental and cultural imperatives; youth status and positive youth development.

Essentially, the thesis topic requires that any examination consider the benefits that accrue to either the local councils or to youth. There is no disputing central government's prioritising of the Auckland region as being most suited for the purposes of sustainable development as discussed earlier (DPMO&C, 2003:19). Equally, there is no disputing that there is a positive youth development element to youth participation in local council sponsored initiatives. However, there is some dispute over the methodologies applied to engage youth and whether youth are ever fully informed about their participation and the outputs and outcomes associated with their participation.

*The secret message communicated to most young people today by the society around them is that they are not needed that the society will run itself quite nicely until they - at some distant point in the future - will take over the reins. Yet the fact is that the society is not running itself nicely... because the rest of us need all the energy, brains, imagination and talent that young people can bring to bear down on our difficulties. For society to attempt to solve its desperate problems without the full participation of even very young people is imbecile.*  
Alvin Toffler (2005)

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature review**

#### **Background**

This chapter reviews the literature on the complexities of participation. This is imperative to understand whether youth participation with local councils is a free and moral activity. The different models of youth participation as posed by Hart (1992), Shier (2001), Westhorp (1987) and Rocha (1997) are examined along with the literature on participation generally to consider whether youth participating in local authorities decision-making has integrity and also if the activities outcomes are transparent and known to youth well in advance of their participation.

Youth and their capacity to provide meaningful input to decision-making has been scrutinised in light of what is being described as the ‘diminished status of youth within society’ (ARCYE Report, 2005:5). Finally an examination of positive youth development and youth as democratic citizens has been carried out to find out whether positive youth development as a process and citizenship as an outcome might provide answers to youth participation in decision-making. An analysis of the above endeavours will synthesise the different arguments to provide a better understanding of the thesis topic.

It is important that in the context of reviewing the literature that a local perspective is considered. Simply adapting and adopting what is found to work in the United

Kingdom, for example, does not necessarily equate to a successful transition to the local setting. As presented in Chapter one, the document ‘Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action’ (SDFNZ) asks New Zealanders to consider the uniqueness of their own lived experiences in New Zealand and to provide initiatives that are home-grown (2003:6). While adopting the iconic ‘number 8 fencing wire’ analogy is perhaps too capricious, there can be no doubting the ingenuity of New Zealanders who have provided creative and innovative solutions to issues from within New Zealand.

At a government level the state has a stake in ensuring that participation by all people including young people occurs (Rahnema, 1997). Part of this rationale lies with the economy of scales that can be used by willing youth as partners in government sponsored and supported projects. Any notion of a threat to a government’s agenda for participation is quickly dismissed by government because they have learned to control the risks inherent in possible ‘unruly abuses’ of participation (Rahnema, 1997:118). In this respect an examination of participation itself alongside development in a youth context will reveal any inconsistencies with central government and local government investing in child and youth development in the Auckland region.

### **Participation: A Global to Local Rationale**

*To understand the many dimensions of participation, one needs to enquire seriously into all its roots and ramifications, these going deep into the heart of human relationships and the socio-cultural realities conditioning them. Rahnema (1992)*

Participation and participatory processes in a historical context, as it relates to development, provides a context to show how participation has influenced whole nations and societies at both the macro and micro levels. The words ‘participation’ and ‘participatory’ in the social, economic and environmental contexts appeared for the first time in the development jargon during the 1950s (Rahnema, 1992). Development projects and initiatives during that period, especially in third-world countries were failing. Experts from international aid organisations theorised that ‘development projects foundered because people were left out’. This suggested that, ‘if people at the local level were involved and active participants in the projects, that much more could be achieved with much less, even in sheer financial terms’ (Rahnema, 1997:116).

Many activists of the day argued against a top-down strategy (development from above) and offered in its place a strategy of action that incorporated participation and those participatory methods of interaction in a bottom up or development from below framework. This way, the development processes relating to a development’s design, formulation and implementation would be a shared process with better outcomes for those involved. Importantly, those affected communities would be included to establish the preconditions for the social, economic and environmental ‘take-off’ of the development (Moon, 2002:10). Seemingly the economic saving by including communities of interest provided developers with strong evidence of helping populations to help themselves; a powerful argument in their lobbying for greater development funds. Even the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council of the United

Nations) recommended to member nations that they should “adopt participation as a basic policy measure in national development strategies’ (Rahnema, 1997:117).

As Rahnema states: “participation is a most accepted concept which even very repressive regimes in the ‘third world’ such as the ones led by Pinochet and Mobutu who have promoted participation as one of their objectives”. In more recent times the Mugabe administration in Zimbabwe has come under scrutiny for its incongruent words and actions highlighted by President Mugabe’s address to a special meeting on the United Nations Special Assembly on Children (Mugabe, 2002). Participation of youth in Zimbabwe, it has been argued, has come to represent something akin to Hitler’s youth during the Second World War. Youth are indoctrinated into the service of the government through citizenship and democracy training. The outcome, though, sees these youth carrying out abuses against their own people to serve the purposes of the Mugabe regime (Mandondo, 2005).

Funding is a concern at the global and local levels. In a developing country and in the local development of a community, funding for activities of a developmental nature and scope requires trade-offs. In the global and third world sense the trade-off might be the selling of important resources like oil, land or minerals. At the community level it is the external agency such as a local council who might help with a community’s development, the trade-off being localised community gains against strategic roading systems or industry which are mooted as being for the greater good of the wider city. The community may be strategically targeted for an economic take-off in which their

participation is a necessary requirement and in which the community is perceived as a willing partner (Moon, 2002:10). The trade-off might mean a more knowledgeable and educated community, to meet the growing demands of industry. However, against this there would inevitably be a decline for some in terms of their traditional or cultural norms; their selling off or letting go of their cultural icons.

Participation plays a huge role in catalyzing how people deal with external agencies and organisations. This has similar implications as detailed in Freire's (1970) statements of the opposing relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed. This might be seen at the global level where the amount of foreign funding directly reflects the degree by which recipient countries are prepared to 'participate' in the global needs and efforts of their developed partners. The result is one in which even the most impoverished and developing nation acquires sophisticated systems of control over their populations. This means that anything and everything that people do in their daily lives is potentially known by or linked to someone in government.

The role of local authorities in the Auckland region can therefore be scrutinised by examining the role of their officers who might be based at the community level. Local authorities officers based within a community might be the ears and eyes for their respective councils, effectively positioned to signal potential difficulties from 'their community' and therefore act as an early warning device. Contrastingly, officers might be perceived by the local community as advocates for community concerns. Significantly, the role and responsibilities of an officer is paid for by the local council

and philosophical arguments aside, the officer is contracted to deliver outcomes as determined by their employer.

So, effectively government can be everywhere and can use any means at their disposal to control and catalyse dependency on them from the masses, using democracy and participation as a means to achieve this. In such a context, participation is seen to be a tool easily transformed from a meaningful social, economic, environmental and cultural tool, into a manipulative tool that controls whole populations (Rahnema, 1992:118). A 'whole of government' approach to a community's development therefore, requires careful consideration as to what this in fact means. Stiglitz (1999: 100) offers 'context' as a moot point by arguing that participation can be a useful tool to engender sustainability. He gives the example of water projects in which there has been community participation. He suggests that there is a more likely chance a project will be successful because participation will help support the kind of long-term maintenance that is required to keep the water project effective.

Third-world development projects such as the water example can be seen to be enhanced by participation. Historically, the more developed a country becomes through increased technologies the more people seemingly become addicted to modern technologies and thus to the development policies that provide people with increased well-being. Once people are made dependent on modern services, their participation in public activities and policy-making decisions is mostly used to secure general support for the same needs and services (Rahnema, 1997). The scenario of third-world

development has lessons for youth participation in the Auckland region. The myth therefore of participatory contexts where people can have a say continues to receive popular support only because they perpetuate the illusion that some day similar advantages will be extended to all (Rahnema, 1997:116).

Youth participation by its very nature might be construed as being more an ideal than the reality. The paper 'Talking about Youth Participation, When, Where and Why' provokes questions about the reality of young people participating in citizenship type activities. The authors Calvert, Zeldin and Weisenbach (2002) pose the questions: "Are youth truly empowered?", "Do they want to be?" and, "Are they capable?" The challenge made is in direct response to what they identify as less than rigorous research in the area of youth participation. Participation according to Stiglitz (1999:103) can create a sense of community and be viewed as positive, negative, manipulative and spontaneous all at the same time. He states, "If individuals believe that they have had a meaningful participation in the decisions that are affecting them they will be more willing to accept changes, even if they are adversely affected."

Conversely, Stiglitz adds, "but if they believe those changes have been imposed on them by outsiders who have not taken their concerns into account, then resentment is more likely to mount and lead to socially destructive outcomes". Hart (1992:5) refers to participation as the 'process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives". This viewpoint is reiterated by UNICEF whose statement on participation is "the fundamental right of citizenship

and the means by which democracies should be measured” (Hodgkin and Newell, 1998). Keelan (2000) describes participation as ‘something of a buzzword of development. It implies being actively part of something’, while Moon (2001) agrees with Rahnema’s definition of participation (1992); as having four basic characteristics, firstly it should have a moral aspect; ideally it is a free activity; it should be guided and finally it is goal orientated.

Understanding these characteristics and how they might be applied to the context of youth participation in activities that contribute to local government decision-making opportunities is open to interpretation. One interpretation might be that the moral aspect has to do with an equitable voice on improvements or benefits to youth. Free activity might assume that there is no coercion or pressure brought to bear on young people to participate in an activity: youth participate because of the benefits available or because they have a real interest. The initiative must be guided and therefore it is something that does not necessarily happen impulsively or by chance; there is a plan and young people have been engaged to develop the plan, possibly alongside adult mentors. The young people who participate do so because the initiative does have a goal, with a plan, and the youth are sufficiently informed about the goal, as are all other participants involved in the initiative.

Importantly, the above examples are interpretive and require examination alongside the different models of participation put forward by Hart (1992), Shier (2001), Westthorp (1987) and Rocha (1997). The definitive characteristics of participation

from Rahnema (1992) can in turn provide a base tool for examining the different models of participation. The argument that youth can participate without knowing what the goal is and that the lack of not knowing may not be harmful, while basically true, is contentious. There needs to be a moral obligation, a principled approach to working alongside young people that is honest and transparent. Withholding information from young people who would understand the links between what they were involved in and a greater goal implies the use of deception, especially if the greater goal is known to the initiator of the participatory activity.

If the interpreted characteristics of youth participation were applied to young people in the Auckland region being actively involved in a local government sponsored or supported initiative, some of the participation opportunities might include but not be limited to being part of a community consultation that feeds into local and central government decision-making. These might include: youth focus groups, demographic representation of a particular town / city; supporting a particular political view through voting at an election; being a youth candidate in a local government election, or; being a youth candidate in the general election; being an active decision-making partner in a youth-focused project that promotes participatory democracy; writing a submission to a territorial local authority or to central government; completing a survey on the merits of a local council facility; being involved in community volunteerism, such as beautification projects relating to one's town, city or region; being part of a Youth Advisory Group planning a youth event such as a 'Youth Forum on Sustainable Environments', or Community Outcomes Process; being part of a youth entity,

partnering with a local authority planner to provide a youth perspective as to how a youth strategy, policy, plan or action plan might be designed with youth; presenting in person a submission to a territorial local authority Annual Plan Committee.

In fact, many young people find alternative pathways to those listed above to engage with their local Council. While participation in a youth council or being involved in a community consultation may be democracy and citizenship-type activities in practice, other endeavours such as painting out graffiti, clearing stagnant waterways or planting out hillsides might provide young people with the beginnings of becoming a democratic citizen. The community volunteering initiatives can be a catalyst for young people to write letters to the editor, or write or present in person submissions to their local council about sustaining the human environments. The significant point is that active participation commits a young person to find out more about an issue so that they are informed and better equipped to address the issue.

One of the positive aspects of participation and participatory processes is that they can be a solution in the context of changing conflict into negotiated losses or making development assistance more effective (da Cunha and Junho Pena, 1997:109). Mostly, da Cunha and Junho Pena argue that participation works best for groups that are already able to help themselves. They state that: 'Participation is as much a problem as it is a solution, as much a goal as it is an instrument. It is a problem when it is disorderly and it is a big problem if it is assumed to be a substitute for democratic representation'. "Modern jargon" Rahnema (1992:116)

argues, “uses stereotype words like children use Lego toy pieces”. Rahnema uses the example of Lego toy pieces as an example of how words can be fitted arbitrarily to one another and thus support the most whimsical notions. In effect Rahnema is stating that these constructions have no content but do serve a purpose. They are separate from any context and therefore suited ideally for manipulation purposes (1992:116).

True participation, it has been argued, comprises enhanced communications, knowledge exchange, decision-making, education and agreed-upon courses of action, all seemingly geared to the empowerment of people (Human Resources Canada, 2000). While empowerment is about building capacities in people to act on their own or as a collective, empowerment is also a tool for governments to manufacture outcomes that align to their particular policies and strategies. This is indicative of development projects, activities and initiatives sponsored by governments around the globe. Da Cunha and Junho Pena present a view that if ‘A’ considers it essential for ‘B’ to be empowered, ‘A’ assumes not only that ‘B’ has no power – or does not have the right kind of power – but also that ‘A’ has the secret formula of a power which ‘B’ has to be initiated into. They argue that within the current participation ideology, this formula is nothing but a revised version of state power; an assumption that people, their communities, supports and networks – formal or informal – do not have the mechanisms in place to take care of or to protect themselves (1997:123).

A further argument offered is that where local government engagement with people at the community level is concerned, there are, arguably, two desirable outcomes. One is democracy itself and the second is better targeted and more efficiently delivered public services. Da Cunha and Junho Pena (1997) posit that: 'There is a strong demand for participatory and community based development programmes not because they promote democracy...the attraction is their capacity to achieve redistribution with incremental localised gains. In the context of a specific project, participation can be used to interpret demands and produce a better match between project outputs and local wants; it can be used to align the distribution of benefits and costs with the needs and aspirations of the community'.

### **Evaluating (Models of) Youth Participation**

While there is no local model for evaluating or measuring participation or participatory processes between local councils and young people there are models from the international arena that provide a structure in which to consider its merits. Several models have over the years been considered by those interested in youth participation. Arnstein (1969) developed a theory of people participation that included eight levels to show the degree of control that people have in an activity or project. Arnstein's theory later became a ladder, a symbol for others to add or subtract different 'rungs of measurement' to. Guijt and van Velduizen (1998) created models of participation to emphasise the different goals, purposes and methods to measuring the autonomy of people's participation. Perhaps the most widely known participation model in New Zealand that relates specifically to young people has been Hart's ladder (1992), a

ladder of participation and empowerment for youth. Others who have created a framework in which to consider and evaluate the key elements of youth participation include Shier (2001), Westhorp (1987), and Rocha (1997).

The Ministry of Youth Development in its youth participation booklet “Keepin’ it real” (2002:14; 15) promotes ‘Hart’s Ladder’ as a guide for planners and practitioners alike to refer to when engaging with youth. Keelan (2000) used Hart’s Ladder in her ground breaking work ‘E Tipu E Rea’: Maori Youth Development’. Hart’s Ladder comprises eight rungs. The first three rungs are examples of exploitation of youth through manipulation (rung 1), decoration (rung 2) and tokenism (rung 3). The succeeding rungs 4 to 8 are degrees of youth participation that Hart identifies as legitimate ‘participation’. These are assigned but informed (rung 4), consulted and informed (rung 5), adult initiated, shared decisions with young people (rung 6), youth initiated and directed (rung 7) and youth initiated, shared decisions with adults (rung 8). Hart (1992:12) did warn against using the model as a measurement of participation. He asserted that an unfortunate aspect of the ladder’s use was people believing that in order to achieve best practice youth participation that they should always be aiming for the top rung on the ladder; that this was not the aim of designing the model.

In contrast, the six stages of Westhorp’s participation continuum (1987) provides a base model from which questions might be asked about what stage of the continuum participation together with young people is. At each stage on the continuum:

Stage 1. Ad hoc input;

Stage 2. Structured consultation

Stage 3. Influence

Stage 4. Delegation

Stage 5. Negotiation

Stage 6. Control

Questions are asked to ensure genuine participation is occurring. The difficulty with the model is that the continuum does little to simplify for planner or practitioner alike the issue of power and control. If anything the model, besides being dated, simply outlines several options to consider, whereas Hart's ladder does give a simple explanation as to where youth participation might be situated.

Perhaps then, the model provided by Shier (2001) which comprises five levels of participation provides an alternative to Hart's Ladder. In Shier's pathways to participation different levels represent the degrees of commitment by individuals to empower young people. Shier endeavoured to provide a context where the three stages of commitment could be identified through three options at each of the different levels; these being openings, opportunities and obligations. At each level the adult initiator is asked about their commitment to empowerment such as, 'are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?' The model is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, but is applicable to older cohorts in the sense that there is the stated implication that adults do in fact hold power and in terms of empowerment there needs to be a 'letting go and sharing of that power'. Though

this is implicit in the other models, Shier is explicit in stating where in fact the power lies and planners and practitioners alike are required to note that young people need to be informed from the outset the rationale for their participation and realistically what their participation might achieve.

Arguably the most dynamic of the different modalities in terms of young people being critically engaged in the political sense is Rocha's model (1997). Her approach to empowering youth through their involvement at an individual level through to the community involvement level is to bring about participation at the political level. This is modelled on the different categories of power, where they exist and why they exist. Rocha uses the term "empowerment", and when she designed the ladder Rocha considered where she thought the changes occurred on a continuum of individual rungs of empowerment. This would help to measure not only the progress of the individual at any stage, but also the integrity of the initiative that the young person was engaged in. As the individual grasps the understanding of power and of being empowered they then move to another level of empowerment to finally engage with others on the political empowerment rung.

In Rocha's model, activities are not 'evaluatively arranged along an axis that characterizes one as less beneficial and one as more beneficial. They are arranged on the ladder based on the intended locus of their outcomes: from individual to community empowerment' (Rocha, 1997:34). From an individual's involvement to their empowerment (Rung 1; Atomistic Individual Empowerment), to a consolidation

of that empowerment (Rung 2; Embedded individual empowerment), the individual begins to become conscientised (Rung 3; Mediated empowerment) and socio-politically empowered (Rung 4). Having the means necessary to effect the political environment through a range of activities allows the individual to be fully engaged and politically empowered (Rung 5) to become part of a community's struggle.

In terms of the New Zealand setting and youth participation all of the models reflect an adult imposed logic that in itself leads to maintaining adult power that supports the institutions of adult created authority. Youth and adults are intertwined in a struggle to equalise the power relations and control exerted by adults over young people. The models all act to guide and provide a rationale for their existence based on the premise that we live in a world where unequal relations are the norm. In the context of participation and especially youth participation an argument becomes apparent concerning the power and authority elitism that comes with being an adult compared to that of being a young person. This requires examination so that the notion of youth participation is not simply an ideal.

Whether the modalities apply or not, there is the context in which the control mechanisms for decision-making are heavily weighted in favour of the status quo, adult power and youth powerlessness. This in effect shows that regardless of the engagement with young people in democracy and citizenship-type activities, ultimately adults have the final say. Thus it is reasonable to argue that critical youth

participation and participation in general does appear to be more the ideal than the reality.

### **Diminished Status of Youth in Society**

Many theorists and commentators on youth development point to the stereotyping of young people as one of the critical issues (Males, 1994; 1999; Moore and Richardson, 1999:11; Rankin, 2001; Astroth, (1993); Peteru, 2001). The diminished status of youth is an example alongside a negative framing of their impulsiveness through at-risk behaviours is ammunition for the media to create a 'moral panic'. There may well be more deep-seated social issues including long waiting lists for surgery in the health system, poverty, domestic violence, or even an out-of-control Police force, yet youth have always been at the mercy of the media, governments and businesses.

Bessant and Hil (1997:13) state that: 'the political powerlessness of young people, combined with their propensity for engaging in behaviour which is visible and so easily sensationalised, assists the media in creating a 'newsworthy story'. They add that, 'the concept of the moral panic is based on the notion that societal outrage or concern can be directed against certain groups in society through representation of negative images of them in the media'. It is a moot point that while young people of today are bombarded with damning stereotypes of themselves from the older generations, young people still wish to have positive relationships with those same older people (Peteru, 2002).

A case for unequal power relations in society is posited based on an argument that the origin of modern liberal democracy rests on a disturbing assumption that, “the elite compete to rule but voters remain apathetic” (da Cunha and Junho Pena, 1997). This, they posit, stems from what Macpherson (1977) describes in his examination of modern European history “that only when the ruling classes were convinced that there was no threat from the poor to their rule were the poor then given the right to vote”. The literature relating to governments aiding the participation of young people at both the local and national level is perhaps representative of Macpherson’s understanding of the different power dynamics operating. Arguably, governments no longer see a threat from the youth sector now that there are sufficient adult-managed mechanisms in place should youth become too politically empowered or unruly. So, while the example of young people engaging with local councils to participate in decision-making activities might appear simplistic, participation has not always meant fair and equitable distribution of resources to all people in society; nor does participation necessarily equate to democratic choice or radical outcomes for youth.

The discourse concerning unequal power relations between adults and youth needs to be tempered with the fact that unequal power relations also exist between adults, between the genders and between cultures. It is not a new concept. Unequal power relations are not solely the domain of youth. Freire (1970) asserts that until people are educated about what is happening in their marginalised and oppressed condition only then can they begin the process to resist and become empowered. The flip side to there being no mechanism for young people to voice their views, only serves to

marginalise young people further and thus magnify not just the unequal relations between the age groups, but perhaps human rights for all.

Young people's status within society can act as a social barometer in terms of measuring whether people's concerns are being voiced and, more importantly, whether society is inclusive and accepting (Peteru, 2002). The effects of young people not being listened to and not being sufficiently valued in their communities arguably results in negative social milieus that inevitably breed both apathy and anger towards authority. In the article "Public Participation in Regional Economic Development" (2001) the term 'people' is presented to be inclusive of young people, who it is noted "have been ignored as having too little to contribute". Similar descriptions of women and ethnic minorities as being excluded from participatory contexts shows the deep-seated discriminatory practices that are applied to youth, women and ethnic minorities in broad based settings the world over (Public Participation in Regional Economic Development, 2001:118).

There is also an argument that the international experience as it pertains to youth, women and ethnic minorities mirrors the experience of those same groupings within the New Zealand context. In New Zealand, the National Secondary School Youth Health Survey carried out in 2000 by the Adolescent Health Research Group (AHRG, 2000) of the University of Auckland found that when young people are involved in a research that has their approval; young people overwhelmingly feel validated by their having been asked in a respectful way for their views. Contrast this with the example

of the disenfranchised seeking outlets from their disengagement with society, such as seeking solace in a gang patch. Vigil (1988:168) poses a scenario where, ‘The gang has taken on the responsibility of doing what the family, school, and other social agencies have failed to do – provide mechanisms for age and sex development, establish norms of behaviour, and define and structure outlets for friendship, human support and the like’.

Researchers of student perspectives on children’s rights in New Zealand secondary schools found that although student participants overwhelmingly (96%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that ‘At my school there are opportunities for young peoples views to be heard by those who make decisions’, that in practice this did not in fact match the statement (Smith, Nairn, Taylor and Gaffney, 2003:11). While 88% of staff thought that in practice this happened, only 51% of students thought this was the case. The same result was reflected in students’ responses as to whether they thought their views were taken into account and acted on by those staff that made the decisions. While two-thirds of staff agreed that this was the experience, only about one-third of students agreed.

### **Positive Youth Development**

Positive youth development initiatives have primarily existed in a vacuum, at the whim of political decisions of institutions, including local and central government. The importance therefore of the ‘Investment in Child and Youth Development’ outlined in ‘Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action’ has

meant a re-focus and prioritisation on the Auckland region where close to one-third of New Zealand's total population resides. The Auckland region's economic growth has been steady and with this comes the opportunity to consider how social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing might be improved.

It would appear that many young people do not have the luxury of being asked to provide their opinions on matters that relate to them in the environments in which they live, are educated, work and receive religious teachings. However, of equal concern is that many adults in society do not have access to decision-making opportunities for a variety of reasons. From her research of positive youth development models both locally and overseas Keelan (2000) developed a framework for Taiohi (youth) Maori Development. In her contribution to the youth question concerning youth participation and particularly Taiohi Maori participation, Keelan suggests that she is not entirely convinced whether or not participation in youth development empowers a young person to engage in the roles and responsibilities expected of them.

In 'Proof at Last: Youth Development Programs Do Work', Boyle (2002), identifies the 'touchy feely' aspects of engaging with young people to design programmes that include young people participating in citizenship activities. The American National Academies of Sciences tested the validity of the youth programmes. The results showed compelling evidence that where young people have the support of their

families, schools, and extra-familial adults (from the community) that young people made significant progress in their development.

The evidence suggests that young people who become involved in participatory environments whether at a familial, school or work-based level often thrive as opposed to those who do not become involved (Cappelaere and de Winter, 1998:3). There is proof that there are benefits for society too. Proof is that ‘when children and young people develop positively, the need for expenditure on health care, crime, police, and welfare benefits is likely to be less’ (Sustainable Development for New Zealand, 2003:24). Seemingly, the connection between the family unit, government sponsored institutions, schools and extra-familial supports, contribute to a guided, if somewhat adult-controlled outcome for young people. The disconnect aspect where young people do not feel supported by adults arguably facilitates negative options for young people to explore.

Civic leader Joel Spoonheim, founding member of the Active Citizens School (ACS) in Minnesota, believes that while there is evidence of apathy among young people to voting in America, rather than simply taking stock of the statistics, people should look at the increase of young people’s participation in community projects through volunteerism. The contrasting trends of voter apathy and youth volunteerism might suggest that young people are developing their own ways of participating in civic life (Van Benschoten, 2000). In their research into the validity of young people participating in school councils that centred on citizenship education, Taylor and

Johnson (2002) found that although the 'school (youth) council can make significant contributions to the life of the school, and to young people's experience of democratic processes and practices, there is no guarantee that young people will necessarily be empowered. They make an important point that while the structures remain the same, that is adult-centred and adult-controlled environments, it is arguable whether in fact a change of the structure itself can be actively brought about by the young people themselves.

Philipa Biddulph writing on behalf of the Children's Issues Centre at Otago refers to Articles 12 and 13 of UNCROC which state that young people are entitled to receive information and to have a say, to be listened to and have their opinions respected (New Zealand Action Plan for Human Rights: Children's Rights Component: Stocktake Report, 2004). Biddulph cites New Zealand research which indicates that ensuring young people are able to contribute to decision-making is an important part of their development (Smith, Nairn, Sligo, Gaffney and McCormack, 2003; Taylor, Smith and Nairn, 2001; in Blundell, P; 2004). Hart (1992:5) refers to participation as the 'process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives', and, UNICEF views participation as "the fundamental right of citizenship and the means by which democracies should be measured" (The State of the World's Children, 2005).

The Ministry of Youth Affairs published the "Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa" (2002) as a document that would assist society in general to better support young

people. The strategy document also provides a means by which society might shift their thinking in terms of the negative stereotypes attached to young people. While the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA) on its own is not the guiding policy document for all New Zealanders, it is nevertheless the 'National Youth Policy' for the lack of any other. The YDSA envisages a New Zealand where young people are free from stigma and stereotype and can be supported to develop positively by being sufficiently skilled and armed with the right attitudes that will assist them to positively participate in society as of right. The six principles as defined in the strategy state that Youth Development is shaped by the big picture; is about young people being connected; is based on consistent strengths based approach; happens through quality relationships; is triggered when young people fully participate and needs good information (2002:15). Together, these six principles can help young people to gain a sense of contributing something of value to society; gain a feeling of connectedness to others and to society; and to believe that they have choices about their future and their identity.

Importantly, the strategy highlights the need to 'involve, acknowledge and consider key issues for specific groups of young people which include rangatahi (young Māori); Pacific' young people; young people from minority ethnic communities; young people with physical, intellectual and learning disabilities; young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people; isolated rural young people and young parents (2002:14). This is indicative of the young people who are more inclined to be marginalised and

effectively kept on the sidelines as non-starters in participatory processes with local government.

The booklet ‘The Youth Development Participation Guide: Keepin’ it real’ as an extension of the YDSA provides valuable information about how to engage youth to become involved in a variety of initiatives. The intent of the booklet is the ‘positive development of young people by creating opportunities for them to influence, inform, shape, design, and contribute to an idea or activity’. The opportunities can involve an approach by youth to a local council, as opposed to the local council approaching youth. Having youth involved in local government-sponsored initiatives, advising on policies, strategies and action plans around youth outcomes, ensures that there is some integrity in the policies, services and programmes which are being shaped by local councils to meet the needs of youth (Ministry of Youth Development, 2004).

Further literature on positive youth development can be found in two booklets, the ‘Whole Child Approach: A guide to applying the whole child approach’ and ‘Involving Children: A guide to engaging children in decision-making’. These booklets follow from the youth development approach outlined in the ‘YDSA’ and ‘New Zealand’s Agenda for Children: Making life better for children’. The ‘Whole Child Approach’ booklet is about ‘making sure that the needs, rights and interests of children and young people are taken into account’. This perspective is significant as it recognises that although children through legislation and other societal constructs must depend on others; that they are in a time and space in their development in which they

need to learn how to 'look after themselves and make decisions about their lives'. The influential factors act upon the young people and largely determine whether in fact they flourish or are adversely affected in their development. Arguably, their connectedness or disconnectedness with key adult figures in the early stages of their lives will determine at later life stage development their ability to choose between positive and negative life options.

The 'Involving Children' booklet provides insights into the different types of participation and participatory processes and gives a rationale for involving children based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by New Zealand in 1993. The primary benefit of children's involvement as outlined in the booklet relating to democratic activities is that children's participation builds a positive, democratic society (2004:8). The obvious link between the 'Involving Children' booklet and 'Whole of Child Approach' booklet is that of child development and applying a 'rights approach'. Their overlapping themes with the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa and the booklet "Keepin' it real" provide practical and informative tools for planners and practitioners.

The issues that come from a synthesis of the four documents are based around societal inclusion and the rights or lack of rights of young people. There is a rising awareness emanating from the literature about the need to educate young and old alike to see past the generation divide to enable a closer working relationship together. While the unequal relations between the different generations has been examined earlier in this

chapter, the undeniable consideration is that youth participation will only ever exist in a vacuum unless adults with a positive youth development belief actively advocate for young people's inclusion in all areas of society.

Work conducted in 2002 and 2003 by Local Government New Zealand, the Ministry of Social Development, The Department of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Youth Development provided a 'Child and Youth Toolkit'. This resource document is an effective guide which local authorities' planners and practitioners can use in their daily work with young people. The rationale provided in the resulting document 'Child and Youth Toolkit for Child and Youth Participation' outlines five evidence-based assertions. These are: that the Local Government Act 2002 and other New Zealand legislation requires it; to contribute to society is a basic human right (See Article 12 United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child); children and young people are the experts on how they experience the world; the next generation will feel more connected and able to contribute; research confirms that children and young people do want to participate in decisions that affect them. The value of young people's participation in a project, activity or initiative with local government can result in the following benefits for young people: they are listened to and respected; their sense of belonging, self-esteem and responsibility increases; they gain skills in communicating, cooperation and problem solving; they learn where to go for help and they experience democracy in action.

A positive youth development approach includes a young person's ability to critically participate in the economy and politics of their local, regional and national communities (U.S Dept. Health & Human Services, 2002). Positive youth development promotes an all-encompassing approach for all youth to build on their assets and their potential and helps counter problems that may affect them. There is the assertion that "growing up can be tough for everyone, but young people are far more likely to succeed if they are active participants in decision-making that affects their lives and their communities" (U.S Dept. Health & Human Services, 2002).

In March 2000 the Australian Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed the National Youth Development Strategy for Australia. The Strategy adopted the definition of youth development as, 'a process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader development needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models, which focus solely on youth problems'. Walker and Dunham (1994) define youth development with an emphasis on the importance of enhancing capabilities and capacities. They describe the importance of the environment (community) to the outcomes as 'the process of growing up and developing one's capacities in positive ways'. They contend that the human environments in the context of the family, the peer group, the school, and the neighbourhood or community are all important to youth and their progress in life.

McLaughlin (2000) contends that the connection between community development and youth development is vital. Without the nurture and support of communities, youth development cannot be sustained. Jolley (1998) argues that institutional support is critical for the longevity of any community group, but more so with youth groups. There must be recognition that care and service to youth is not enough; that self worth, independence and competence must also be fostered (Costello et al, 2000). A review of literature from America about the concept of Youth Development made a defining point that: “the participation of young people in the decision-making structures of youth development organisations is one of the real challenges in implementing a positive youth development approach (Ausyouth, 2001;10).

Ausyouth (2001) in their discussion document “Good Practice in Youth Development” assert that there are three key environments: policy, organisation and programme that must be addressed if young people are to succeed and play decisive roles in shaping the development of their communities; the organisation in which they are involved; and directing their own personal growth. The principles for good practice in youth development put forward by Ausyouth are: strengths-based positive youth development as the foundation for policy and programme development; participation of young people in all levels of planning and decision-making; an inclusive ethos; an experimental model of learning that builds on capabilities and skills while maximising opportunities for fun and recognising age and development phases; respecting community voice and identity; encouraging communities to value and engage young people; partnerships; quality outcomes; encouraging and respecting choice;

recognising the contribution of all stakeholders; promotion that is ethical, honest and non-patronising; maximising formal and community recognition of learning outcomes; and strengthening the interconnectedness of social networks

### **Youth as Democratic Citizens**

Moore and Richardson (1999:11) present a view that young people in Christchurch are perceived as problems, yet in reality they are members of the council's constituency. They further contend that older youth are voters, ratepayers and leaders; the younger sets are potentially all of these. When one thinks of democracy and citizenship there is often angst in defining the two. For some, democracy is all about belonging to a society in which notions of freedom are tolerated and protected. Others believe democracy to be about equality, a society in which the rights of all are seen to be the same. In terms of achieving either, civil society and free markets have been touted as the key to essentially encouraging these notions (Westheimer, 2003). Citizenship has been described as having three inter-related parts which encourage a person to have a Social and moral responsibility; be involved in community; and acquiring political literacy (Westheimer, 2003). People learn about the institutions, problems and practices of a democracy, so making oneself an active and effective citizen in society as apart from simply having political knowledge (Department for Education and Skills, 2005).

Being a democratic citizen is a combination of all the good things one might do for a neighbour, charity organisation or as a community volunteer. Taking part in political

processes such as voting, community consultations and community action and, for some, protesting or being part of a political campaign are also citizenship activities (Westheimer, 2003). Being a democratic citizen one cannot avoid politics; as politics is embedded in all the institutions in which people interact with on a daily basis. While a willingness to participate as a community volunteer develops moral and values traits, washing one's hands of the struggle between the powerful and the powerless is tantamount to siding with the powerful (Freire, 1970). If democracy is to be effective at improving society, people need to exert their personal power over issues that affect their lives. Although citizens can and do volunteer to help out when help is needed; these activities will not ensure that government policies and practices are effective or that they necessarily reflect a community's preferences (Westheimer, 2003).

Micro and macro effectiveness as a democratic citizen can be seen in the local, regional and national levels where a person carries out volunteer work in his or her community. They might work on an environmental project to clear a waterway of noxious weeds. The same person is politically aware of the need for local and central government support and writes submissions to her local council, the Regional Council and the Ministry for the Environment seeking their assistance on the matter. Being a democratic citizen is about caring for one's community, being politically aware, protecting the rights of freedom and rights of others to enjoy those freedoms accorded oneself; and most importantly it is about being actively involved, participating in community consultations, writing submissions, being part of a community planning

exercise with local and central government and business leaders; voting and encouraging others to do the same.

The need for democratic citizens has always been great, but perhaps more so today where voter participation rates are declining and young people seem to be disconnected from their parents and older generations. The advent of sustainable development with the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of wellbeing poses critical questions about New Zealand's future. The Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action (2003) cites several reasons to begin engaging young people, to invest in children and youth the time and resources. These reasons have largely been discussed in chapter one and simply reflect central government's push to interest young people in participation together with their local councils so that they are engaged to meet the future needs of their region and their country's needs. This approach lies with research, which indicates the need for young people to become the future skilled workforce, and future community leaders and parents. It is they [the young] who will inevitably carry the torch for future generations and importantly decide the needs of an ageing population.

How these decisions shape and determine their eventual inter-dependent relations with adults and the environments they live in is largely dependent on how adults engage with young people. The introduction of the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement (ARCYE) project goes some way to providing the foundations for a sustained dialogue concerning the active participation of young people. However,

while some councils recognise the importance of involving their future ratepayers, future skilled workforce, future parents, planners and developers; educators and community leaders, until recently very little has been done to create a civics education package, or promote youth in community volunteerism. Neither has there been much done to sustain the dialogue with young people about their critical engagement if the human environments that people mostly enjoy today are to be sustained into the future. Very few councils partner with schools to provide an orientation to the structure and meaning of why councils exist, where they fit within the governance of communities and how communities through elected representatives fulfil community trustee positions to represent community views at the local government decision-making table. There is perhaps a valid argument that adults too flounder when trying to understand the governance structure of several local city and district councils together with a regional council in the Auckland region, that perhaps a simpler structure would lessen barriers to 'people's participation' together with local councils.

## **Conclusion**

A review of the literature on sustainable development and its relationship to the thesis topic shows a clear link between what is occurring at the global level and at the local setting the Auckland region. The Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project is seen to be one means in which local authorities might demonstrate through key demonstration initiatives the best approaches to involving young people in local Council activities. That this might then lead on to democracy and citizenship activity

and young people being primed for considering the development needs of the Auckland region is not completely unfounded.

An examination of the complexities of participation has been undertaken to provide better understanding of the concept. The outcome clearly shows ambiguity and ambivalence as to whether participation is a moral and free activity. The different models of youth participation as posed by Hart (1992), Shier (2001), Westhorp (1987) and Rocha, (1997) examined alongside the literature on participation, shows that it is arguable whether youth participating in local authorities' decision-making has integrity. The literature on youth and their capacity to provide meaningful input to decision-making has been scrutinised in light of what has been described as the diminished status of youth within society (ARCYE report, 2005:5).

An examination of positive youth development and youth as democratic citizens has been carried out to find out whether positive youth development as a process and citizenship as an outcome strongly suggests that there must be a sustained dialogue for all stakeholders. Actively promoting youth participation in decision-making is one thing, doing something 'concrete' about it is an entirely different matter. Given that participation can be a tool for nations to control their populations under the notion of partnership, there is little doubt that the tool of participation can be manipulated at the local setting too. As with governments around the world, inevitably and inexplicably adults directly or indirectly are in control of the many and varied institutions that provide young people with a place to be with other young people, such as the state

legislated and compliance settings of schools. This adult-constructed paradigm of the adult-created, adult-run, adult-sponsored projects, activities and initiatives effectively translates to a New Zealand society in which the rights of young people compared with adults is somewhat diminished.

The overriding consideration therefore is that participation with and between any numbers of people requires mutual consent and agreement, takes much focused energies and requires respect between people. Importantly, some form of coordination and collaboration must be present to prevent a total breakdown. Participatory processes cannot avoid the issue of power and authority, populism and representation. Participation can be viewed as being as much a problem as it is a solution.

Young people who participate in local government sponsored activities both consciously and unconsciously expand the space in which a youth voice can be woven into the adult psyche to show the importance of young people within the social fabric of society itself. Many argue that the pathway to adulthood for a young person is fraught with transitional and developmental challenges in a character-building process towards becoming a more responsible person (adult) in society. Participation therefore, for want of a better mechanism, provides a platform upon which young people can develop skills, and become both confident and competent in their abilities to eventually become interdependent with their adult relations (Rajani, 2001).

If young people in today's context do not have a stake in their communities, if they do not see value in a caring society and if they have little or no notion of democracy and citizenship then clearly this will influence how they behave towards an ageing and retiring baby boomer population. The ability of many ageing baby boomers to retire with some degree of quality of life is reliant to some extent on the Generation X and Generation Y having a respectful regard for older people. Like positive youth development, the ability of future society to look after a large number of older people retiring from the work force is something that cannot be left to chance.

While the limits of sustainable development are harder to define, in terms of young people participating in local government decision-making, it is clear that there would need to be some form or structure in place to help mitigate any unforeseen impacts. Also, consideration needs to be given to the notion that it is more desirable for older 'worldlier' people to mentor, coach and support young people in their development. On their own, many youth would struggle to make headway in local government decision-making environments. Therefore, the role of Council officers is significant and pivotal to facilitating young people's successful access to decision-making opportunities.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

While the previous chapter focused on reviewing the literature concerning the complexities of participation and the influence of sustainable development on youth participation in local government in the Auckland region, this chapter examines the methodology used in the study. The expectation was that the information from the interviews and focus group discussions would provide rich data for analysis to help bridge an identified gap in knowledge of youth participation in local council decision-making. The choice of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with local council officers is examined in some detail to determine their efficacy.

From January 2005, the researcher began planning a survey, semi-structured one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with local councils' officers throughout the Auckland region. The survey was a succinct information-gathering mechanism designed to provide an overview of what local councils were doing. The methodology was important in understanding how officers engage with youth. If officers do not have a clear understanding of what they are doing, then there is the distinct possibility that the young people will not have clarity of purpose or understanding. Some of the critical considerations that the researcher contemplated included:

- Use of a qualitative approach

- Role clarity of the researcher
- Dealing with risk factors
- Insider / outsider relationships
- Population selection and gathering method
- The researcher as participant, interviewer and observer
- Participatory action research
- Analysis procedure
- Organising the data
- Generating categories, themes and patterns
- Coding the data
- Testing the emergent understandings
- Searching for alternative understandings
- Writing the research findings
- Trustworthiness, ethical and political considerations.

These areas will be explained in some detail later in this chapter. The researcher must acknowledge the whole of government initiative the ‘Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement in Decision-Making Opportunities’ that has provided the opportunity to carry out the study. The nature and scope of the researcher’s prior knowledge of the workings of local government has assisted in efforts to successfully engage officers to become research participants.

## **Survey Methodology**

The initial survey carried out to provide the researcher with data that would inform the design of base questions for the interviews is aligned to a positivist and quantitative undertaking. However, the collaborative and participatory endeavour with local government staffers in focus group discussions and individual interviews employs interpretivist and critical science methods which are qualitative in their approach. While the purist quantitative researcher might argue in favour of positivist over interpretivist or logical and objective as opposed to interpretive and subjective, the researcher is comfortable with being less concerned about the particular research paradigm or methodology. The researcher is more interested in how best to achieve well-rounded research considering the research purpose, the context and setting, as well as where the researcher 'fits' within the research as interviewer, observer, and participant.

## **Qualitative Approach**

*Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. In contrast, quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things*  
Berg (1995:3)

The researcher used a qualitative approach as this was seen to be an acceptable method with officers the researcher knew at a professional level. One to one semi-structured interviews or focus group interviews were mandated by the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement working party. While quantitative statistical data can be used to make projections or predictions, this differs from qualitative research which

generally provides a set of options or directives for consideration. The richness of qualitative data is often subjective to the lived-life experiences of research participants and therefore attracts criticism at times for not being an exact research science. Qualitative research is more akin to people participation. It is inclusive and seeks people's input, sometimes at a very personal and subjective level.

Reducing participants' fear of being or becoming controlled by the research process has been one of the researcher's main priorities. Because the research participants work in local government and because the data that they contribute in the interviews and discussions may be of a sensitive nature to their respective Councils, the integrity of the research process has been uppermost in the researcher's planning. A very important issue to consider is that the researcher /interviewer has been perceived by some research participants to be 'one of their own'. The researcher, as an employee of Manukau City Council, provides an interesting dynamic and by-play to the research. This might have been tempered to some extent by employing an outside moderator to conduct interview and discussion proceedings.

Barnett (2002:6) argues that the role of moderator is critical to the success of the focus group. The researcher did consider the use of an outside moderator but felt that the moderator would need to gain the trust and rapport required with officers to then discuss issues that might be of a sensitive nature. The researcher decided that the benefit of an external moderator would be minimal, costly, and involve a time commitment that council staff with high workloads would see as inconvenient. The

researcher's established role as a council employee and his own experiences in the field of youth development assured to some degree a trusting and mutually respectful relationship with officers. These considerations negated the use of a moderator. Any ethical considerations however were acknowledged and addressed throughout the research process by the researcher utilising the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project working group. The project working group acted as a reliable sounding board to minimise any potential harmful repercussions to officers and their respective councils. While some might see this approach as a protective factor for council officers that might act as a constraint to meeting the issues head on, there is an argument as to the safety of research participants within political environments such as local councils.

### **Research and Role Clarity**

The methodology of the research undertaken requires a frank and honest examination of its integrity and the ability of the researcher to stand up to scrutiny from peer researchers. The researcher acted on the following considerations:

- That the researcher is a local government employee employed by the Manukau City Council and seconded to the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project as project coordinator/manager.
- That the researcher's own expertise in the field of youth development is strongly weighted towards positive youth development outcomes as opposed to deficit focused outcomes.

- That the position of the researcher presented a considerable opportunity to influence outcomes.
- That the researcher had to be objective in data collection process
- That the researcher enrolled others to critique his research to balance subjectivity in the research.
- That the researcher must state any bias, including his peer relationships with other officers and how he has addressed these issues.

It is therefore important to consider the role of the researcher through his involvement in the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement Project. In his role as a Community Advisor at Manukau City Council, he was approached in August, 2004 and asked to consider a secondment opportunity as project coordinator/manager to what was then the Auckland Regional Youth Citizenship Project. From the outset the researcher made it clear that there was an opportunity to carry out a study that could be used towards completing the requirements of his Masters programme in Youth Development.

The researcher proposed to the project leader and the then smaller project coordination group (including three other territorial local authorities' representatives), that he would take up the offer, as the project offered positive outcomes for youth. At this time there was no stated research brief in the 'Auckland Regional Youth Citizenship' project. The researcher took up his role as Project Coordinator/Manager on 1 November 2005.

Ethics approval for his study was granted in January 2005 and the researcher had by then worked with the project working group to provide an outline of the proposed research. As of 1 November 2004, the Coordinator was required to work 40 hours. Outside of these hours, which was a flexible working arrangement, the researcher could dedicate time to fulfilling the research role of MA Student, Auckland University of Technology and carry out the requirements of his MA Thesis ‘Youth participation with local councils in the Auckland region: a snapshot of officer reflections involving young people in decision-making opportunities’. The crossover in terms of the different roles were meeting key people and receiving data that could be used for the purposes of either the research or the project. This, to a degree was minimised by the researcher informing people openly of the research activity versus the project activity.

### **Project Review and Evaluation**

In December 2004, the project brief for the ‘Auckland Regional Youth Citizenship’ project was reviewed and by the end of December a name change of the project to the ‘Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement’ project was decided. Also, the project brief was changed through an evaluation workshop led by an independent facilitator. The changes were agreed to by the project working group. A survey questionnaire was approved by the project working group, quite separate from the researcher’s qualitative research interviews with territorial local authorities’ officers. The researcher proposed to interview local authorities’ officers who had a child and youth focus and the interviews were carried out between February and June 2005. A clear understanding between the project leader, the project coordinator and the project

working group was detailed to provide protection for those local council officers who might be involved in the research.

### **Risk Management**

Due to the nature and scope of the research the Project Coordinator/Manager resorted to the researcher role to complete the research undertaking. The researcher had to minimise risk aspects to the research participants and consider his own return to his local government role once the secondment had been completed. The researcher employed a 'checks and passes' mechanism alongside the research. This was simply a process whereby the researcher had a close working relationship with the local government project leader and provided a feedback loop mechanism where a small number of local council officers could provide comment as the research progressed.

Information concerning the process of the research was reported monthly to the project working group, which consisted of local councils' staff and representatives from central government agencies. Prior knowledge of the workings of local government assisted the researcher to develop a 'no harm' approach by giving due consideration to how progress of the research was reported. Commentaries of a generic quality as opposed to individual officer comments lessened the likelihood that an individual officer might be put at risk.

### **Insider Relationships**

The researcher's acceptance as a local government employee effectively meant that he acknowledge, respect and work with the different research participants in a professional manner. The researcher recognised that his insider / outsider roles were not always transparent to some officers. As one means of maintaining research integrity the researcher took responsibility for keeping in mind the differential power relations that existed between him and those participating in the research. The researcher also chose to be challenged on his research approach by making the data (in its generic form) available to the research participants. This approach increased the interest of the research participants who still required 'ownership' and 'validation' for their contribution.

An intangible outcome from this was that the research participants offered further commentary which added to the quality of the research. This meant that by facilitating the opportunity for feedback, further analysis opportunity was possible. The complexities of the research were made easier through their empowerment. Skelton (2001:90) posits that the notion of empowerment of the participants in research makes us think and reflect on the action dimension of qualitative research.

The researcher employed a 'sustained dialogue' approach (Saunders, 2001) to work creatively within the competing tensions. As stated previously, prior knowledge of the workings of local government assisted the researcher to develop what was essentially a trusting relationship with the research participants. The critical factor that

might produce a positive or negative context concerned the researcher being in the employ of a local council and being known to many of the research participants. This added dimension in the researcher's opinion only emphasised the need for a 'no harm' approach to the research. The obvious issue concerning the researcher's approach was being able to maintain objectivity. This dilemma in balancing role, responsibility, research integrity and meeting timelines for both the research and the project required that the researcher work closely with the project leader and smaller coordination group as detailed earlier.

### **Population Selection and Gathering Method**

The setting 'Auckland Region' and the population 'Local Government staff who have a youth focus' provided the researcher with a narrow enough focus of study for the purposes of the research. The decision to focus on these foci alone stemmed from the secondment opportunity afforded the researcher, as related earlier. An initial email communication was sent to the project working group members requesting their support for the research and also for their assistance to nominate officers with a youth focus to participate in the research. Follow-up phone calls and emails to nominated officers assisted with defining who the research participants would be. All eight councils approached agreed to nominate officers.

In February 2005 a survey was sent to the councils' representatives. This sought information about best practice approaches to engaging young people and required officers to consider those youth initiatives that best aligned to the criteria presented

in a participant information sheet sent prior to the survey and further outlined in the survey questionnaire. The survey's design required the input of local councils' staff. This was achieved by presenting the proposal to council staff representing seven of the eight councils. Because the project was a collaborative partnering between local government and central government, the ability to receive input from central government agency representatives was of some value. The project working group's input decided criteria for the researcher to incorporate into the survey design.

The project working group considered its participation and how in fact the final design of the survey would look. Officers were asked to critique the survey questionnaire until most were satisfied with its design. Feedback from officers included critiques of the questionnaire's format, font, layout, length and language used. Also, there were comments concerning the use of double negatives and possible deception. The final survey questionnaire was then circulated to the eight councils (see Appendice 1).

Because of the limited resources available, the researcher had to communicate with each of the councils' representatives in person. As discussed under 'survey methodology' in this chapter the survey used a positivist and quantitative undertaking. However, the latter interviews employed interpretivist and critical science methods; that is, a qualitative research approach. The researcher used the following processes:

- Ensuring consultation with individuals and groups is carried out with integrity.
- Recognition of who might be affected by the research.
- Contacting key people from the targeted research sample.

- Presenting a transparent non-deceptive rationale to parties identified in the consultation process.
- Seeking those parties' critique of the research undertaking.
- Giving sufficient information to consulted parties and allowing sufficient time for a response.
- Showing a genuine disposition and consideration for views expressed during the consultation process.
- Acting on views expressed and arguments presented in a respectful manner.
- Acting at all times reasonably and in good faith.
- Keeping in mind that the group being researched stands to make gains or suffer losses by their involvement.

### **Limitations**

As discussed in the previous chapter, young people's involvement in planning processes is paramount. However, as stated in Chapters One and Two, the focus for this study effectively means the spotlight is taken off youth. They essentially have a diminished capacity in society and in their relationship with adults; adults have power and youth are powerless. If this area is to be more equalised, then it is important to focus on those with the ability and capacity to influence change. Those in a position to challenge authority structures such as local councils have a duty if not a moral obligation to young people to present arguments that influence how councils might become more child and youth friendly; or even people-friendly, also discussed in Chapter Four. While the researcher values youth input the real focus on the study was to consider officers input as to the opportunities and the barriers to youth participation. This focus would provide officers and their respective councils

with the opportunity to facilitate changes to include young people in decision-making opportunities, free from tokenism.

In respect of the survey and officer busyness one of the primary concerns was responding to participant requests to make the survey simple and free from complexity. An agreement was reached about the survey criteria. The design needed to include the following criteria: finding out what councils are doing now or have planned for the future with regards to youth participation; to name the initiative, current or planned; it must focus on children and youth; the need to cite the level of partnership (e.g. is it with young people), community or multi-agency collaboration; status of project (e.g. current, newly established, pilot, sustainable beyond 2006); those wellbeing 'aspects' i.e. social, economic, environmental, cultural that the council's initiative deals with.

From these criteria a draft tick-box survey was designed and three representatives of different local territorial authorities were asked to critique the design and feedback any concerns. The survey design was then presented to the project working group for sign off. As discussed earlier, the survey was not part of the researcher's application to AUT Ethics Committee for research approval. The survey design signed off by officers asked survey participants to consider the following: which of the "well-beings" (s3 Local Government Act; 2002) does the project, activity or initiative impact most e.g. social, economic, environmental or cultural; whether the project, activity or initiative was current or planned for in the 2005 / 2006 year; who

were the partners in the project, activity or initiative, e.g. young people, community groups, central government agencies or non-government organisations; what evidence is there that the project, activity or initiative was sustainable beyond 2006; the ethnic make-up of the participants; whether the young people involved had an active role in planning and implementation. The survey was sent to the seven local city and district councils in the Auckland region and the Auckland Regional Council. The survey findings are reported in chapter four *Research Findings*.

### **Interviews and Focus Group Discussions**

The researcher's choice of a qualitative approach by incorporating semi structured interviews and focus group discussions stemmed from the naturalness of the informal setting and a desire of the researcher to work in participatory and collaborative contexts with the study participants. A further justification for this approach lay with the researcher's previous successful qualitative research experiences. Marshall and Rossman (1999: 105) have said that "Qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: participation in the setting; direct observation; in-depth interviewing and analysing documents and material culture". While quantitative survey data can be very powerful in sheer statistical analysis, often the depth of the contributing 'voices' is not present and it is the facilitation of people's voices that is important to the researcher as previously stated.

The researcher worked from a premise that the focus group discussions and individual interviews are a shared endeavour, that the endeavour is educative because

it promotes shared knowledge and, most importantly, that there is the assumption of shared ownership. However, there needs to be a balancing of these positive aspects of focus group interviewing. Marshall and Rossman (1999:115) observed that the interviewer has less control over a group interview than an individual one; that data is more difficult to analyse because content is not necessarily ordered; that focus group discussion can be difficult to manage because a conversation can be a long narrative; and therefore it is difficult to record good quality data.

While these aspects can be seen as limiting, a well-planned semi-structured focus group interview has the necessary means available to address these concerns. Marshall and Rossman (1999:114) present the view that the use of focus groups has high face validity and the ability to provide quick results. Also, Suter (2000:4) describes the focus group methodology as being popular. Barnett (2002:6), Kitzinger and Barbour (1999:34) and Marshall and Rossman (1999:114) say that the structure and number of individuals required to form a focus group can range anywhere from 4 to 12 people. Given the researcher's experience in small group work within local government and the community context, the researcher felt that between three and five people (including the researcher) would be ideal. This was tied to the fact that the researcher would be participant, observer, recorder and interviewer.

Marshall and Rossman (2001:60) cite the importance of providing "a rationale for the particular genre of qualitative research in which the study is situated". Kitzinger and Barbour (1999:34) state that whilst focus groups 'have great potential, they are also

open to careless and inappropriate use, the results may be manipulated, and the subjects of the research can be exploited'. The researcher's experience in social work interviewing, group work facilitation, facilitation of events and project planning in different settings effectively meant that a professional approach to the interviews and focus group discussions was always of primary importance.

Once venues and timings for the interviews and focus group discussions were decided, the researcher made contact with the participants to ensure that they were prepared for them. A 'Participant Information Sheet' outlining the purpose for the interviews, with possible questions and prompts allowed prospective interviewees the opportunity to consider whether in fact they wanted to participate. The sheets had been made available to all nominated participants. The researcher's contact details were on the participation sheet, as were statements about participant safety, the no-harm approach to officers and their respective councils'. There was also a clear statement of the right of the participants to withdraw their information should they choose to at a later stage.

The interviews and discussions took place between February 2005 and June 2005. They involved officers from the Rodney District Council, North Shore City Council, Waitakere City Council, Auckland City Council, Papakura District Council, Franklin District Council, Manukau City Council and the Auckland Regional Council. Follow-up phone calls and email communications further emphasised the purpose, the possible questions and prompts, as well as privacy and confidentiality riders to participation.

The researcher interviewed nineteen territorial local authority staff. The interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to one and one-half hours and the settings were usually at the site where the officers worked, with the exception of one interview that took place at an alternative agreed location. Seven of the focus group discussions were carried out using a notetaker and transcribed to MS Word. Three interviews were carried out without the use of the notetaker. The researcher was able to use interviewing skills gained through previous work based and tertiary learned experiences.

Throughout the interviews and discussions undertaken by the researcher, the principles of good interviewing as discussed by Morse and Field (1995:95) were observed closely. These are: to concentrate on listening to what people have to say, as well as being calm and settled in the role of interviewer. Importantly, the role of researcher/interviewer was not to lecture or assume a position of authority. The researcher was well aware that people will act differently to match the setting or environment they find themselves in, and that the setting for carrying out interviews and focus group discussions needed to be in a user-friendly setting.

The researcher's role as observer in contrast to the role of interviewer was basically to systematically note and record events, behaviours and to be less intrusive or imposing on participants in the interviews. As previously alluded to, trust is a big issue in local government and to this extent it was important that the respective council staff were able to appreciate that although the researcher was 'one of them' (a local government

officer), he was also engaged to carry out a different role. The researcher engaged officers to take shared control of the discussion process, allowing the researcher to occasionally prompt, observe, note and later initiate a process where the officer participants could evaluate the interview and provide frank views of its value. Every snippet of information from the interviews, regardless of perceived irrelevance, added to the plethora of information gathered. The quality of data added colour and vibrancy to what was a developing snapshot from an officers' perspective of youth participation with local government in the Auckland region.

### **Analysis Procedure**

Barnett (2002:8) discusses pre-analysis, where 'first and foremost' there is a summary of the focus group discussion facilitated by the interviewer or moderator. This was shortened. What the researcher did instead was transcribe the data verbatim to a MS Word document. The transcript was then sent to each of the interviewees to critique for accuracy. This enabled two things; one, to keep the process transparent and two, to give people an opportunity to either add to or edit out information. The rationale for this is that the researcher has experienced working with young people and adults in diverse settings and that ownership is only realised when roles of responsibility for an outcome are shared. Thus the researcher made transparent his process by inviting research participants to 'actively participate' by providing input at different stages of the research.

One issue that arose from the focus group interviews was the attendance of officers with their managers. This occurred in two of the focus group discussions. While there appeared to be nothing untoward on the surface and communications appeared relatively relaxed, what was not being said gave the researcher some concerns. The researcher needed to ensure that there was no undue pressure being applied to officers by their managers being present. Subsequent follow-up conversations with officers indicated that there might be issues apart from the research, but essentially participants said that what they communicated to the researcher was correct.

In an interview, where there is a controlling influence, people can effectively be silent or circumspect in what they say. Following up with interviewees in isolation, provides the researcher with the opportunity to confirm a 'hunch' or to empower people by seeking their confirmation of their 'version', thus allowing to a degree some editing or simply commenting on factors which limit the quality of the research itself. The typical analytical procedures covered by writers of research relate to six specific phases, these being organising the data; generating categories, themes and patterns; coding the data; testing the emergent understandings, searching for alternative understandings and writing the report. Not all of these phases were necessarily accorded the same importance by the researcher.

### **Organising the Data**

Although there is research software such as NVivo or NU\*DIST available to organise qualitative data into thematic categories, the researcher used a 'hands-on' approach.

This approach enabled the researcher to ensure that narratives and discussion threads were not fragmented and meanings were not lost in 'framing' data into a software programme that the researcher did not have a high degree of expertise using. Also, the researcher was constrained by both time and resources and thus did not have the luxury of becoming proficient in using the software. Therefore the chosen approach involved accurately transcribing the audio tape recordings to MS Word; sending the document to the interviewees for critique; considering feedback from participants and making changes where necessary; summarising the focus group data agreed to by the interviewees; continuing to identify salient themes and tacit points as they emerged; allowing for emergent categories; checking with participants if unsure; reading and re-reading of notes and transcript (audio) for coherent understanding in relation to context; using data reduction methodology to confirm understandings; and, finally, re-sending a more succinct version of the data to interviewees for their confirmation as to accuracy.

### **Coding the data**

The researcher adopted a 'hands on' approach as previously stated and used highlighter pens to code the different thematic data and different coloured paper to print out copies of the research to avoid 'draft report confusion'. The audio transcript, once printed, was coded within a loosely designed framework of emergent themes. However, with the audio data there was the added emphasis of coding tonality and inflections within a voice, taking into account the context of the conversation. Identifying research participants in the discussions proved easier than anticipated due

to coding of the people's names at the time of the discussions. The researcher was able to send transcribed summaries from each of the discussions to participants for their critique. This process proved most valuable and was one of the important learnings from the research.

Sometimes what is said and what is written can have different interpretations. Hearing and reading the same information for example, differs through one's ability to interpret tone, flow of commentary and to take into account body language, something entirely distinct from reading the information without the benefit of face to face interviewing. Knowing full well that the spoken word and the written word differ provided the researcher and the study participants with a further opportunity to discuss the study data and where identified make some changes.

The researcher tested the emerging understandings as they appeared through the process of analysing different thematic categories. The researcher felt that the ability to triangulate the data by contrast and comparison between the different councils added value to the research findings. The researcher also looked to challenge the data for alternative understandings.

### **Research Findings**

The researcher's emphasis on inclusion and shared endeavour can be seen as a participatory action research, an inclusive undertaking to work cooperatively and cohesively with research participants. Having placed such emphasis on participatory

and collaborative endeavours throughout the research undertaking, the researcher felt that there was merit in involving some of the focus group interviewees in critiquing the report findings. This also gave the researcher and interviewees the opportunity to frankly discuss any aspects of the research that they might be concerned with; adding a further safety mechanism for interviewees, their respective councils and for the researcher and the integrity of the research itself.

The overall study was carried out across ten different sites from Rodney Districts in the north of Auckland to Franklin Districts in the south of Auckland. Using triangulation analysis assisted to protect the 'reliability' and 'validity' of the research findings. Because the overall study has been a quantitative (survey questionnaire) and qualitative (focus group and individual interviews) the analysis should be that much richer. Data was mostly clean because the researcher had included research participants in the critique of the reporting of the research and its findings. Although there has effectively been only one researcher involved, arguably the input from research participants in the overall research context reflects the inclusive nature and scope of the research and adds validity to its methodology.

### **Ethical and Political Considerations**

While deception is used in research undertakings, the researcher is not reliant on the use of manipulative mechanisms to acquire information. O'Brien (2002:26) argues that "ethical principles are set out as guides to the behaviour and practice of researchers to ensure that research is undertaken in ways which protect and enhance

the interests of participants in research projects”. Some ethical and political considerations were addressed in undertaking the research. The importance of maintaining participant confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and access was critical. The integrity of the research in relation to ethical considerations of confidentiality and anonymity of participants was at all times a priority given the participants positions in their organisations. In this respect, the researcher painstakingly assured all interviewees that their input to the discussions and individual interviews would be kept confidential and that any identifying data would be sufficiently masked to ensure their privacy and safety.

Before the end of the interviews the researcher ensured that his contact details were available to the interviewees and the process for reporting the information was explained, so that anyone could effectively withdraw their information or edit the information if they wished. They only needed to contact the researcher to discuss and agree how this would be done.

## **Conclusion**

Due consideration is required to understand the nature of the research, against the little scope there was for interviewing young people directly. Officers involved felt that the scope of the research and the overall project needs to be focused on local councils. There is evidence that shows the collective effort by local government officers is clearly to facilitate meaningful youth participation. Knowing many of the research participants enabled a fairly trusting environment for both the researcher and

interviewees. They were able to openly discuss the issues and provide examples of youth participation in local council initiatives. The involvement by the researcher in his capacity as interviewer, observer and participant in the interviews was accepted by the research participants. Many of the officers agreed that different audiences would probably appreciate the fact that the research undertaking was a simple snapshot in time.

Given that change is very fluid in local government settings, it is important to revisit and review what was found out in the process of the study. There has been no local benchmark for what has been done and officers fully appreciated that they have begun something of some significance that is essentially a self-examination of their (local council) engagement with young people. The researcher expects that the data provided by officers will contribute significantly to the debate about the merits of youth participation with local councils. While there is evidence that many young people do not participate in democracy and citizenship activities, this needs to be considered against anecdotal evidence that many adults too do not participate. This would to an extent provide evidence whether youth participation in voting as one example is in fact a youth issue, or is an issue for the greater eligible voter population (Catt, 2005).

The researcher considers that further research is required to provide an in-depth understanding of each of the thematic category outcomes that are derived from the research. Low levels of eligible youth voters (18 to 24 years) in local body (council) elections are a concern for those with an interest in democracy and citizenship. A

research question of some importance might be whether young people's non-participation in voting reflects an adult attitude to democratic participation, and whether young people have named and accepted that their diminished status in society acts against them.

The research findings will provide some but not all of the answers. The methodology for developing the answers to whether "Youth participation with local councils in the Auckland region" is a legitimate endeavour needs to be weighed against the evidence from international, national and local settings. Officers in local councils in the Auckland region have provided professional insights and at times frank views about what they perceive to be issues of engaging young people in local government. While their views may not be shared by everyone who works in the child and youth sector, nevertheless the officers have given their time and energies to provide the space for a dialogue to occur. In the research findings chapter, inevitably there will be some issues and areas that local councils will need to consider if they are to engage young people with integrity, free from tokenism, decoration and manipulation.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research findings**

#### **Introduction**

The research methodology particularly relating to the interviews and focus group discussions is important when considering how the research findings have emerged. The methodology explained in the previous chapter emphasised partnership and collaborative undertakings between the researcher and the research participants. While an objective viewpoint of the researcher/research participant relationship might be seen to be subjective, the significant point the researcher makes is that officers are self-examining their practices with youth. In this respect, the researcher in his capacity as a local council employee is in effect doing the same thing.

The significant factor which needs to be re-emphasised in this chapter is that the research undertaken by the researcher has been a participatory action research. The process, the development of the research and the writing of the research findings have all been relatively transparent and inclusive. The project leader of the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project, along with the smaller coordination group and the broader project working group have scrutinised 'process' to maintain integrity of local government officers and the respective councils involved in the project and research. The research participants are dedicated officers who have a focus on young people and their development needs. Their assistance within research

development praxis is to seek best practice approaches to help build youth development capacities from different levels within their respective councils.

The thesis topic as to whether youth participation with local councils is beneficial to the councils or to youth themselves needs to be addressed. Throughout the research process officers have had to identify what in fact it is that they do with youth. They have detailed what they do, how they do it and why they do it. The key question is whether in fact young people want to participate in decision-making opportunities with their local councils. The research findings in this chapter are the result of the different research methods undertaken by the researcher. The chapter begins with a discussion on the limitations of the research.

### **Limitations of Survey**

While the research design took into account the project working group criteria, it reflected and respected the wishes of busy council officers. As discussed previously, the officers requested that it be simple and free from complexity. Interestingly, the officers discussed the fact that the seven councils and the Auckland Regional Council had recently undergone local body elections in October 2004 and that while officers were confident most of the initiatives involving young people would remain relevant, the political direction of a 'new' council almost always means that there are never any guarantees of sustaining the different youth initiatives. In this context it must be remembered that the three-year local body election cycle does have an

impact on the ability of officers to sustain youth initiatives beyond that three-year cycle.

The advent of the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) will, over time, build in sustainability for initiatives over a much longer period. A further limitation was that the Franklin District Council representative did not fill in a survey. This was due mainly to the officer reporting a lack of engagement with young people in the area to date. However, in their reporting of evidence-based approaches to engaging young people, it is clear that Franklin District Council have clear intentions to work alongside young people. Also, the fact that the survey was essentially small means that there is no definitive certainty as to whether one council is more balanced in its approach in engaging youth participation. Simply, each individual council has its own priority areas to address. Rural-based councils for example have a different set of priorities than do their urban counterparts. This is discussed in some detail within this chapter.

The survey in the context of the larger piece of research (the qualitative research interviews) for the thesis simply provides a snapshot, and the survey results itself helped formulate the questions that would be used in the interviews with local authority officers. The researcher has analysed data based on what was received on the clear understanding that individual officers were completing the surveys as they saw fit and thus the findings should not be a reflection upon individual local authorities.

## **Survey Findings**

As discussed in the previous chapter (p.56), in February 2005 a survey was sent out to the seven city and district councils as well as to the Auckland Regional Council. The survey sought information on best practice approaches in engaging young people. The cultural aspect scored highly amongst the majority of the urban councils as well as the Regional Council. Perhaps this is testament to the way the cultural aspect is introduced into the teaching of the Enviroschools programme. The environmental focus is typically high with the Regional Council, Waitakere and Auckland Councils. The Enviroschools and WaiCare educational programmes have been taught in Waitakere, Auckland City and North Shore City schools. While there is an economic aspect to each of the youth initiatives carried out by all Councils, it is more to do with the budgetary reporting of the initiatives themselves as opposed to a specific economic outcome of the different initiatives.

Except for Rodney, an overwhelming number of projects or initiatives are currently being implemented. Sixty percent of the projects that Rodney list in the completed survey are being implemented in the 2005/2006 year. A high number of all of the projects presented by all of the Councils will carry on beyond 2006. Waitakere and Manukau score highly in their partnering with young people in activities supported or sponsored by local councils. Waitakere identifies as being the most inclined amongst all of the Councils to engage with multiple agencies in a whole of government approach (91%), followed by the Regional Council (71%).

While most councils are inclined to include the different ethnic groupings in their sponsored or supported initiatives, Manukau stands out (100%) as being perhaps more committed to including its diverse youth population in its participatory activities. This probably reflects Manukau City Council's strong commitment to its youth population, where a considerable 43% of the City's total population are under the age of 25.

The Auckland, Manukau, and Waitakere Councils figure prominently as being more inclined to involve community in their partnerships, with Waitakere featuring strongly on 91%. Waitakere (100%) and Rodney (80 %) show that they are more inclined to involve young people in planning aspects of child and youth projects. They are followed by Manukau (67%), North Shore (54%) and the Regional Council (43 %).

### **Implications of the Survey**

The evidence suggests that the councils are delivering a high number of projects, activities and initiatives for, and in partnership with, the region's young people. While the quality in terms of meaningful outcomes for young people can be argued, the intent of the officers in their facilitating opportunities for young people's participation appears exemplary. While many of the initiatives are interesting there is a concern with regards to the number of events carried out with young people and whether these are meaningful participation opportunities for all young people. An example might be a youth concert. The total numbers of youth attending and participating may be 300. The event planning team may include 10 young people. In terms of youth

development would the meaningful participation be accrued to those involved in the planning of the event or to those making up the audience?

The degrees of participation as emphasised in the literature review chapter show the complexities of participation. An evaluation of the example event might show that the overwhelming number of youth enjoyed the event. However, it is debatable whether everyone came away with a significant and meaningful experience. While being on an event planning team can be beneficial for young people and be seen as critical participation, being in an audience is more akin to passive participation.

### **Individual and Focus Group Interviews Analysis**

The analysis from the interview and focus group discussions data reported in ‘Child and Youth Engagement in Decision-Making Opportunities’ (ARCYE Report, 2005) provided a snapshot of issues for consideration as well as areas that Councils might consider for further development. The researcher has identified several areas for further development that local councils might consider. If councils genuinely want youth to participate in their sponsored or supported initiatives then they will need to be more critical of their efforts and how they go about engaging youth. The findings from the interviews and focus group discussions are presented from the methodologies discussed in the previous chapter and will provide some but not all of the answers to the thesis topic ‘Youth participation with local councils in the Auckland region: a snapshot of officer reflections involving young people in decision-making opportunities’.

### **Findings: Best Practice Engagement with Young People**

First, in terms of best practice approaches to engagement with young people, officers were asked the questions, ‘What is Engagement in the context of ‘child and youth engagement?’ and ‘Access to Children and Youth: What are best practice approaches?’ The common theme focused on the following answer, ‘Engagement takes place on multi-levels, with stepped degrees of possibility and probability in terms of relationship building and trust...each one of these cannot be dismissed or you run the risk of tokenism’.

Best practice access approaches were determined as involving respectful inclusion. Access is mostly concerned with safety and ensuring that proper consents are sought for young people’s participation. Access to young people requires consideration of those environments in which young people congregate together. All schools, including Kura Kaupapa, tertiary institutions, training institutions, church, marae, community centres, youth centres, skate parks and leisure centres are potential sites of engagement with youth. Meeting young people one on one is not desirable as there are obvious safety reasons for that. The context in which the young person is located informs the approach required. Everything about access needs to be transparent, such as a simple one-pager outlining clearly what it is young people are being asked to consider. Being respectful and mindful of young people and their familial and extra familial supports will have a direct influence on gaining access.

Council officers were asked, ‘What are the evidence-based child and youth initiatives that clearly demonstrate that your Council is positively engaging with young people?’ This question provided officers with the opportunity to present evidence-based examples of initiatives that they had undertaken with young people. The self-reported accounts provide a small window into the work carried out by local councils across the Auckland region. As an example, over a one-year period local councils in the Auckland region might plan and implement anywhere between one hundred and two hundred and fifty initiatives where there are clear outcomes for young people.

The common themes to be derived from the evidence-based initiatives presented by council officers is concerned with ‘integrity’, working with young people and involving key people who might have some direct connection with the young people in question. An example is that the Franklin District Council, with little past record of involving young people, sought a collaborative approach to engaging young people to be participants in their Council’s Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). Youth workers, WINZ staff, teachers and senior council officers came together to plan how to engage young people. Unfortunately, young people were not included in the planning or running of the forums. It was very much a top-down approach with good-intentioned adults doing what they thought was the most appropriate process given time, resources and their busyness within a council structure.

Auckland City Council’s example of engaging young people to be part of a ‘Sister City’ venture with Fukuoka (in Japan) showed a detailed approach that incorporated

risk management as a primary factor. Young people given an opportunity to go to Japan and experience another's culture were given every chance of success through a tightly managed process that results in young people being deemed 'fit' to be good ambassadors for their City overseas. The approach is definitely top-down. Although the process works well and incorporates aspects of sustainability, the tried and tested formula for successful engagement between young people of different countries does not provide young people with input to planning and implementation. However, the evaluation process in terms of feedback arguably assists to address issues and increase the likelihood that future participants have an outstanding experience.

The Auckland Regional Council has a strong environmental focus and this is evident in their educational programmes run at Arataki, Ambury and the Botanic Gardens. A sustainable environment is a strong theme and young people learn about their place in the larger scheme of things. The young people learn through an enquiry approach where their community is placed within a global perspective so that they can then apply what they learn back in their local communities. The engagement process is through volunteering within a school environment. There is no compulsion to participate. Teachers with an interest in sustainable environments work alongside staff from the Auckland Regional Council to set the programme. Again, there is no input from the young people to the planning and implementation of the programme. However, there is support given to those young people who wish to carry out environmental projects in their local communities.

Two examples provided by Manukau City Council as best practice approaches to engaging youth in decision-making opportunities are Lil' Achievers and the City Wide Youth Congress. The Lil' Achievers event (2004) involved several young people engaged in an event to recognise the achievements of young people in Manukau through their efforts in sports, arts, the sciences and business. While the young people involved in the planning and implementation of the event received critical learning the same could not be said for the two hundred plus youth who sat in the audience. While it was a feel-good experience for many the young people involved in the planning and implementation of the event learnt the most.

The City-Wide Youth Congress, a youth entity supported by council officers, sat down at the decision-making table with politicians to decide how best to spend \$130,000.00 across the City for youth. The lead-in to this was a series of workshops between the Youth Congress and Councillors. While it is arguable whether the decisions were conducive to youth development, the process was none-the-less of a high standard. Young people could be seen to be directly influencing the decision-making processes of Manukau City Council.

WaiCare was an environmental approach posited by North Shore City Council as an opportunity to engage young people. However, like the Auckland Regional Council example there is only the environmental aspect that is necessarily addressed. The engagement process is open, which in itself is commendable. The difficulty is whether young people do have an active voice in the planning and implementation processes.

This is doubtful and the programme is one that has become something of a template and is fast becoming instituted in Auckland, Waitakere and now the North Shore. While the focus is admirable, participation and especially critical participation must provide young people with the ability to input their ideas and their decisions as to what should occur. Guided participation of projects by adults is acceptable, but there needs to be a clear message to young participants that their views will be listened to and acted on.

The Papakura District Council worked alongside the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project working group to develop their model for 'youth in community outcomes'. Officers were able to bring together a group of young people with community representatives and council officers to form a youth advisory group. The Papakura Youth Expo was held in 2005 and the process of youth interviewing youth to find out what young people felt about their City and what developments needed to be made was outstanding. The use of drama, art, interviewing through audio and video techniques and presentations incorporated much of what youth had agreed to as being the 'right processes'.

Rodney District Council has produced a youth strategy, released in September, 2004. The Rodney representative to the research says that working alongside young people is very new in comparison to how Rodney has traditionally worked. Therefore it is early days in terms of developing a working relationship with the District's youth.

Nevertheless there are on-the-ground initiatives that are being developed and will hopefully be realised in the short to medium term.

The Waitakere City Council example of engagement of youth is focused on young people with disabilities. The example of competing interests between youth and adults can be highlighted in the example of adults trying to 'mainstream' their youth in contrast to young people with disabilities wanting a youth event where only young people with disabilities can attend. Their argument is that, by their being coerced into the mainstream youth sector, where anybody can attend, they were being set up to become the objects of ridicule. While this might serve the purposes of the politically correct, adults need to take into consideration the young people's thoughts and feelings. The council officer working with the young people over a period of months was able to assist them make an application to council for funding for their 'special event'. The application for funding was successful and the event was held.

Considering the models of participation provided by Hart (1992), Shier (2001), Westhorp (1987) and Rocha (1997), and the extensive literature on participation presented in Chapter Two (p.27-49) it is obvious that the above examples show contrasting levels of participation that arguably restricts youth participating in local authorities' decision-making. Thus much of what is reported above lacks the integrity of critical participation by young people. Why this is can be linked to what is presented in Chapter Two concerning those in society with and without power (p.31-36). This equates to adult power and youth powerlessness.

While this may be too targeted and effectively seen to stereotype adults as being controlling, one only needs to consider who in fact makes the decisions in the decision-making environments of society today. Some child and youth advocates might argue that young people make decisions every day, however, are these critical decisions that impact on society in respect of how society might be more inclusive and more in tune with what young people might contribute?

A majority offering from officers concerning the participation of young people was presented in the comments by two officers who said, ‘Adults need to let go of the process and trust young people so that the young people can lead’ and ‘Some adults think that they are the ‘parent’ figure and the youth are the ‘child’; there will always be those’ (ARCYE Report, 2005:8). Another argument exists that, just like young people, many adults can be conveniently pigeon-holed in terms of their lack of participation in decision-making opportunities. Perhaps the distinction that must be made is that many of these adults have privileges not necessarily afforded young people. Examples range from freedom of movement, access to benefits, being able to vote, receiving an adult wage versus a youth rate, being perceived as being of an equal standing in society through age and therefore wisdom, and having access to tertiary education without having to rely on one’s parents combined income being low enough to qualify for a student allowance.

Youth participation might be understood as being more an ideal than a reality. However, much of the evidence concerning youth participation reveals that there are

many reasons to encourage young people to participate in democracy and citizenship activities. Supporters of young people in decision-making feel that adults need to be more open to what young people have to say. These include Hart, R; (1992); UNCROC (1989); Keelan, T; (2000); Local Government New Zealand & Ministry of Social Development (2003); Treseder & Crowley (2001); Smith, Nairn, Sligo, Gaffney and McCormack, 2003; Taylor, Nairn, 2000; Smith and Nairn, 2001; in Blundell, P; (2004);

A question concerning the four wellbeing areas was asked to focus on how officers aligned to these areas as a strategic focus from a Council perspective. The question put to council officers was, ‘which of the four wellbeing areas does your Council do well to address or prioritise when engaging with children and youth (that is the Social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of wellbeing)? The only significant distinction from the answers provided in the earlier survey was that officers said that, “The challenge is to get the different well-being’s integrated with one another” (ARCYE Report, 2005). Another consideration is how urban and rural councils view their priorities in terms of integration. Officers are adamant that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not the answer, especially when considering that councils such as Rodney, Franklin, and parts of Manukau have issues around transport and access and the ability for rural youth to meet face to face on a regular basis with their urban peers.

There are many and varied accounts of council sponsored or supported child and youth initiatives in which one or more of the aspects of wellbeing (social, economic,

environmental and cultural) are being met. While some councils do struggle with the cultural aspect of wellbeing many are developing ways forward to ensure there are links between the four areas. One such undertaking is the environmental initiative Enviroschools (ARC) where the cultural aspect of wellbeing is included by using young people's cultural experiences through their storytelling so that the cultural and social aspects are seen as critical components in the makeup of a good environment; a good space to grow and develop. One officer reports that, 'one of our key goals is raising achievement in Maori and Pacific students; being lowest achievers; we hear it all the time. What we aim for in the Enviroschools programme is to make the cultural focus a huge part, an underlying principle. There are tools for teachers to use working with youth; for example speaking Te Reo, students bringing their own stories and experiences from their own culture and importantly helping to create the safe environment for this to occur'.

Others in rural areas see the economic aspect as being significant as young people continue to drift to the cities for work. Seemingly there is little attraction in terms of jobs, entertainment, mixing with other young people, to keep them in their rural home. Another example of the social and economic aspects being addressed is evidenced at Waitakere City Council where the Council is focusing 'more attention on the economic and social areas... and we have been doing this for some time now. We've got this whole wellbeing collaboration working with central government and community, looking at common wellbeing goals. The challenge is to get the different well-being's integrated with one another'.

One of the difficult and hard-to-discuss issues concerned how councils approached youth engagement and participation from within councils. When asked the question officers were at first apprehensive in their replies. However, as discussion went on many agreed that planning and provision of services to children and youth can be more effective and cost-saving if all sections within the different councils worked more cohesively together as opposed to unwittingly continuing with a silo approach. Some of the Councils, including Waitakere, Auckland and Manukau have seemingly moved beyond the concept phase of such an approach and are communicating internally to investigate how to progress and work more effectively between and across the different sections of their respective councils. While individual councils might consider key council staff with a child and youth focus as forming a staff cluster, the realities may act to constrain this approach happening. An officer comment as to the practicalities of a 'whole of council' approach was, 'Young people mostly don't vote, so the political direction from on high has meant a less than effective strategic direction (at officer level) in terms of young people' (ARCYE Report, 2005:8)

In the interviews and discussions, officers felt that the ability to have dedicated staff from across council examining policies, plans, strategies and actions as they relate to young people had merit; it was only the practicalities of such an innovation that required addressing. In terms of engaging young people to participate in decision-making opportunities officers were overwhelmingly supportive of the community development approach. Many of the youth engagement initiatives officers argued,

‘needed to be driven by the community and owned by the community otherwise the issue of sustainability cannot be successful’ (ARCYE Report, 2005:9).

Overwhelmingly, the identified method for engaging young people in decision making opportunities has been through a community development methodology. While many Councils have their own definitions of community development, one definition which brings relevance to the discourse of youth participation with local councils in the Auckland region is provided by the Federation for Community Development Learning (2003):

*Community Development is the process of developing active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about influencing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.*

Officers describe an uneven provision of services to youth due to what are essentially small numbers of community development officers within the local councils. This emphasises both a gap and an opportunity for councils to consider when determining staff levels in respect of the increasing need to engage young people in decision-making opportunities. The officers refer to community development officers as being relatively low cost high impact initiators within their respective councils. Therefore the opportunity to increase participation by young people with councils is inextricably linked to those decision-makers within councils seeing the value of community development coordination across the whole of council. Officers further offer that the apparent need to engage youth has never been more evident than now.

One area of concern for officers is around youth councils and their capacity to make inroads to influencing decisions made within local councils in the Auckland region. The question asked of officers in the interviews and discussions was whether there was any real evidence that youth council's work in the interests of young people. While there were some positive comments concerning how youth councils acted as one of many entry points for youth participation, overwhelmingly the negatives outweighed the positives. One comment in particular summed up 'youth councils' and their effectiveness, 'While the Youth Council has tried its best to engage with Council to offer a young persons' voice, they are not necessarily listened to and the information they provide to Council is not acted on'.

Youth Councils were seen by officers as providing an environment and a rich experience for those young people interested in working with an organisation, such as a local council, to learn about democracy and citizenship. Conversely, Youth Councils were viewed as problematic by officers. An example is the research carried out by the Children's Issues Centre concerning Youth Councils and young people on Boards of Trustees (Taylor and Johnson, 2002). The findings clearly show that the young people involved often feel disempowered, that through their experiences they feel their voices do not have an impact. Youth councils by their very name exude an imagery of a legitimate body or structure that has authority, like a City Council. However, youth councils do not allow for a great number of interested youth to participate because numbers are generally limited. While sitting on a youth council may offer personal

development for the individual, the intention of youth councils is to make a difference for young people in their communities, city and region (ARCYE Report, 2005).

In light of the observations from officers in relation to youth councils it was of some interest to the researcher to find out whether it was a young person's expectation that something meaningful will occur in their engagement with local councils. One officer's comment summed up the thinking of the majority, 'I'm not sure that it entirely depends on what you are doing with them. I think that young people are quite realistic and do not have unrealistic expectations. I think the real issue is convincing them that there's some value in what you are promoting' (ARCYE Report, 2005:8). Given that youth councils depend to some extent on the willingness of local councils to provide resources in terms of venue and officer time the question as to 'council friendliness' is important.

Supposedly, youth councils are seen to be ineffective and yet officers are seen to be supporting them. The discussion centred on whether this had something to do with a tokenistic approach by councils to youth participation. The researcher asked officers how they would describe their council in terms of being 'youth friendly'. One of the comments put the emphasis back on communities and the people themselves, 'We are not about promoting but about facilitating a sense of belonging in communities that comes from the people themselves; it's about what people can do with sometimes very little input from us'.

So, while many perceive councils as people-friendly institutions, there is evidence to suggest that councils are equally not perceived as being people-friendly institutions let alone child and youth friendly. Officers state that there are not enough positive messages about the importance of young people's participation in citizenship and democracy, or opportunities to learn about the structure, roles and functions of Council. If, as the officer's comment above suggests, officers create a sense of belonging, but without very little input from officers, in some respects officers are not seen to be promoting what they in fact might do to assist communities. One officer offered the following, 'In my consultations to do with the youth policy review, I spoke to literally hundreds of young people asking them what they thought Council did; they said rubbish, rates, and sewage drains. The issue is that young people simply don't have the faintest idea about what Council does'. One officer was more specific in relation to what needs to happen, 'Council needs to listen to what young people have to say. A lot of people in the older generation don't know how to listen to the youth voice. People tend to focus on the problems surrounding young people'.

Again, there is an issue about the lack of community development officers in the field. While there is a deliberate low profile supported by many officers for what they in fact do in the communities they work with, there is a question whether communities are to some extent dependent on their assistance. The roles of officers contributing towards the development of young people within their communities could be perceived as councils taking over the role and responsibilities of parents. Contrasting this is what officers describe as the disconnection between parents and their sons and

daughters. Officers attribute this to there being a growing awareness on the part of adults of their own developmental needs and of putting their self-preservation first, ‘A whole generation of baby boomers caught up in the discovery of themselves and self-improvement have left the affairs of youth to the few who hold some sway influencing their communities about the shortcomings of youth today’ (ARCYE Report, 2005:21). Interestingly, visiting Professor Whitfield from the United Kingdom, in an address at a youth development strategy seminar in Wellington (2002) stated that, ‘Many young people are often struggling to define themselves under complex cultural circumstances where it is not clear what adults truly believe in any more, except apparently, self-protection, excessive competitiveness, materialism and busyness. Their angst of identity is hard for them to name, let alone to address and resolve through new connections (Whitfield, 2002:9).

Some Officers report their Councils as being at the beginning of the continuum to building meaningful relations with their communities, while others have sought continual improvement in terms of respectful relationships with communities. As officers at the Papakura District Council reported, ‘we are at the beginning of establishing ourselves with our communities. The creation of the Economic Development position and the Community Development Coordinator position clearly indicates a shift in direction from our Council simply collecting rates. The community will (hopefully) over time perceive Council as being a more people-friendly organisation’. The Waitakere experience provides an example of a Council building on their established relationships between residents, ratepayers and Council,

‘I think relative to other councils we are right up there. We’ve got the policy; we have two Councillors that have a child and youth portfolio. We love having children come in and present things, and we often have speakers in. There’s a real interest, although there is still room for improvement. It’s all part of an ongoing process’.

The identification of blocks and barriers to young people’s participation in decision-making was discussed with officers. The officers were required to answer the following question; “As a council officer with some expertise, working in the child and youth area; what do you identify as the blocks/barriers to advocating for ‘child and youth’ programmes, policies, strategies, initiatives, activities in your council?” The officer comments indicated that ‘the higher ups’ within councils did not necessarily support youth having more of a say beyond their input at events such as youth forums. The overwhelming factor had to do with young people’s diminished capacity within society; ‘Young people don’t vote do not pay rates...so it is their circumstance which is a barrier to their critical participation and acceptance in Council’.

Yet others felt that the breakdown of the specifier/service provider split acted as a catalyst for poor outcomes for young people: ‘We would work more cohesively in a whole of Council approach if our service delivery people would be more aware and understanding of the bigger picture stuff that we are linking in with” and conversely, ‘our planners have no sense of development from below, or what is necessarily happening on the ground where we engage with communities. Consultants who do

not even have a relationship with the communities in question are brought in (at a high cost) to provide planners with expert advice”.

Asked about whether youth participation with their councils was meaningful or token, officers were very frank and conveyed a less than flattering approach by their councils to work in any meaningful manner with youth. ‘Hart’s Ladder of Participation’ was vetted as a means for officers to measure their respective council’s engagement with youth. The results from officer interviews and focus group discussions overwhelmingly showed that, from their perspectives, officers did not think councils engaged young people with integrity. Although there were fluctuating accounts that to some extent could be seen to be positive youth participation, officers felt constrained in their abilities to carry out ‘meaningful’ participation activities with youth.

Another area of some contention focused on a question put to officers concerning, ‘who the disenfranchised youth are’, and ‘how they might be included in participation opportunities with local councils’. The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA, 2002:14) identifies those young people more inclined to be kept on the sidelines as non-starters in participatory processes with local government. The strategy recommends specific efforts to involve rangatahi (young Maori); Pacific young people; young people from minority ethnic communities; young people with physical, intellectual and learning disabilities; young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people; isolated rural young people and young parents’.

The researcher has deliberately not focused on ethnic or cultural determinants in this study. The rationale for this is that much has been made of the poor outcomes for Maori and Pacific Island people, so much so that it would be easy for a researcher to undertake a study on Maori or Pacific Island youth as a separate research, perhaps to the detriment of the thesis topic. While the researcher makes this distinction, he also makes it clear that for the purposes of this study disenfranchised young people in terms of equitable participation in local council decision-making opportunities might very well be Maori and Pacific Island youth. However, there is an argument that many young people across the diverse youth sector in the Auckland region can be said to be disenfranchised, pushed against the margins of societal inclusion seemingly without the capacity to share in decision-making opportunities.

Officers felt that there were real problems accessing young disenfranchised people. They felt that the key to doing this was through community development officers. Officers commented that, ‘the only way that councils can effectively facilitate marginalised youth being involved with council is to support community development...the officers are connected to and have good relationships with key people who work with those marginalised youth’. Community development officers commented that, ‘what we can do is keep up a dialogue with community at multiple levels. We have the strength of developing relationships to include those marginalised young people when they are ready to be engaged’. Asked, “What are the current issues around engaging with young people to participate in local council participation opportunities”, officers responded that, “There needs to be some sort of partnership

with local schools to inform young people from an early age about the workings of council so that as the young people grow older they become more aware of the issues so that they can then make informed decisions”.

Democracy and citizenship-type education was mooted as being important in schools so that children and youth grew up knowing about the role of local councils and central government. This made it easier to discuss young people’s development needs, their community development needs and the needs of the region and nation. One officer remarked on the significance of youth engagement and participation in local council’s decision-making processes as being the key to future generations; ‘I see engagement with youth as key to sustainability, the sustainability of our policies, our decisions. It just makes our policy and decision-making that much more robust I think’ (ARCYE Report, 2005:10).

Finally, officers were asked, “What one initiative do you think would positively give young people a voice at their local council decision-making table, where they are listened to and the politicians heed the advice contributed by the young people?” A Waitakere City Council officer discussed “First call for Children”. The officer believed, ‘it is all about strategic planning, getting people to understand the need for long term planning and thinking. There needs to be a commitment where Councillors, senior management, the Chief Executive Officer are all in tune with the needs of children and youth’. Yet another officer discussed ‘Maori and Maori in respect of the Treaty of Waitangi’. The discourse on the Treaty would need to address the

generational impacts on young people who arguably carry-over the baggage of adults who had yet to resolve the issues around the Treaty and Partnership.

The three key initiatives identified as being demonstration projects to provide critical learnings for local councils in the Auckland region were also discussed. Those three initiatives are, 'Citizenship in Schools', two separate projects led by Waitakere and Manukau City Councils respectively; the 'Kids Voting' project led by Auckland City Council, and 'Youth in Community Outcomes', a Sustainable Communities case study with the Papakura District Council. Although the key initiatives have yet to be completed and reported on, the promise of the learnings from these initiatives will go some way to addressing the deficits identified in this thesis research. The 'Kids Voting' package in partnership between Auckland City Council and schools has attracted wide interest and is perhaps a starting-point in terms of democracy and citizenship education beginning to roll out in the Auckland area. The platform for 'Kids Voting' was laid some years earlier through the Auckland City Council's 'Political Awareness in Schools' Programme. Due to its impact and progressive qualities, the current 'Kids Voting' School Package has a great potential to not only promote awareness of democracy and citizenship opportunities in schools, but also to catalyse and activate in young students the importance of being involved in making decisions.

The Citizenship in Schools module and teachers toolkit is very much in a planning and experimental phase. Waitakere City Council will provide the module and teachers

toolkit for primary schools and Manukau City Council is focusing on the delivery of a module and teachers toolkit for the secondary school sector and alternative education providers.

The community outcomes process is probably one of the best opportunities for young people to be engaged to contribute their thoughts about the future development of their communities. The different methodologies in engaging children and youth require innovation that can be informed by enlisting the help of young people in a Community Outcomes Youth Advisory Group. Both the North Shore City Council and the Papakura District Council have been creative in setting a youth friendly approach to 'youth in community outcomes'. A Papakura District Council (PDC) Officer put forward, 'In this respect PDC has a clear stake in the ground signalling a 'green fields' opportunity to positively engage with children and youth. Current discussions are under way to explore the possible link with the Regional Child and Youth Engagement Project so that learnings from the proposed demonstration project will provide local authorities with options as to how they might engage young people in their community outcomes processes'.

Any proposed initiatives concerning child and youth outcomes would be enhanced if the views of young people were taken into account. This respectful inclusiveness creates a connection that has the power to bring people together and can mean a world of difference in those communities where disenfranchised young people reside. As two officers commented, 'Often when there's something going wrong in the youth

sector there's a sudden burst of energy to fix the problem...this is avoidable if we have a community presence and a sustained dialogue in communities with the young people and key community people...there's every chance issues can be signalled earlier and problems resolved without further escalation

### **Key Messages from Officers**

Without doubt, young people want adults to listen to them. One of the main issues about child and youth engagement concerns adult attitudes towards young people. As one officer said, "Perhaps it is about educating adults to not only hear the noise youth make, but to actually listen to what in fact they are saying". Also, while there are a number of adults who berate young people for not contributing to local government decision-making processes, officers note that the truth is that there are many adults too who do not participate. Many Pasifika and Iwi Maori adults do not vote, or put any value on engagement with Councils and remain on the periphery of local government decision-making. Their young people will undoubtedly be affected by their apparent apathy, but then, officers ask, 'are Iwi Maori and Pasifika critically informed?'

Officers identify that adults are the greatest blocks and barriers to child and youth engagement and their participation in Council sponsored or supported activities. The literature in chapter four supports officer comments that child and youth input to decision-making is not prioritised in local councils. Officers suggest that the way in which young people are perceived in society often acts against them and that providing opportunities for them to participate in Council activities can prove positive for young

people who learn about democracy and citizenship, as well as for adults who then see the value of including young people.

Being labelled "problems" is a disempowering practice that discourages young people from realising their potential, and impedes their ability to participate. This contrived labelling can have life-lasting effects. At the least young people can feel consigned to the periphery of society where they effectively remain voiceless. In this sustained culture of silence (Freire, 1970) it is the power elite that effectively control who has a voice in societal matters. The youth are seen but not heard and find trust and advice in other young people. Sometimes those young people do not have the information to provide the right advice. Officers offer that young people must be convinced of their innate capacity to contribute their voices to local government decisions that primarily affect them, but which are made on their behalf by adults.

In spite of the labelling and moral panics contrived by the media around young people, the young still want to have respectful relationships with the older generations, as emphasised throughout the research (Peteru, 2002). Unless adults are prepared to act as advocates for young people, fuelling tensions between the generations will continue. Officers note that, 'there are a very small but visible group of young people acting in anti-social ways unwittingly to uphold an adult-held perception of young people as problems, or even being pathologised; diseased and in need of a cure'. Participation therefore, for want of a better mechanism, provides the opportunity for young people

to express their views and to develop the skills, confidence and competence in their abilities to become interdependent of their adult relations.

Officers noted that young unemployed people and young people in full time employment, training courses and in apprenticeships are often under-represented in youth participation initiatives in the Auckland region. Young people are effectively non-participants in 'adult forums' concerning topical issues around young people in public spaces, youth curfews, the planning of skate parks, youth centres/drop in facilities; and issues to do with education concerning students as consumers of education and their rights as consumers. These issues by and large are cyclic, regurgitated themes which recur because, officers' state, they were never fully addressed in the first place. Certainly since the early 1990s and probably before, young people in the Auckland region have been offering their views, relating their experiences of their condition and those of the communities in which they live, go to school in and work (Peteru, 2002). The significant point is that due to young people's diminished status within society, they have little input as to what is finally decided at the local council level.

Officers talked about the positive aspects of technology for youth, but also highlighted the not so positive aspects for officers within their councils, where growth in technology is arguably depersonalising and disassociating people from their human environments, so much so that the ability for people to meet face to face is restricted.

An issue for officers is the feeling of pushing the youth voice in isolation. The

apparent distance of child and youth planners in relation to where the service delivery officers physically are is an issue. The very technology that might enable inclusive and participatory environments for young and old alike, as well as breaking down the silo approach and elitism, also has the capacity to block engagement through mechanisms such as firewalls and passwords.

With respect to ever increasing technologies, officers feel it is important to recognise that a significant number of the child and youth population do not have ready access to the internet and therefore information on a youth website might need to be generated in other forms of media for those who require alternative access options to information and opportunities to participation. Radio and ‘punchy’ newsletters have been posited by officers as being effective in generating information to and among young people. The creation of Youth Websites has been received favourably by young people, and most local councils in the Auckland region now have one. The North Shore City Council for example looked at the geographical issues in bringing young people together at a central point to meet and discuss their issues. The logistics of doing this partly informed the need to have a website where issues could be discussed online. As a Council Officer offered, ‘our young population is supposedly the most technology savvy youth in Auckland, so we are told, so it makes sense to use technology to engage with young people. Also, geographically it’s not an easy task getting young people to travel from Albany to Takapuna to discuss or workshop issues’.

This is not to disregard the doggedness of some young people who find their own way to push for action on youth matters. The following example was provided by a Manukau City Council Officer, ‘There are always a few young people who grab onto an idea and become tenacious and driven to get things done, such as a young girl from Makaurau who wanted a playground for the young people. Over three years and three Annual Plans she presented the needs for young people, until now there is a playground’.

### **A Rights-Based Approach**

While a ‘strengths-based approach’ to child and youth development is worthy, the rights of young people in a democratic society such as New Zealand warrants examination in the context that youth rights alongside adult rights are seemingly less, are understated and in turn undervalued and seemingly in practice are invalid. To counter the imbalance of adult perspectives young people need to consider their participation in such activities as participatory democracy where they might over a sustained period of time develop a critical awareness of the functions of local and central government to expand the space in which a youth voice can be woven inclusively into the social fabric of society. Therefore a ‘rights-based approach’ with a ‘strengths-based approach’ will take into account legitimate child and youth rights as recognised at the local, national and international levels.

The promise of a range of strategies, action plans and projects, including: the Ministry of Youth Development’s “Youth Development Strategy (2002)”; the “Sustainable

Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action (2003)”; “Investing in Child and Youth Development”; and the “Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project (2004/2005)”, will only be realised in partnership with young people, not through tokenistic or manipulative mechanisms. Officers contend that while young people may be stereotyped in negative contexts, the overwhelming and quantifiable lesson (using statistics) is that the vast majority of young people do not conform to this stereotype.

Officers further emphasise that adult attitudes towards youth simply limit the potential of all people to participate as democratic citizens in their own right. Young people; their strengths, their rights, their personal power and their freedoms are inevitably tied to adults. Young people are often valued in society for what value they will bring to society in the future rather than now. The rhetoric that is generally propounded by the politicians and bureaucrats concern youth being tomorrow’s civic or community leaders, parents, skilled workers, educators and guardians of future environments. This obviously creates issues for young people’s participation and its context, as explained earlier in the research. If adults do not attach value to what young people can contribute in the here and now, then young people will be cast perpetually in futuristic roles of importance; a constructed moratorium on youth ever critically participating in decision-making.

## **Conclusion**

Officers from local councils in the Auckland region have identified a gap in the institutional and political support for positive youth development initiatives in local government. The inability of local councils to provide positive youth development initiatives is based around adults who persist with the ‘youth at risk’ tag. Many youth programmes could conceivably fall over should the rationale be offered and upheld that deficit focus programming is not good for youth in development. Many youth workers need to distinguish between coaching, mentoring and parenting. A review of the power relations between adults and youth is required as adults clearly contribute to the diminished status of young people in society, by ‘spinning the wheels’ of the media to uphold a ‘time-worn’ notion that ‘all youth are at risk’ and that youth require the constraints within their societal existence that adults do not require.

Young people’s diminished status in society can only be enhanced with adults in a positive and proactive approach. Adults who adopt a positive youth development approach recognise that, ‘young people in development is mostly a natural occurring process, but one in which it is accepted, cannot be left to chance and therefore guidance and mentoring by adults is required at different life development stages’; and ‘young people must be provided with real opportunities to participate in meaningful democracy and citizenship initiatives if they are to become responsible as future skilled workers, educators, parents, community leaders, and guardians of future environments. Young people, provided with real opportunities to participate in meaningful democracy and citizenship opportunities, can become responsible

democratic citizens and make decisions on issues that affect them and their communities.

Further research is required to examine the data that suggests that so many young people are 'at risk' in comparison to those people aged over 24 years. The different issues and how they impact on all people in society such as youth employment vs. employment; youth offending vs. adult offending, youth suicide vs. suicide – youth issues or societal issues must be seen alongside the statistics of whole populations as opposed to isolated samples of the whole population. The planning and provision of services to youth might be more effective and a cost saving of resource over time if a whole-of-council approach was employed. Individual councils might consider key council staff with a child and youth focus or expertise forming a staff cluster to examine policies, plans, strategies and actions as they relate to young people and the communities in which they live. Officers report a tendency towards a silo approach to youth related issues within Councils. A long term strategy and approach to youth development compared to interim or short term arrangements will lessen the issues or problems that are perpetuated year after year, simply because they were never addressed fully in the first place.

When officers think about deficit they think about liability. A deficit focus approach to children and youth is about problems which some young people experience, not all. However, the response to that is often isolated and a small population of young people acting out anti social behaviours is often met with a blanket approach by adult

decision-makers, which unfairly categorizes all youth as "at risk". This approach has proven ineffective and dilutes the effectiveness of what should be carefully targeted, research-based efforts. There is much potential in exploring the strengthening of ties with Community children and youth worker networks (New Zealand council for education, 1993). Councils might consider what role they might play to support the efforts of children and youth workers to develop Youth Worker Associations at the local, regional and national levels. Not all territorial local authorities connect with Youth Worker networks. There is evidence to suggest that doing so would support and reflect a community approach to youth development and community development to strengthen relationships between Councils and communities. Most young people simply do not have any real idea what Councils do, nor would they necessarily be interested if they were told. However, many young people are not given the opportunity to in fact find this out.

In an ever-decreasing and arguably globalised community, change is very much apparent. No longer are New Zealanders insulated against the influences of what occurs overseas. In the changing world where many young people will be expected to inherit the decisions made by their parents' generation, young people are simply not subscribing to become willing participants in democratic citizenship-type activities. This is to the detriment of people young and old who run a real risk that the consequence of their non-participation is that the decision-making capacity will revert to the state, and token community representation will be further marginalised to the fringes.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

*The young, free to act on their initiative, can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown... The children, the young, must ask the questions that we would never think to ask, but enough trust must be re-established so that the elders will be permitted to work with them on the answers.*

Margaret Mead

A focus on youth participation with local authorities to consider whether benefits accrue to the councils or to youth is timely, given the decision of the United Nations to designate 2005 – 2015 as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (SDFNZ, 2003). Consideration must also be given to the 1989 adoption and subsequent near-universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC, 1989). New Zealand ratified UNCROC in 1993. Through the Convention's philosophy of recognising young people's rights as individuals and respecting young people's dignity, UNCROC promotes the principle that young people should be entitled to express their views on all matters that affect them and to have those views taken seriously. Article 12 of the Convention makes this clear: "Participation is a substantive right of all children and young people...democratic participation is not an end in itself; as a procedural right, it represents the means through which youth can take part in, and influence, processes, decisions and activities in order to achieve justice, influence outcomes, expose abuses of power and realise their rights"

The study has incorporated the work carried out by the researcher through his involvement in the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement Project (ARCYE) in 2005. The project is part of the Auckland Sustainable Cities, 'Investing in Child and Youth Development' (ICYD) workstrand which began in 2003 and is due to be completed by 30 June 2006. The researcher interviewed officers of the seven cities and district councils in the Auckland region and the Auckland Regional Council, all of whom had a child and youth focus within their organisation. The interviews examined the drivers for youth participation from a local government perspective. The fact that no young people were included in the study is significant as the researcher wanted to shift the deficit focused lens on youth-to adults; officers in local government who engage young people to participate in their council's many and varied initiatives.

The interviews provided the local authorities' officers with a rare opportunity to share their experiences in engaging youth to participate in council decision-making opportunities and to speak about the issues that often affected how they carried out their roles. The researcher also wanted to find out what the benefits of youth participation were for councils and for the participating youth. The thesis topic: "Youth participation with local councils in the Auckland region: a snapshot of officer reflections involving young people in decision-making opportunities," provided the platform for officers to discuss aspects of youth participation with local councils that they might not have reported if not for the research opportunity.

The researcher's view that the Auckland region's economic growth is dependent on the next generation of leaders, skilled workers, educators and parents is critical to understanding the links between sustainable development, youth participation and youth development. Young people must be critically involved in the discourse and in decisions made about the region's development simply because if they are not, the implications are that overseas workers will fill the gap at a cost. Statistical evidence suggests that older people will stay in the work-force well beyond their optional retirement age of 65 (Statistics New Zealand, 2000).

Therein, argues the researcher, is the reason that central and local government should engage young people. The 'whole of government' (central and local government with community) focus on investing in child and youth development therefore is not random; rather it is a strategic effort to prepare young people to become responsive to their region's growth and development. The benefits from a whole-of-government approach may see engaged youth as a captive audience being open to influence from adults.

The value or benefit of including young people in decision-making opportunities needs to be carefully considered within a context of young people's diminished status within society. For youth development stakeholders the issue is how young people might be open to exploitation and manipulation. Youth participation with local councils, the researcher argues, is nothing more than an ideal or a distortion to show participating youth how to contribute their voices to improve their position in life, while the reality

might be that they are being blinkered into considering and committing to the economic needs of a growing Auckland region. So, effectively, youth rights are being exploited by adults. The study's findings on participation and in particular youth participation is basically about the equalization of power relations and the creation of a more flattened and informal relationships in which young people and adults act in an equitable way in planning, consulting, engaging and decision-making with respect for one another, at both the institutional and the community level.

Heather McLeod, co-editor and co-founder of "Who Cares" magazine, says "young people provide fresh ideas and insights to debates that have grown pedantic and stagnant over the years" (McLeod, 2000). She says: "Young people give a much more real perspective to issues". They are not caught up merely in the academic point of view. Without kids at the table, she argues, "it's all quantifications, objectification, and statistics". Alongside the need to validate young people must be a positive focus among youth advocates, policy makers, and funders to re-focus the deficit-based lens quagmired in the visual colours of youth gangs, young criminals and boy-racers as somehow representing the youth sector. Quite simply, policy makers, politicians and the community at large are ill-informed of the real situation for young people in their communities. This is not helped by media imagery in television and newspapers. The media's approach of whetting a hungry public's appetite for crazed teens out of control on 'P', or of young people killing and maiming one another is an entrenched mindset or media strategy geared to 'rule the headlines' and capture market share within a fierce media competition environment.

McLeod's commentary on policy-makers who would rather invest in alcohol and drug prevention programs over positive youth development initiatives is perhaps indicative of some officers being isolated from reality. This logic is supported by officers, particularly in service delivery, who comment that policy makers are too far removed from what is occurring at the community level. The arguable effectiveness of policy-makers engaging costly contractors to 'paint a picture' for them of 'community' supports officer comments about strained relationships within councils between policy and service delivery. While policy makers paint the deficit-focused collage to politicians who also have their say, young peoples rights are being trampled on, they are being treated as second class citizens and their access to the media to protest the rhetoric and unfounded claims by 'responsible adults' is effectively controlled by adults. As presented in Chapter Two, just as governments in third world countries can control the population through various mechanisms, so too do local authorities have the means and capacity to influence what young people might have to say on matters relating to them.

This chapter provides a summary of the different arguments presented together with the research findings. It also provides issues and areas for development with recommendations that the researcher feels youth stakeholders will find innovative. The research recommendations will include the need for further research to tackle aspects of the study that were not necessarily dealt with here because to do so would not have done justice to the issues that are thesis topics on their own. The implications of not engaging youth to participate with local councils in democracy and citizenship

initiatives are examined with the recommendations. In order to consider the issues, areas for development, implications and recommendations presented in this final chapter, it is important to reflect on what has been presented thus far.

Firstly the introductory chapter provided an in-depth examination of sustainable development in relation to the linkages from a global to national to local (Auckland region) setting. Youth definitions were explored to show the complexities involved in determining who in fact youth are. Such definitions clearly show that it is the dominant culture New Zealand European Pakeha definition that is adhered to. Chapter two the Literature Review provided the theoretical framework that outlined the various arguments of the benefits of youth participation together with local councils. It also focused on the complexities of participation and its relationship to development, from a global to national to regional context. The literature provided evidence of adults holding the power and youth being powerless, adding to the mounting evidence that the reality for youth in New Zealand is that theirs is a diminished status beside adults.

The third chapter, Methodology, considered the essential elements of the research carried out in 2005 by the researcher through his involvement in the Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement project. The qualitative undertaking with local authorities' officers was carried out with integrity, in consultation with the research participants. Results of the research presented in chapter four: Research Findings shows that while there may be many initiatives undertaken by councils, overwhelmingly they do not necessarily provide for young people taking lead roles

in the planning and implementation of the initiatives. The research analysis of the various findings from interviews with officers supports the view that youth participation works well for both councils and youth.

However, in terms of meaningful outcomes, the engagement of youth and their participation mostly benefits councils. The analysis of the data provided a snapshot of local councils' officers' experiences with young people that strongly suggest the need for more community and youth development officers. All of the chapters have concentrated to some degree on the merits of sustainable development and how this relates to the Auckland region. The central government push supported by local authorities in the Auckland region to invest in child and youth development seemingly requires time and resources. The discussion about central government's push to interest young people in participation together with their local councils does point to the government's requirement to meet the future economic growth needs of the country, but especially in Auckland. The findings in Chapter Four strongly suggest that the whole of government approach will become the 'new way of working' and that entrenched ways of working both within local government and central government agencies will become obsolete. There is anecdotal evidence that this is already happening, especially with the growing number of regional initiatives involving the different local authorities and central government agencies.

There is a real need for young people to become the future skilled workforce, and future community leaders and parents for it is they (the young) who will inevitably

carry the torch for future generations and look out for an ageing and retiring baby boomer population. While many of the local councils recognise the importance of involving young people there is little evidence that local councils have gone beyond the rhetoric. Neither is there evidence that a dialogue has been sustained to discuss with young people their importance as future decision-makers. Very few councils partner with schools to provide an orientation to the structure and meaning of why councils exist, where they fit within the governance of communities and how communities through elected representatives fulfil community trustee positions to represent community views.

Given that 2011 has been identified as the beginning of the potential mass retirement of the baby boomer generation, there may be cause for those contemplating retirement then and thereafter to consider whether the younger generation will be of a friendly disposition in taking care of them and their needs in their retirement years. If the young were given the opportunity to become democratic citizens, caring for one's community, being politically aware, protecting the rights of freedom and rights of others to enjoy those freedoms accorded oneself, then perhaps the future might be brighter, not only for young people but also for the ageing baby-boomer population.

While the unequal relations between the different generations has been examined in this study there is the disturbing scenario that youth participation will only ever exist in a vacuum unless adults actively advocate for young people's inclusion in all areas of society. As discussed, the value of young people's participation in a project, activity

or initiative with local government can result in many positive benefits not only for young people but for many other people. Providing young people with meaningful decision-making opportunities, where they participate as equals and are listened to, will invariably increase their sense of belonging, raise their self-esteem and give them the confidence to make better decisions in their lives.

The report 'Sustainable Development for New Zealand: Programme of Action' is an emphatic statement of intention by central government that: 'reducing the number of children and young people without foundation skills and qualifications is essential if the future workforce is to have the skills it will need to participate and contribute to the economy' (2003:24). Knowing that the present workforce is under-prepared for meeting the future skills demand in the Auckland region should be sending alarm bells through every institution, every community and every household.

The Prime Minister's Department and Cabinet state that: "we must take the opportunity to invest in children and young people because they are the parents, workers and adult citizens of the future. Skilled workers in sustainable employment are essential for funding the services associated with an ageing population' (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2003: 23). Over the next ten to twenty years there will be zealous competition between countries to attract skilled workers. Economic growth globally is already feeling the effects of an ageing workforce.

The possible implications of not engaging young people today to improve their understanding of sustainable development is perhaps to consider a future New Zealand workforce dominated by skilled workers from overseas. In addition to this is the possibility that New Zealand's young people might become disenchanted with competitiveness and look overseas for the answer or become disenfranchised and jobless, disconnected to their communities and their families. Should young people in the Auckland region not be engaged to at least consider their futures in relation to New Zealand's economic requirements, then they may not be engaged at all. Their (youth) development needs and their community and region's needs may not be met. Therefore any strategy to address the real possibility of a downturn in the region's workforce must also consider contingencies to address the different socio-economic scenarios in the future.

Young people are often valued in society for what they will contribute to society in the future rather than now. Civic leaders refer to youth as tomorrow's leaders, parents, skilled workers, educators and guardians of future environments. The difficulty in positioning young people in roles of importance tomorrow is the real possibility that young people do not get to experience the roles and responsibilities of decision-making now. Young people and their relevance to the roles and responsibilities in decision-making in society are perhaps better addressed in the present context.

The researcher has alluded to an adult society caught up in its own self interests (ARCYE Report, 2005:21; Whitfield, 2002), so much so that young people have had

to seek advice from other young people. Sometimes the advice offered is not informed, largely due to young people not being critically informed about the mechanics of the society in which they live. This adult-centred focus in part is linked to a global phenomenon based around 'finding oneself'. In an enlightened epoch of history where individual thought and action is seemingly more important than community cohesion, spirit and development, adults are seemingly rebelling against a tradition of looking out for their young ones. Further research is required to bring to light the serious implications of such behaviour. A starting point perhaps would be examining the effects that American culture through such television programs as the 'Oprah Winfrey Show' (Harpo Productions, 1986), and 'Dr Phil' (Harpo Productions, 2002) has on the New Zealand adult population. As alluded to in chapter four anecdotally the baby boomer generation has become self-absorbed in their own self-discovery, perhaps to the detriment of successive generations.

Research into New Zealand youth and their participation in democracy and citizenship initiatives, especially in a local government context has been lacking. The researcher has presented the issues around participation and has highlighted that officers identified that the limitations of youth participation are built around unequal power relations between adults and youth: adult power and youth powerlessness. In this respect the way young people are treated compared with adults warrants further research.

Some obvious examples of the different treatment meted out to young people but not necessarily comparable to the way adults might be treated include:

- Youth curfews vs. Adult curfews?
- Youth wage rates vs. Adult wage rates (ability/competence versus age imposition)
- Voting age – lower to 16 years of age (does age equate to knowledge and wisdom, or an understanding of how local government / central government works?)
- Student Allowances – until the age of 25, a young person is dependent on parents' combined income.
- Decision-making capacity – in family, school, work contexts; where is the power; who in fact is in control?
- Youth make decisions every day. However, who makes the decisions that effectively determine what a young person does daily?
- Youth gangs vs. gangs
- Youth suicide vs. suicide (youth problem or societal issue?).

A whole-of-council approach and a whole-of-government approach can address the requirements for an engaged and involved child and youth sector. Local councils' officers in the Auckland region indicate that more democracy and citizenship activities are planned for the future. Young people will inherit and be affected by

decisions made today, so the future adults need to be active participants in decision-making with local government now (ARCYE Report, 2005).

Because a higher level of economic growth is required so that New Zealanders can enjoy and sustain a relatively good quality of life, all New Zealanders must have a stake in their community's development, their city's future and their region and nation's standing in the world (ARCYE Report, 2005). The latter arguably requires a sense of nationhood, linked with common values and respectful relationships that can only occur with a sustained dialogue (Saunders, 2001) across all of the community.

The importance of involving young people in decision-making processes must be communicated to everyone. For Sustainable Auckland Cities to achieve its aims, young people need sustainable support structures that assist them to become democratic citizens, making informed choices about their future and the future of Auckland. The champions of economic development in New Zealand need to be innovative in their promoting of New Zealand as the best destination for skilled workers to live and work, and perhaps promoting New Zealand in the context of a safer, more secure environment to live in and raise a family. Certainly the events of 11 September 2001, along with the recent bombings in London (July 2005), may see some New Zealanders presently working overseas reconsidering their future living and working arrangements. However, there is no evidence to date to show that many

of the approximate 800,000 ex-pat New Zealanders are in any hurry to come home (Statistics NZ, 2005).

The evidence provided in this study clearly shows that while youth participation is not necessarily free from coercion, manipulation or tokenism by adults, participation does offer youth opportunities with local authorities to explore the importance of young people being able to contribute to the decisions that impact on their lives and the communities in which they reside, go to school, work in or train for work. Local councils need to be more focused to promote positive youth development initiatives around democracy and citizenship. In this respect councils can assist youth with improved access to information about the workings of their council so that they can readily access decision-making processes, especially where decisions relate to them.

### **Adults as Change Agents**

The involvement of adults in the development of children and youth is unavoidable, given that many young people are inevitably tied to their parents or caregivers in some way until they are 25. As much as this study has been around building capacities in officers to engage young people respectfully, as important is the role adults have in relinquishing some of their power and authority to include young people in planning and implementing initiatives. Adults participating as active democratic citizens provide an example for young people to follow. They also contribute to changing a culture of non-participation by a large sector of an adult society who do not vote and do not take the opportunities to contribute.

## **Youth Participation**

The evidence to date clearly shows that although there have been some good local initiatives together with young people, time and again the benefits of youth participation accrue to local councils. Youth councils for example have provided a mechanism for local councils to seek a youth perspective on the latest council policy, strategy or initiative under consideration. However, so far, little evidence is provided to show councils actively seeking out a wider youth voice in the community.

This highlights the realities too, for local council officers who often work with limited resources while being required to be responsible for several portfolios, of which youth is but one. The question of youth participation within a local council setting seemingly comes down to a particular council's priorities and often reflects the availability of officer time, resources and energies that councils are prepared to commit to young people. Therefore, the situation for many council officers involved with young people is that they do so using a piecemeal methodology. There are few councils who have a dedicated youth service. If councils want to get serious about effectively increasing the levels of youth participation then they need to increase resources to make this happen.

## **Moral Panics and the Media**

Within mainstream society is a belief that to be different is to be deemed deviant.

The role of government and the media needs to be scrutinised for their complicity in

providing the ‘makings’ and ‘triggers’ for moral panic about young people and certain behaviours (Peteru, 2002). If society is to overcome their culture of control, apprehension and alienation towards young people, then it must act on factual data, not statistics taken out of context, isolated from the whole. Efforts must be made to connect with young people on consensual terms at the familial, extra-familial, peer, school and work levels (Peteru, 2001). Applying positive youth development principles through local and central government’s various portfolios would be a major step forward.

Age in relation to ability and capacity is a barrier that impedes young people’s involvement at community and local government levels. Youth are too often wrongly perceived as not having the necessary maturity through their lack of years. They are therefore effectively sidelined, marginalised without a voice in matters that impact on them and the communities in which they live. While it would be remiss to ignore the importance of citizenship within a society and especially the current emphasis within the context of ‘Sustainable Development for New Zealand’, the overwhelming evidence may be that young people simply want validation, an acknowledgement that they exist and therefore belong.

In 2005, the impacts of globalizing equity and opportunity, such as prescribed by the United Nations and specifically the ‘Convention on the Rights of Children’ (1989) mean that individual thought and action is becoming more the norm. In this respect young people in New Zealand have begun adapting and evolving aspects of

marginalised youth around the world (e.g. American culture) to better reflect and communicate their experiences and especially their dissatisfaction concerning their place in New Zealand. Political correctness and traditional hierarchies contribute to what Freire describes as a 'cultural silence' (1970). For a youth sector already marginalised, being perceived in such negative terms does not instil in them trust with older people. The push-pull effect of competing loyalties for young people around school and home, one's culture and the culture of New Zealand is heavily weighted against a young person's ability to resist, be resilient and accept that the raised expectations from family, school, work and the state will be addressed over time.

If society makes the rules and governs the preconditions to participate as an equal in that society then effectively anything that is marginally outside the mores, values and parameters of societal governance becomes marginalized (Peteru, 2002). When looking through the problem-focused lens on young people, what is immediately apparent is that policy and action do not connect to positively address what is not so much a youth issue as a societal and a systems issue: one that obscures and divides people along lines of culture, ethnicity, age, gender and socio-economic circumstance.

The lack of fair and equal social policy to address the situation for young people is not a localised event, but a theme that has parallels globally. While the emphasis is always on the deficit or the gap, the capacity differential will never close. While the aspirant needs and wants of young people to be better represented in decision-making (Martin, 2002) do have currency for some youth, overwhelmingly the evidence shows that this

runs in the face of a society that is skewed heavily towards dominant culture ideology. There appears to be a gleeful attachment for the paternalistic and over regulated state control mechanisms applied mercilessly to youth, as discussed throughout the study. For youth development to occur a young person needs to be critically engaged at a social, political and economic level within society (Keelan, 2001).

In the history of humankind a misplaced notion is perpetuated that young people are more vulnerable and more susceptible to the nuances of daily life. This fractured thinking is borne from a familial context of paternal authoritarianism that is discriminatory in nature, deep seated in the history of humanity and perpetuated over time by the hegemony of political powers. That politicians and their economic advisors do not openly pursue a biased based attack on youth is arguable, yet their questionable policies and unsophisticated legislation such as youth wage rates create environments for unequal social and economic distribution based seemingly on age versus ability. Such unequal relationships are played out on a daily basis and only serve to further entrench the roles in society that adults and young people act out. Bringing about the necessary changes in New Zealand society that would see a more equitable distribution of power between the generations would appear unrealistic unless there were a multitude of benefits for adults to do so. So rather than the simplistic endeavour to show how young people might give voice to address the issues facing the Auckland region, young people must first be informed and have the capacity to question decision-making processes concerning but not involving them.

## **Participation**

The requirement for local councils' officers is to question beyond simple answers, as 'answers can be obstacles to understanding and knowledge'. This is critical otherwise simply having answers without rationale resists critical examining and understanding why and what we do (Rahnema, 2004). Refining the question to define the level of examination brings a conscious understanding of the situation and circumstance of young people's participation. Participation invariably is tied to development, social, economic, environmental or cultural. Participation is also interrelated with democracy especially in the sense that people with a shared purpose congregate and engage in dialogue that determines a collective and political direction, whether it be in public policy, voting or social action.

Participatory democracy can be viewed in positive and negative contexts. While young people and their ability to participate in society is very much an adult controlled process an important factor is that many adults do in fact care whether or not young people are involved when different opportunities present themselves. The refusal of youth to be boxed or contained within a compliant socialisation mechanism of society's hegemony seems to be a natural phenomenon in response to their not being informed, engaged or having the status to speak about their relative position in society.

Because there are very few citizenship and democracy education programmes that would inform young people about 'free will', moral rights and democratic rights, their access to critical participation and meaningful discourse is not a structured process, but

a more ad hoc and adult controlled experience. The role definition of youth and adulthood however constructed is located within an opposed relationship of the powerful and the powerless, the oppressor and the oppressed as Freire (1970) has discussed. Progress without improvement is the reality for young people should they not become active democratic citizens in society. Youth do not necessarily identify who is marginalising them, they simply react in protest – consciously or unconsciously by actions that might include but not be limited to an apathy to voting; apathy to education; truanting; graffiti; petty crime; anti social tendencies and withdrawal. However, statistics time and again show that youth crime (as one example) has remained relatively stable for the last ten years or so (Becroft, 2004).

Being labelled as "problems" is a disempowering practice that discourages young people from ever realizing their potential. This only consigns young people to an already conditioned culture of silence on the periphery of society ('seen but not heard'), where young people find trust only in other young people. The use of legislation and pointing the finger only alienates and further marginalizes young people to an unhealthy position in society. Youth must be convinced of their innate capacity to contribute their voices concerning local government and central government decisions that are usually made on their behalf by adults, yet primarily affect youth themselves.

The rights of young people in a democratic society warrants examination in the context that youth rights alongside adult rights are seemingly less, are understated and in turn

undervalued. Therefore, it is imperative to engage young people in positive and productive activities that have outcomes that meet young people's needs as well as the needs of their communities. This helps to break down the societal stigma that unfairly targets young people, to then show young people in a different (positive) light, as being community contributors through such activities as community volunteerism.

The preconditions to becoming an adult, a worthy citizen of one's community and society in general are both mischievous and misleading. Rules and norms marinated in generational adult constructs of privilege, class, ethnicity and culture have engendered in society negative behaviours and attitudes towards youth. Adults view young people through the media, through their own comparisons with their own youth or through engagement with youth at short intervals. While young people may be stereotyped as drug users or delinquents, the overwhelming and quantifiable lesson is that the vast majority of young people are not like that at all, and it is adults conditioned to control who perpetuate a colonised or captured mindset that need to change. Therefore, any research that takes into account the situation and circumstance of young people and how they might be engaged to participate in citizenship activities, must also examine and define the preconditions for this to occur in the context of the environments in which young people live.

As more studies are conducted and more information comes to light about the development of young people, there appears to be a growing awareness and commitment among child and youth advocates, policy planners, and community and

society stakeholders that the opportunities for youth are somewhat diminished in comparison to older people. The push therefore is to improve conditions for young people, or at least to be seen to be trying to improve their lot.

### **Implications if Society does not get it right**

The effect of young people not being listened to and not being sufficiently valued in their communities may result in negative social milieus that can breed both apathy and anger towards authority in all its various forms. In the article “Public Participation in Regional Economic Development” (2001) the term ‘people’ is presented as being inclusive of young people, who it is noted “have been ignored as having too little to contribute”. Similar descriptions of women and ethnic minorities as being excluded from participatory contexts shows the deep-seated discriminatory practices that are applied to youth, women and ethnic minorities in broad-based settings the world over (Public Participation in Regional Economic Development, 2001:118).

Information or its lack, combined with a low energy resource to disseminate information effectively to the youth sector appears to be a major factor in preventing young people from participating in decision-making processes. Young people simply do not know what they do not know. Adults seemingly treat youth issues as trivial and therefore young people are much more likely to confide in their peers for advice on issues, some of which can have very serious consequences. Youth gangs or crews, unemployed youth, young people failing in education settings are serious ramifications of ongoing adult dialogue without young people being involved in the discourse.

## **Areas for Development**

The areas for development are outlined below and for each area a recommendation is made by the researcher:

### **Adult Attitudes**

Adults' attitudes to young people can be seen to limit the potential of all people to participate as democratic citizens in their own right. Young people, their strengths, their rights, their personal power and their freedoms are inevitably tied to adults. Young people's diminished position within society may also be linked to the fact that they:

- are not old enough to vote
- lack personal power or representation
- are not ratepayers or bill payers
- are not seen as core business of local authorities.

### *Recommendation:*

An independent review of councils service delivery to children and youth to examine the suggested deficit in equitable services; they make up a substantial number of the region's total population; and positive stories with a priority focus on young people working with councils will both raise their profile and effectively install a safety mechanism of 'public scrutiny'.

## **Addressing the Diminished Status of Young People**

Young people's diminished status in society can only be enhanced with adults in a positive and proactive approach. Adults who adopt a positive approach recognise that:

- Young people's development is mostly a natural occurring process, but one which is recognized and cannot be left to chance. Therefore guidance and mentoring by adults is required at different development stages;
- young people must be provided with real opportunities to participate in democracy and citizenship initiatives if they are to become responsible as future skilled workers, educators, parents, community leaders, and guardians of future environments;

### *Recommendation:*

Commit regional resources from local government and central government to establish a response to the diminished status of youth. Hold a series of regional workshops to examine the low prioritisation of positive child and youth projects, activities or initiatives.

## **At-risk Youth**

Addressing the perception of children and youth as being at risk is a "problem" that requires a total mind-shift from people. An examination of the evidence that posits young people as being more at risk than adults is unfounded.

*Recommendation:*

An examination by independent contractors to review the data that suggests young people are 'at risk' in comparison to those people aged over 24 years of age; giving due consideration to the different issues and how they impact on all people in society e.g. youth employment vs. employment; youth suicide vs. suicide.

**Silo Approach of Councils**

Officers were in the main critical of their respective councils ability to work with external partners to consider how best to provide services and programmes to youth. Officers commented that one of the negative aspects of their respective council's was working in isolation of planners or service delivery officers. The left hand often did not know what the right hand was doing.

*Recommendation:*

The planning and provision of services to children and youth can be more effective and cost saving if a 'whole of council' approach is employed. Individual councils might consider key council staff with a child and youth focus forming a staff cluster to examine policies, plans, strategies and actions as they relate to young people. These staff cluster workshops might best align to planning cycles and half yearly catch-up meetings.

### **Stigma of being Young**

As detailed throughout this study, moral panics assisted by the media about youth require redressing. Otara as an example in recent months has come under the scrutiny of the media, politicians and those within the ‘youth industry’ seeking funding for their youth programmes. An unfortunate consequence of media and moral panics around young people is that those (otherwise) positive youth development advocates within the ‘youth industry’ feel pressed to paint a dark picture of their community’s situation to attract funder dollars to keep their programmes going. The result is a collusion of sorts with the media and the politicians.

#### *Recommendation:*

To address the stigma attached to young people, councils might consider a staggered campaign across the region replicating the ‘Youth Week’ message of ‘Redefining Stereotypes’. The campaign would highlight positive stories about young people alongside media profiling of best practice child and youth participation initiatives (perhaps beginning in Otara or Mangere).

### **Community Child and Youth Workers**

Councils have indicated that they do not have strong ties with community child and youth workers. If all are agreed that community development is appropriate; then there is a need to work from the community up. Child and youth workers have the key contacts within their communities to ‘make things happen’, but not necessarily the backing of local councils or central government agencies.

*Recommendation:*

There is potential to strengthen ties between councils and community child and youth worker networks. Councils might consider how they can support the efforts of children and youth workers in developing Youth Worker Associations at the local, regional and national levels. A youth worker's Hui would be a good place to begin, partnering with youth workers to plan the event.

**Local Territorial Authority (LTA) Child and Youth Advisory Group**

There is an apparent lack of coordination concerning collective approaches to positive youth development. Coordination of officer efforts across the region would be helpful for officers making linkages to find effective methods of working with various groups of young people.

*Recommendation:*

Create a child and youth advisory group made up of LTA officers from across the region to promote partnership and a sustained dialogue on positive child and youth development. The group could be extended to include representatives from the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) who have signalled their intention to provide a MYD Regional Hub to support children and youth development.

**Clearinghouse function**

A common barrier for planners and practitioners is accessing up to date information. Clearinghouses for this purpose exist in America, the United Kingdom and Australia.

They provide a wealth of information and links to other valuable resources for engaging with children and youth.

*Recommendation:*

The creation of a clearinghouse for child and youth development hosted by a tertiary institute (with a good record of positive youth development programmes) and resourced in partnership between local authorities, the Office of the Commissioner for Children, and the Ministry of Youth Development.

**Regional Youth Voice**

Youth voices are mostly heard in isolation from one another, such as at a ward level e.g. Howick, Otara or Mangere. This process replicates in part councils way of working in silos. If young people have an opportunity to meet together on an annual basis across the Auckland region, a better understanding of youth matters might be derived through a youth initiated agenda.

*Recommendation:*

That local councils and the Auckland Regional Council contribute necessary resources to hold an annual Youth and Sustainable Development Conference. The Conference might look to national trends as a means of emphasising sustainability for the future wellbeing of people and the environments in which they live. The Forum would also reflect New Zealand's contribution to the United Nations declared 'Decade for Sustainable Development' (2005 to 2015).

## **Rhetoric around Children and Youth**

Just like kissing babies and shaking hands, politicians espouse a rhetoric concerning young people as ‘tomorrow’s leaders’, future skilled workers, parents and educators. While natural attrition through old age and dying means that this is fact, the spin put on by politicians suggests that young people will ‘naturally assume’ the above roles. This cannot be left to chance.

### *Recommendation:*

A commitment to positive child and youth development could be addressed through the development of an Auckland Regional Child and Youth Charter, designed in partnership with young people in the Auckland region. All LTAs would be signatories, which would help focus on the needs of young people at all stages of their development.

## **Low Cost High Impact Outcomes**

Officers refer to community development officers as being relatively low-cost high impact initiators within their respective councils. Therefore the opportunity to increase participation by young people with councils is inextricably linked to those decision-makers within councils seeing the value of community development coordination across the whole of council. Youth development and community development are closely linked.

*Recommendation:*

Those local authorities who put in budget bids to secure the services of youth development staff effectively bolster their respective organisations, especially where officers have only a generalised approach to youth development. Those who appreciate that youth development is a specialised area of expertise will know that the investment is a long-term wellbeing initiative. Therefore, senior managers need to consider the value of a youth services team especially in larger cities including Manukau and Auckland. Working closely with Councils community development services will provide synergies that will benefit not only youth and communities, but also, act to catalyse councils as becoming ‘youth friendly’.

**Further Research**

For young people to critically participate and be critically aware of partnering with local councils they must be exposed to the inner workings of local and central government, the political processes and the meanings behind tokenism, manipulation and decoration. Young people must know their community in which they live, learn and work; and how these inter-relate to aspects of the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being’s of their development and the development of their communities. Investing in further research which focuses on the mechanisms required to provide young people with the necessary ‘tools’ to participate is desirable and supports the efforts of advocates for young people who seek a more equal footing for young people in their relationships with adults.

Further research [proposed but not limited to just these areas] includes:

- Youth rights e.g. schools, training, workforce
- Ethnic youth e.g. iwi Maori, Pasifika, new settler / migrant groups
- Cultural dictates that prohibit young peoples' participation
- Adult constructs of power relations with young people
- Review the data that suggests that so many young people are 'at risk'
- Youth citizenship programmes in schools
- A linked up service provision to young people vs. silo approaches

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1

### Children & Youth Engagement with Local Councils

#### Introduction

This survey is designed as part of an overall stocktake across Auckland's local Councils, to find out what each Council is doing to engage children and youth to become involved in community and local government civics and democratic decision-making. The Stocktake initiative has been determined by the Project Working Group of the Regional Children and Youth Engagement Project comprising representatives from the local Councils. The criteria determined for the stocktake are:

- *Finding out what Councils are doing now regarding youth engagement i.e. name of initiative current or planned (tick box)*
- *Must focus on Children and Youth (defined as being 0-24 years of age)*
- *Need to cite level of partnership eg is it with young people, community or multi-agency collaboration (tick box/boxes)*
- *Status of Project eg current, newly established, pilot, sustainable beyond 2006 (tick box/boxes)*
- *Tick box (one or more) those wellbeing quadrants i.e. social, economic, environmental, cultural that your Council's initiative deals with*

- *Analyses – will provide ‘what are gaps’; will suggest future research, resourcing arrangements.*

You have been identified as a key person within your Council who has a primary focus on Children and Youth in development. Please complete the questionnaire and return to: **Paul Peteru, C/- Manukau City Council, Private Bag 76 917 Manukau City** or by email [ppeteru@manukau.govt.nz](mailto:ppeteru@manukau.govt.nz)

I further request a follow up meeting with you and representatives of your Council who have operational and planning insights to how your Council engages with Children and Youth. Your assistance setting up this interview would be much appreciated and would add value to the overall stocktake.

Thank you for your assistance. Should you have any queries please phone Paul Peteru (09) 267-2854 or mobile 021 0657 922; or by email (as above).

**The deadline for returning your questionnaire is Saturday, 22 January 2005**

Please tick boxes that best details your Council’s engagement with Children and Youth in each of your listed initiatives. Young people (Y/P), for the purposes of this survey only, are children and youth aged 0-24.

## APPENDIX 2

### Generating Categories, themes and patterns

The thematic outcomes from the survey basically provided an insight as to what questions needed to be asked of the focus group interviewees. The questions asked of interviewees were:

1. What is your understanding of engagement in the context of ‘child and youth engagement?’
2. Access to Children & Youth: What are best practice approaches?
3. Is there a Cluster or Collaborative Approach within your Council to engage with Children & Youth?
4. Which of the four wellbeing areas does your Council do well or prioritise when engaging with children and youth? (social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects)
5. What evidence is there that Youth Council’s work?
6. How realistic are young people’s expectations that anything meaningful will happen in their engagement with Council?
7. How would you describe your Council when I say ‘Child and Youth Friendly?’
8. As a Council Officer with some expertise, working in the Child and Youth area; what do you identify as the blocks / barriers to advocating for ‘Child & Youth’ programmes, policies, strategies, initiatives, activities?
9. What is the evidence based child and youth initiatives that clearly demonstrate that your Council is positively engaging with young people?
10. On ‘Hart’s Ladder of Participation’, where do you feel your Council is situated engaging with children and youth?
11. Disenfranchised young people: Who are they and how can they be included to participate alongside other young people?

12. What informs your practice, engaging with children and youth? (E.g. philosophy, child & youth toolkit, what other Council's are doing?)
13. What one initiative do you think would positively give young people a voice at the local authorities table, where they are listened to and politicians heed advice given? (Does not need to have happened yet...).
14. What are the current issues around engaging with young people?

## APPENDIX 3

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Over the course of developing the study a number of terms, specific phrases or words have been used that might require definition for ease of reading. Here are some of them.

**Annual Plan and LTCCP:** While the Annual Plan process was the predominant planning tool for a Council's works schedule for any one financial year, the Annual Plans of local authorities will now be driven by the Long term council community plan (LTCCP). The Annual Plans will still be carried out, but in reality, they will be little more than a list of activities with a budget assigned to each of the activities

**Bottom up or From Below Development:** Basically relates to power dynamic in development at the community level; who in fact is controlling the development process. Bottom up stems from grassroots ownership and control as opposed to top down which is concerned with external (to community) ownership which may involve 'utilising or using' community trustees in a token manner to veil who in fact is in control.

**Child and Youth Outcomes:** Statement of an intended result for children and youth. The outcome statements usually start with the words Children will be...

**Citizenship:**

Where a person has a **Social and moral responsibility** to others, understands and becomes **involved in Community** matters and service to the community and has the **Political literacy** to understand how to make themselves effective in the life of one's community, region and nation; more than just having the political knowledge.

**Collaborative:** Group of government officers working together toward a common goal.

**Community Development:** Community Development as a process and outcome is about developing active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about influencing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.

**Community Outcome:** Statement of a result for a community. Can include services or qualities. The collaborative aims to achieve for its community.  
Example: Our community will have available and affordable child care resources for families.

**Deficit Focus:** Is concerned with looking at the negative or liability aspect e.g. youth and crime, youth and fast cars, youth and suicidality.

**Disenfranchised:** those who by a variety of different means do not have full access to participate or to be included in decision-making opportunities e.g. young Pasefika who are not aware of their right to vote = parental and legislative mechanism that effectively disenfranchises them from participation through a lack of 'user friendly information'.

**Empowerment:** building capacities in people to act on their own or as a collective. Can also be used as a tool for governments to manufacture outcomes that align to their particular policies and strategies.

**Engagement:** Engagement takes place on multi-levels, with stepped degrees of possibility and probability in terms of relationship building and trust...each one of these cannot be dismissed or one runs the risk of tokenism.

**Evaluation:** Collection, analysis and reporting of information for decision making or to guide progress.

**Facilitate:** To guide through the process.

**Four Aspects of Well-Being:** the identified *social, economic, environmental* and *cultural* aspects of wellbeing identified as significant in s3 Local Government Act; 2002.

**Indicators:** Data, information, and statistics that measure whether outcomes are being achieved.

**Issues:** Concerns/ Ideas of project working group members.

**Kura Kaupapa:** Education delivered through Te Reo at the pre-school through to tertiary education levels.

**Moderator:** Usually an independent facilitator employed to oversee research interviews and discussion proceedings

**Moral Panic:** The concept of the moral panic is based on the notion that societal outrage or concern can be directed against certain groups in society through representation of negative images of them in the media

**Outcome:** A desired result.

**Participation:** In the context of people participation can be transitive or intransitive; either moral, amoral or immoral; either forced or free; either manipulative or spontaneous'

**Participatory Action Research:** A research emphasis to include and share endeavour together with research participants. Working relations can include an undertaking to work cooperatively and cohesively with research participants.

**Participatory Democracy:** Actively participating in democratic activities such as community consultations, lobbying local and central government; proactive as opposed to inactive.

**Participatory Processes:** the processes involved with participation

**Positive Youth Development:** Includes a young person's ability to critically participate in the economy and politics of their local, regional and national communities

**Rangatahi / Taiohi:** Both reflect young Iwi Maori.

**Representative Democracy:** The governance model under the Local Government Act whereby communities elect people to the governing body of their local authority (such as Councillors) who then on behalf of their communities make decisions as to what will promote community well-being.

**Resources:** What you have (people, financial, equipment, etc.), or equally resources that you do not have.

**Snapshot:** In context of study, an acknowledgement that what is reported through research today may be redundant tomorrow. This applies especially in context of youth in development.

**Strategy:** Activity that leads to achieving your vision.

**Sustainable Development:** development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

**Sustainable Dialogue:** Negotiated or mediated discussions at the local and international level. Hal Saunders discusses the ability to bring opposing factions at the community or international level to the 'table' to deal with difficult or fractious issues to seek answers to what he describes as "the problems behind the problem"

**Target Group:** The group of people one tries to reach with a particular strategy or activity.

**UNCROC:** United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Whole of Council / Whole of Government Approach:** The collaborative approach between units of Council or Central Government Agencies or between Council and Central Government, together with community.

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