

WAITEMATĀ YOUTH WELLBEING ACTION NETWORK REPORT



**COMMUNITY
THINK**

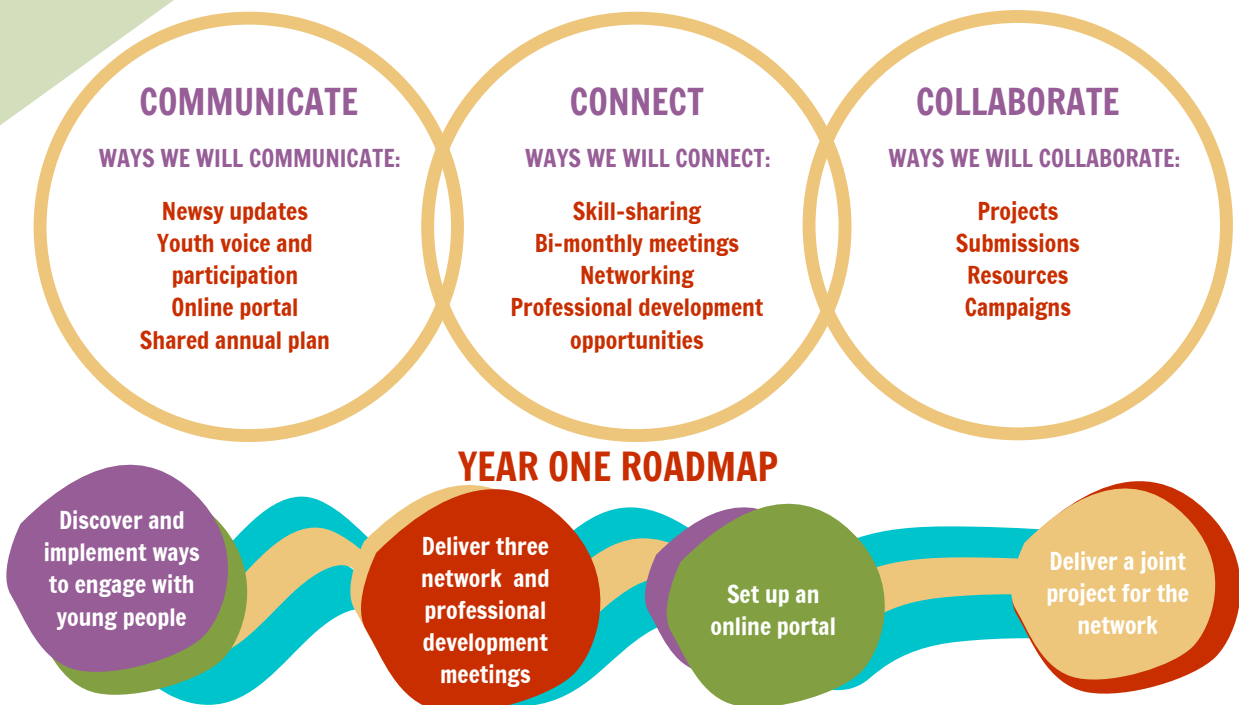
PROJECT BACKGROUND

Community Think was approached by Amber Walls from Auckland Council to convene the Waitematā Youth Wellbeing Action Network (WYWAN). This was a new network of youth service providers and organisations wanting to engage in more collaborative work. Community Think was contracted to deliver four bi-monthly hui, set up an online portal and to convene WYWAN.

Funding for this project came from Community Empowerment Unit's Empowered Community Approach Innovation Fund and the Waitematā Local Board. This funding was to support a collaborative approach to working with young people so they are seen, heard and participating in Waitematā. The project also had a focus in getting young people and network organisations involved in hosting events and activations for Youth Week 2021.

WAITEMATĀ YOUTH WELLBEING ACTION NETWORK

Waitematā Youth Wellbeing Action Network is a community of practice where groups/organisations/individuals share, learn and take action together to strengthen youth participation and wellbeing.



First year Roadmap for Waitematā Youth wellbeing Network

OUTCOMES

BI-MONTHLY HUI

Community Think convened bi-monthly hui with the Waitematā Youth Wellbeing Action Network. These were spaces for service providers and other youth organisations to come together and share their experiences as well as come up with plans for strengthening their own work, alongside that of the Network as a collective.

The first hui was held 16 December, 2020. The priorities set out in this hui were to:

1. Create an online portal
2. Youth participation and engagement:
3. Professional development

The hui also discussed ideas for Youth Week to create youth driven events to enhance what youth are already doing in their communities. A decision was made to establish a working group for Youth Week 2021.



Waitematā Youth Wellbeing Network is given a tour of Short Junction, a new youth centre in Takapuna

The second hui was held 26 February, 2021 at Shore Junction, the new youth centre in Takapuna. This hui was focussed on 'best practice for youth participation and decision making' to reflect on learnings, challenges and possibilities. The first hui identified professional development as a key priority and this was part of that. Network members shared some inspiring examples of youth participation and decision making, and there was a time for reflection. One of the interesting reflections was that often the same young people are attending events and participating, and how to encourage more and diverse groups of young people to participate. This conversation was flagged for the fourth hui.

The third hui was held 07 April, 2021 and focussed on working in a 'youth-led way'. It identified the different ways that network members were already trying to work in youth lead ways, and discussed and shared learning on the different approaches. The themes from this discussion were made into a poster (below). Ellen Melville hall as a potential open tangible space for youth was also discussed. Network members were invited to run events under the umbrella of the Festival being organised as part of Youth Week. Possibilities for this were discussed at the hui, leading to the creation of a Youth Week project that mapped opportunities to increase the safety and enjoyability of Waitematā for young people.

The theme of the fourth hui in June was sparked by questions of whose voices are included, and excluded from youth communities, and the systemic reasons for this, such as: ongoing colonisation, cis-heteronormativity, class, ethnicity, and access to education etc. From this, the hui focussed in on growing the network's ability to work in strength based ways with queer, and particularly gender diverse young people. Rhion Munro (CAYAD) was invited to present and contribute to designing the hui. When wanting young people to participate in their community, it's important to reflect and actively challenge the systemic issues facing them. This hui focussed on strength based approaches to working with queer young people.

ONLINE PORTAL

An online portal was created to allow the Network to have a one stop place to receive information. The idea is that the portal can hold information about the Network such as upcoming hui and the notes from hui. It also serves as a place where people can network, share information about training that they are offering, and share events. <https://waitematayouth.thinkport.nz/>

HOW TO WORK IN A YOUTH LEAD WAY

Ways we try to support youth leadership and decision making in our organisations.

YOUTH DECISION MAKING

Is meaningful youth decision making structured into your organisation? How?

RESPONSIVENESS

What keeps you in tune with and adapting to what your young people need?

RECIPROCITY & REMUNERATION

What do youth receive for the leadership roles they play?

CAPACITY BUILDING

Are there succession and capacity building for youth to enter into leadership and decision making roles?

ACCOUNTABILITY

How is your organisation accountable to youth, and to which youth?

PEER TO PEER

How do you support youth to learn from, support and collaborate with each other?

ACCESSIBILITY

Who is your organisation accessible to: Financially, physically, with transport, etc?

SAFETY

Who is your organisation a safe place for, a refuge for?



YOUTH WEEK 2021

The Network created a Youth Week working group to build on the idea of a Youth Week festival based on the Proud Centres model (an initiative for creating free and inclusive spaces for events during Pride week). This was initiated at the December hui, with the intention of enabling young people to incubate and deliver ideas that activate spaces in Waitematā over Youth Week 2021. This was a way to experiment with the WYAWN collaborative project and creatively involve youth and network members.

On 10 March, 2021 there was a hui to get young people together to co-design the process focussed on branding for the event. While there were a few young people registering for it, not many attended. This, however, led to a youth intern being involved in the organising of Youth Week, who was instrumental in leading the marketing of the event and recruiting participants to the event itself. The Youth Week working group then had an Incubator Day on 21 March, 2021 to engage young people in the process. This resulted in the entirely youth led event, “Big Talks” as well as introducing the idea of a showcase/ gala day.



Youth Week Event Incubator session (21 March, 2021). Community Think engaging with young people in the organising of Youth Week,

While the original intent was to have youth-led organising leading up the Youth Week events for Waitematā, the lack of a pre-existing community of young people engaged with the Network made this difficult, and member organisations showed little capacity to bring the youth they work with into the project. This led to the work being largely shouldered by Community Think with the help of some young people and the intern. There was a shift in the approach at this stage, leading to a call out for young people to run workshops and activities, and proposing that they would be supported and provided with a platform. The idea was to reach out to young people who were already performers or running workshops and bringing in their networks into the space.

The Next Wave Youth Gala 2021 - A Waitematā Youth Week Festival

The Youth Week events were successful. Promotional materials were created and dispersed to the Network, and social media – Facebook¹ and Instagram – were used to engage with young people. What was successful was that the youth-led events brought in the existing networks of those participating.

The week started with a 'Big Talks' a youth led event on 13 May which built skills and facilitated young people to have conversations about topics that matter to them. This was lead by Britta Hammil, a 23year old Philosophy Honours student and two of her friends, with support from Community Think. Britta was interviewed on Breakfast TV in the lead up to the event. It was attended by nearly twenty people, who stayed long after the event, in deep, lively conversation.



Young people and organisers hold up a post-it note board at the Big Talks event for the New Wave Youth Gala 2021

On the main day, Saturday 13 May, there were free workshops all run by people 24 and under including seed bombing, K Pop dance lessons, and a clay workshop. There was also a Q+A session with local representatives including Auckland Central MP Chloe Swarbrick. It concluded with performances from young local musicians. The day ran over eight hours and had some 200 people take part in it. Many of the young people who performed and ran workshops expressed interest in being part of creating and contributing to more youth lead spaces in the future.



Young people look at the interactive mapping boards outside of Ellen Melville Centre, the board reads 'how can we create a safer city?'

Outside of the Ellen Melville centre was a stall by Open Fort, one of the Network members, which was a mapping project around how to make a safe and accessible city for young people. The public visibility of this stall brought in young people passing by. This was set up throughout youth week.

A video was made to celebrate this event.



Facebook banner for Next Wave Waitematā Youth Week Festival, Saturday 15th May 2-10pm

REFLECTIONS

The Waitematā Youth Wellbeing Action Network is a relatively new network, so there will always be some growing pains. When Community Think first engaged with the network, there was not a high level of collaboration taking place. This has increased through working together towards events, but there is ongoing work to do in this space to build up the capacity to work collectively.

WYWAN is a mixed group of people with some members being service providers and others being more focussed on empowerment and marginalised voices in the community. While this has its challenges, it also allows for an ecosystem of different skills and voices. Like many service organisations, there are always structural issues such as limited resources and skills to deliver youth leadership in the ways they would like. The Network has been an important space for building relationships, making connections and learning from each other.

The main reflection from this is that there was a time pressure on the organising of the Youth Week's events, alongside the Network being relatively new. On reflection we could have done a smaller first event and spent more time at the beginning of the project building relationships with young people, and building trust between Network members.

It became clear to us during this project that there is a lack of distinctions made between the youth service providers and young people themselves. This is an ongoing tension in many different sectors of our community but it is important to name and work through these tensions. This is of particular importance as we want youth voices and experiences to be central to any work that impacts youth. There is a distinction between projects which are 'for young people by young people', and projects which are a collaboration between service providers of those young people.

This does not mean that the voices of service providers are not essential in identifying what needs to be done for young people in their communities, rather that there is more work to be done to get young people at the front and centre, leading projects themselves with the financial and mentorship support of these providers.

This project was initiated by Auckland Council, so from the beginning the method of youth collaboration was coming from an already formed idea. While the idea was really good, there was not a lot of buy-in from the Network. While the intent was to organise Youth Week in a youth-led, co-design way, there were limitations from the start in the ability to get young people involved from the Network. This meant that Community Think's role became largely centred on event management.

There have been some assumptions about where the community was at and they led us to jump right into action. On reflection it would have been best practice to go out into the community and meet with people to ask if they wanted a collaborative network or not, and to spend more time building trusting relationships.

One of the most important outcomes of this process has been identifying a group of young people who participated in Youth Week who can be brought together again to work on developing a youth voice in Waitemata.

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A way to bridge the gap between youth service providers and young people is to enable spaces for young people to have shared power and be able to make decisions for themselves.

A tangible next step would be for Community Think and others involved in the Youth Week project to meet with the young people who participated. The idea would be to build a youth network run 'for and by young people' in the Waitemata community, with Community Think and the Network providing mentorship and guidance for anyone interested.

Once established, this group could meet either separately and/or together with the Network. This will allow a space for young people to be connected and to be empowered to lead their communities.

This is a whole new project but something that would be incredibly important in creating a sustained youth voice at the centre of any future work in Waitemata.