

Report of the Youth Summit held at Motueka Top 10 conference centre on Monday, May 25th, 7.00pm

Report by David Armstrong

Exactly 50 people attended this event on a very cold night, a very pleasing number as we were unsure whether we would get 10 or 100. It was decided at the last minute to start with supper and then move on to the main event at about 7.20pm. Supper was soup, chips, sausage rolls, sushi and chocolate biscuits. The soup was made and provided by Carl Chapman and his wife, with other contributions purchased or donated. Coffee and tea, along with use of the venue, was provided for free by Motueka Top 10, for which we were grateful.

A rough count of those attending indicated about 18-20 were probably under the age of 21 and most of the remainder were involved or interested in some way or another in community youth work, though very few in a paid role. The MC for the evening was Brent Maru, who posed questions to the panel and then invited anyone from the audience to add their comments. The panel consisted of "young adults" (what do we call ourselves?) Paul Johnson, Carl Chapman and Stephen Evans and young people Jonty Comins, Kora Appleton, Nathan Peacock and Alok D'Hondt.

The second half of the evening comprised three breakout groups led by Paul, Carl and Stephen, each focusing on the areas of youth engagement that they were passionate about. Attendees chose which of the groups to work in. The discussions ran for about three quarters of an hour, followed by a brief report from each group of what they found. Brent and the other leaders continually stressed the need for some sort of action or result to arise out of the Summit, so it would not be just another talkfest. They also insisted that whatever actions arose, they had to be youth-led (though with mentoring or help from some of the willing adults).

This reporter tried to capture the ideas that flowed quickly, and what follows is a best-effort attempt to capture the essence of ideas. I was unable to attend all three discussion groups, and therefore relied on the summary reports provided from each group. Of particular note in general, is that throughout the evening the young people who were present spoke eloquently and fearlessly about exactly what they thought, without being put off by any adults who they may have felt were trying to guide or manage them. Everyone spoken to at the end of the evening agreed that the young people were given every chance to be heard and express themselves, and that they did so very well.

Four questions

Four topics or questions were posed by Brent. For each he asked several of the panellists for their opinions and then turned the question over to the floor for a few minutes for further comments. The comments reported below will not be attributed to any particular people and are not direct quotes; they are noted to try to gain a flavour of ideas and opinions that flowed. (They are not comments of the writer.)

Question one: Do youths living in Auckland have more opportunities than those living in Motueka?

- This is not a simple yes/no, there are different sorts of opportunities in a large city and a small town. While Auckland may offer far many more opportunities in education and jobs, Motueka offers opportunities in community life and its superior environment.

- One aspect in which opportunities are limited here are the curriculum class subjects offered at school. With a smaller school roll, the school can offer a smaller range of subjects.

- Opportunity can be looked at as quality versus quantity. There may be a greater number of opportunities in Auckland, but they are not of the same quality necessarily as those offered in Motueka.

- Motueka offers more opportunities to get involved in the community in a meaningful way.

Question two: Are you as a teenager heard and listen to in Motueka?

- While it may take a village to raise a child, it is equally true that takes children to raise a village. Adults need to be aware that they can also learn from children, and make sure they listen to them.

- Young people can be heard, to a degree, but they do need to go out of their way to be heard, usually by being part of some sort of group doing work in the community, such as the Motueka Youth Council. When you're involved at that level, people do this on to you, but the question remains - how do young people get into the governing loop in a town.

- Yes, I am being listened to particularly through the Youth Council, but I know many other young people who aren't.

- Some kids actually prefer to be passive and not expected or asked to give their opinions.

- Young people can't vote in elections, so they and older people often assume they shouldn't have a real say in the community.

- Kids at school should be able to pick what subjects they want to learn, rather than going through an institutionalised system where they are told what they have to learn.

Question three: To get a job paying greater than \$20 per hour, do I have to leave Motueka?

- It should not be just about the money, but more about the opportunities for creativity, collaboration, expression of ideas, sharing and things like the gap fillers in Christchurch. You do need to have the infrastructure of the community and a job, but more than that you need to be involved in creative activities.

- There aren't many jobs available here beyond the casual and easy work such as serving in cafes, picking apples et cetera.

- It's actually the same problems as for adults, finding well-paid worthwhile jobs.

- Young people should not just look at the standard cheap jobs, but start to think more positively and look at, for example, using the Internet to start to earn money through their own entrepreneurial efforts. But in order to do that, there does need to be a change in attitude and not just roll over and accept that there are only cheaper boring jobs available.

Question four: Does Motueka have a youth-at-risk issue?

- Not everyone fits the mould of the standard school system, and if they're not catered for they can become "at risk".
- Every generation has its "at risk" kids, and many of them get through it to become contributing adults.
- Often kids who don't meet adults' expectations are made to feel that they failed, when in fact they may not have.
- Motueka has been known as a drug town, and many young people perceive it in that way.
- Adults need to work out what language to use to communicate with young people.

Summary of group work

The groups were asked to come up with say three actual plans or projects or activities which could be initiated directly from this Summit, not just to continue talking about the same issues. They were also asked to ensure that what they come up with would be activities led and created by youth, not by adults.

Stephen Evans' group looked at how to use creative spaces and generate creativity among young people in the town, how to use those spaces for young people to express themselves authentically, to allow young people to be heard in their own way.

The main action decided was to set up a Facebook site called "Motueka Creative Spaces", aiming to start it on Saturday, and to use it to create and promote its first event, to take place on Saturday week. Some of the activity ideas that young people could create, and use the Facebook page to promote, included live music with perhaps a weekly open mike night, events at the Sunday market, use of decks reserve possibly with a temporary stage, an egg and spoon race using kiwifruit as an annual event, visual art and chalk graffiti, and events around the Chinese New Year or Matariki.

Paul Johnson's group was tasked with what could be done with what is already existing in Motueka to help young people. A great deal of the resulting talk was around mentoring and communications between youth and adults and youth and the Marae.

The young people in this discussion group agreed to taking on the task of creating a list of activities or skills which young people would like to be mentored in, and resources that may be around to help. Some of the ideas that emerge quickly were help with public speaking, creating CVs, building confidence and leadership. Initially young people would need to be mentored by adults, but the goal would be for young people to mentor each other in a peer system with skills passed down. The adults in this group were convinced that adults in Motueka are available now who would be happy to be "sponsors" for teaching skills such as workshops, confidence and leadership; but before that could happen the young people themselves must create the lists of things they would like help with and resources that are available.

It would also help to have a place where this could be done, a sort of hub for youth information and connection. This would not necessarily have to be a building for that purpose, but would use existing spaces, rooms et cetera, such as at the high school. Eventually a purpose-built space could be created, but it is not needed initially to get such a scheme going. An important aim of this process would be to get kids who are having problems but not yet "at risk".

Carl Chapman's group was reported back by Alok. The group was to look at youth mentoring at a holistic level rather than on specific topics and activities. They discussed how to get adults to actually connect with young people who refuse to receive help from adults or youth leaders, and then to give them a hand. It was recognised that this may not work for many young people who would prefer to be mentored in specific situations and activities. However, there is a need to address the fact that the school as an institution does not serve well many of its young people.

In summary, Brent asked the question, how do we as adults support youth leaders? Most of them go through a system at high school where leadership is developed, such as in the Motueka Youth Council, but after their third year there they leave school and the community, so the process starts again. He wondered about the possible use of the "gap year" to retain some of the products of the Youth Council system to stay on and help pass on skills to the next group coming through.

Finally, Brent challenged the young people at the meeting to take the initiative and create youth-led activities. They agreed that there was a need for one or more repeats of the Summit, perhaps at monthly intervals, to build and maintain the activity. Stephen said that he would want to be part of that team until there were younger people ready to take the reins. They will organise a follow-up meeting in a month and publicise it using social media and the "Motueka Creative Spaces" and "Mot Youth Acre" Facebook groups, as well as "Motueka 2030".

Finally, it must be noted the outstanding contribution by Graeme Coleman, the teacher of the Community Issues class at Motueka High School, and his students. Over the past week or so he organised his class to come up with a questionnaire for young people to gauge their ideas about what things they think would make Motueka better for them. Graeme will provide the results of that questionnaire shortly, and they will be linked to this report when they are available.



The panel



Some of the audience



Stephen Evans' group



Paul Johnson's group



Carl Chapman's group