

## Young People in Christchurch – a summary of qualitative research findings to inform All Right?

Summary of *Youth Pulse* (Opinions Market Research Ltd, December 2013) prepared by Information Team, Community and Public Health.

To inform the evaluation of the 'All Right?' wellbeing campaign, qualitative research was carried out. This summary details the key findings from the research.

The research was carried out amongst 14 to 21 year old residents of greater Christchurch with data also being collected from parents of children aged 15-21 years. Data was gathered between 15<sup>th</sup> July and 5<sup>th</sup> September 2013. Focus groups were used to collect the following information. Six focus groups were completed with 14-21 year olds. Once focus group was held with parents (of 15-21 year olds). As this research is qualitative, it is indicative only and therefore generalisability is limited.

### Key findings:

In general, the research findings indicate that young people in Christchurch are experiencing the usual types of issues for their developmental age, however the circumstances of post disaster Christchurch have magnified these issues. However, in addition to these usual issues, Christchurch young people are also experiencing a range of issues that can be attributed to the Canterbury earthquakes and their ongoing impacts. On the one hand young people are feeling uncertain about the future of Christchurch, they feel sad about the death and destruction resulting from the earthquakes on 22 February 2011 and they are worried about their friends and family. Young people are also worried about money and lack of affordable accommodation. Young people miss the social life and night life available to them prior to the earthquakes, and are also concerned about their parents worrying about earthquake repairs and frustrated about road works. On the other hand young people in Christchurch are thankful to be alive and are optimistic about the future of Christchurch. Young people reported feeling a greater sense of community and deeper bonds with friends and family following the earthquakes.

The research identified that when young people are in vulnerable situations such as the shift from a structured environment (for example school) to a non-structured environment (for example looking for work) that this vulnerable time is exacerbated by the earthquakes and post-earthquake environment in Christchurch. Reasons for this may include lack of appropriate parental input due to parents being distracted, disconnection from family and friends who have moved away, and reduced social opportunities.

It was identified that in Christchurch, often parents and teachers were preoccupied and siblings, friends and partners often did not have tools to help other than "being kind". An opportunity was identified to increase emotional literacy among those that influence young people (for example parents and teachers).

### **What is life like for young people right now in Christchurch?**

- Overall many of the issues that young people are having are typical for this age group, however the Christchurch post disaster environment has magnified the extent of the issues
- These include:
  - feeling isolated (partly due to reduced social opportunities)
  - struggling to find affordable accommodation , with some young people not being able to afford to leave home
- For some males, a problem has been living up to other people's and their own expectation of male behavior
- Some females reported feeling troubled, isolated and alone. They believed that they are alone feeling this way and that they are not normal

### **What is important to young people in Christchurch right now?**

The focus groups identified the following as being important to young people in Christchurch:

- Having fun right now
- Having family together and getting on well (including being listened to and being understood)
- Close friendships
- A good future (this includes university or employment, independence, new experiences, a partner, friends and family).

### **What has been the impact of the earthquakes on young people wellbeing?**

- The earthquakes have been a difficult experience for young people in particular because of their limited prior life experience.
- Some young people identified that the stress created by the earthquakes for their parents impacted on them (for example living in unhappy households or parents being preoccupied and not able to listen):

*They [parents] get stressed, yell at you.. all you did was knock over a glass of water. That makes me cry, one tiny thing, I burst into tears. (Female 14-17 years)*
- Some young people also identified the loss of social opportunities as having a negative impact on wellbeing.

## The impact of the earthquakes on the wellbeing has varied from person to person

The focus group findings suggested the following about the impact of the earthquakes on the wellbeing of young people in Christchurch:

- For young people who did not have good wellbeing prior to the earthquakes, the earthquakes may have impacted on them more than those without wellbeing issues
- A number of young people do not have the tools to maintain their own wellbeing or to support others
- Lack of support for young people was identified by young people (from family, friends and government agencies)
- Young people identified that there is a stigma associated with experiencing mental health issues
- Young people often do not have an awareness that there is help available for emotional support, even if aware that this is available, they are likely not to know how to access it
- Young people often feel that they are the only one that feels the way that they do.

## Parents' perspective

The parents' focus group findings suggested the following about...

- Parents are still dealing with earthquake related issues, as a result they have fewer resources to manage their children's needs
- Some parents lack the energy and know-how to address their children's issues, meanwhile young people are missing out on adult advice, role modeling and mentoring
- Parents expressed concern for their children
  - It has changed my kids. They used to be independent but they are less now...*
  - It has changed their and our lives.*
- Parents had limited awareness and knowledge of mental health service provision.

## All Right?

- There was some awareness among young people of the All Right? campaign
- The focus groups findings indicate that:
  - All Right? is seen as promoting self-reflection
  - the All Right? message is understood as a recognition of wellbeing

*Everyone feels like that sometimes, you are not different (Female 18-21 years)*

*It is ok to feel like that sometimes (Female 18-21 years)*

- The campaign is seen as having universal relevance, as the messages are non-age specific
- All Right? offers helpful friendly advice
- All Right? is positive and encouraging
- An All Right? message aimed at encouraging young people to share how they are feeling with others would be of benefit
- Parents interviewed were wanting more substance from the campaign, for example direction on where to go for professional advice if they were concerned about their child's mental wellbeing.

**The following recommendations for the All Right campaign are made on the basis of the focus group findings:**

- To explore ways to further promote emotional literacy to young people and their parents (this includes increasing the ability to listen to others and empathise with their emotions)
- To incorporate a message aimed at encouraging young people to share how they are feeling with others