

Does Waimate Need A Youth Worker?

This is the question Otago University Graduate from the Department of Social Work and Community Development, Sarah McKay collected information on when she carried out her research in the Waimate Community earlier in the year.

Commissioned to undertake the Research by the District's Social Services Committee, Sarah interviewed over individual 40 people and seven community based focus groups. Her qualitative research is a snapshot of the perceived social needs of the broader community as they were relayed to her. Her brief did not require her to quantify findings, but to record what people actually thought about the Community's social needs.

From her interviews key themes identified by the participants were:

- General Social Needs
- Health
- Family
- Elderly
- Youth
- Voluntary Work.

The main consensus on solutions to the expressed concerns included:

- a multipurpose facility,
- more consistent medical care,
- a community worker and/or
- a person to work with youth or older people.

“However, a number of participants also identified the need to work in partnership and collaboratively in the community. There is concern that specific roles or services developed in the community, such as the establishment of a community worker, might come to represent the ‘solution to the problem’. This is opposed to strengthening, developing and enhancing the existing formal and informal support networks and resources of the district.”

Will doing what we are already doing better, help solve some of the community's social needs?

Throughout Sarah's report there are some telling statements made by individual people. For example:

- ‘Some older people have no one to ring or talk to, they have home help, but it is not enough. Elderly living on their own don't know who to ring about a myriad of issues’.
- ‘People can be alone 23 hrs a day, with their only contact from meals on wheels’.

- ‘There’s only sport for young people, if you are not into this, there’s nothing.’
- ‘Lack of parental involvement in young people’s lives and activities’.
- ‘To live and play here costs something. It’s expensive to be involved in a range of activities – a lot go out of town for them. As a result some miss out and don’t do it’.
- ‘People and powers underestimate the time it takes to organise activities, especially if you don’t have parents support. It costs you time and money. A lot of good parents are involved, but then there is also GST, OSH, fund raising, regulations, buildings, hire and insurance’.

The report is filled with many positive statements about our community. For example:

- “it’s a very community orientated. There are a lot of hands and people willing to help”.
- “People are our strength. Many do a lot of good work; they do countless hours”.
- ‘There are a number of groups to keep an eye on issues in the community’.
- “There are a lot of things to join. Clubs for everyone, that are affordable”.
- “People’s general concern is about neighbours and people, you don’t get this to the same extent in cities... People tend to rally around”.

To make use of the report Sarah has suggested that the Social Services Committee work by a process outlined in the University of Kansas’s Work Logic Model. This aims to increase the “Community’s capacity – the ability of members to make a difference across time and over different issues”. It stresses the need for the community to work collaboratively to address it’s concerns. The empowerment of the community to find appropriate answers to it’s concerns.

Sarah McKay has supplied us with much information about our community’s needs. It is now up to us as a community to use this information to move our community forward.

The employment of a Youth worker may not give us the answers we first thought.

We now need to work out what our priorities are as we endeavour to increase our community’s social capacity. At this stage we may not have answers, but we do have information and a process to work by. Our task is not finished, it has only begun.