

# The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa - *In Summary*

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa is about how government and society can support young women and men aged 12 to 24 years inclusive to develop the skills and attitudes they need to take part positively in society, now and in the future.

## **HOW THE STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED**

The Strategy was developed by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and informed by literature and broad consultation. This included advice from a ten person external Reference Group and a Wellington-based Youth Advisory Forum and consultation with young people, adults and agencies working with young people or on youth issues. Appendix 3 lists the consultation meetings and the respondents who provided written feedback.

*“To be perceptive and actually ask questions, is really how these goals can be achieved. Once you have a combined force within government, just imagine all the wonderful things that could be achieved.”*

*16-year-old female, Te Puke*

## **WHO THE STRATEGY IS FOR**

Government has agreed that this Strategy provides a policy platform for public sector agencies when developing policy advice and initiatives relating to those aged within the 12 to 24 years inclusive age group.

Although this Strategy will be used by public sector agencies, it is also for individuals, groups and organisations that work at all levels with young people and on youth issues. Together we can make a difference.

## **The Strategy’s Components**

### **THE VISION**

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

### **THE PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

The Strategy is based on a youth development approach that has six key principles:

- 1. Youth development is shaped by the ‘big picture’.**
- 2. Youth development is about young people being connected.**
- 3. Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach.**
- 4. Youth development happens through quality relationships.**

5. Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate.

6. Youth development needs good information.

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

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

## THE AIMS

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

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

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

## THE GOALS

### *Strengths-based Approach*

**Goal 1** - Ensuring a consistent strengths-based youth development approach .

### *Quality Relationships*

**Goal 2** - Developing skilled people to work with young people.

### *Youth Participation*

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

### *An Informed Approach*

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

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS

The Strategy development process identified a range of actions to support the positive development of young people in New Zealand. These actions relate to the the goals and social environments where youth development takes place.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION - WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The Ministry of Youth Affairs will take a lead role in working with other central government agencies to apply this Strategy across government portfolio areas. Appendix 1 lists some of these areas. However, the Ministry

*“All of the students agree that the development of a youth strategy was an excellent idea... young people have rights too... we are the future of New Zealand and we need to have a say...young people are an important part of the community and need to be recognised as one... decisions made affect young people the most as they will have to live and grow up with the results of those decisions.”*  
*Group of secondary school students, Auckland.*

and other central government agencies, are not the only organisations responsible for implementation. As the actions illustrate, local government, non-government agencies, communities, families and individuals all have a role to play. This document can be used as a resource for all of these groups.

Specific actions by Government in implementing the Strategy (and the Agenda for Children) will inform the Action for Child and Youth Development work programme, which guides the work of the Ministries of Youth Affairs and Social Development on these Strategies for 2002/03 and beyond.

**If the nation or community acts on the understanding that positive youth development:**

- is shaped by the 'big picture'
- is about young people being connected
- is a consistent strengths-based approach
- happens through quality relationships
- is triggered when young people fully participate
- needs good information

**young people are more likely to grow up knowing:**

- they can make a positive contribution to society and have opportunities to do so
- they have supportive and caring connections with a range of groups and people who care about them
- they can influence their own lives through choices and skills
- they feel good about who they are and what they can offer

**and we help create...**

- a country where young people are vibrant and optimistic.



# Why A Youth Development Strategy?

How we raise and support young people is too important to be left to chance. A healthy and vibrant youth population is a valuable asset for our nation - for what it offers both now and in the future. A number of interrelated factors highlight the need to re-think how we can improve the lives of all young people.

## **THE WORLD IS CHANGING RAPIDLY**

Globalisation, new technologies and associated social change are challenging and altering all aspects of society within single generations.

Successfully adjusting to change and harnessing the opportunities it brings requires new approaches and attitudes. Innovation, creativity and the resiliency to endure change have become the critical determinants of future prosperity and are linked to good youth development.

## **A CRITICAL STAGE - For Young People and Society**

The years from age 12 to 24 inclusive are critical for human development - they build on experiences of childhood and

generate the foundation skills for adulthood. This is also a critical stage for wider society; young people 'test' its values and norms, enhancing its capacity to adjust to a rapidly changing world.

## **INCREASING STRESS ON THE YOUTH POPULATION**

The increasing rate of social change and competition for training and job opportunities is increasing the stress on young people. This is reflected in rising mental health issues for this group. Over the past 40 years, the youth population has not shared the health gains of other population groups.

## **AN ECONOMIC ESSENTIAL**

Too many young people are arriving at adulthood unprepared to contribute productively as citizens and employees.

This group continues to be disproportionately made up of Māori and Pacific young people. The trend has doubled the associated costs through negative investments in the justice and health systems and lost returns from non-involvement in the labour force.

In addition, New Zealand's ageing population and shrinking working-age population accentuate the economic risks of not improving outcomes for all young people in New Zealand.

## **WE KNOW HOW WE CAN DO BETTER**

There is a great deal of evidence on what young people need to develop in positive ways. They need to be successful: at school; in relating to friends and partners; at work; and emotionally.

Building a youth development strategy on this information base makes it more likely that all young people will enjoy this success and that fewer will suffer from mental illness, unemployment, addiction, unwanted pregnancy, loneliness or become involved in crime.

*"...by letting youth recognise they have a say in their futures you are paving a pathway to future success."  
Eight secondary school students, Auckland.*

# Young People Today

## WHO ARE 'YOUNG PEOPLE'?

The term 'young people' describes young women and young men moving between childhood and adulthood, aged 12 to 24 years inclusive.

There are no set boundaries between 'children' and 'young people' and 'adulthood' - they depend on the person's culture, their individual personality and choices and their social and financial circumstances. Likewise, there are many terms that describe this period, such as youth, adolescent, teenager, young adult, taitamariki, rangatahi, taiohi and tupulaga talavou (Samoan).

Today, the term 'young people' refers to a longer time span than in the past. This is largely because young people today generally depend financially on their parents for longer than earlier generations.



Young people aged 12 to 25 account for around 20 percent of New Zealand's population (747,200 in the 1996 Census). Overall, young men outnumber young women. However, women outnumbered men in the 20 to 25

year age group in 1996, with a sex ratio of 98 men per 100 women. The youth proportion of the whole population is decreasing and is expected to fall to around 15 percent over the next 50 years. Within

this proportion, an increasing percentage of young people will be non-European<sup>1</sup>.

## YOUNG WOMEN AND YOUNG MEN

Gender influences young people's lives in many ways, as highlighted by the consistently different outcomes of young women and young men.

For example, young men are more likely to excel at sport, offend, be prosecuted and commit suicide, while young women are more likely to gain a qualification after leaving school, develop an eating disorder and attempt suicide. Appreciating how gender (and attitudes to gender) can shape young people's life experiences is important in the 'big picture' of youth development.

## A COMMON PROCESS FOR A DIVERSE GROUP

The process of 'growing up' consists of similar opportunities and challenges that all young people are likely to experience.

These challenges and opportunities, which shape much of what we understand as being 'young', can include:

- negotiating school
- living as part of a family while becoming more independent
- getting along with friends and peers
- adjusting to physical changes and growing sexual feelings.

However, there is a tremendous diversity in young people's individual characteristics and backgrounds, such as gender, ethnicity, being a recent migrant,

<sup>1</sup> *New Zealand Now - Young New Zealanders*. Wellington, NZ: Statistics New Zealand, 1998.

socio-economic status, sexual orientation, rural or urban location, disability, religious affiliation and family structure.

The interaction of these characteristics has a significant effect on the development process, life experience and outcomes and, therefore, needs to be carefully considered in a youth development approach.

