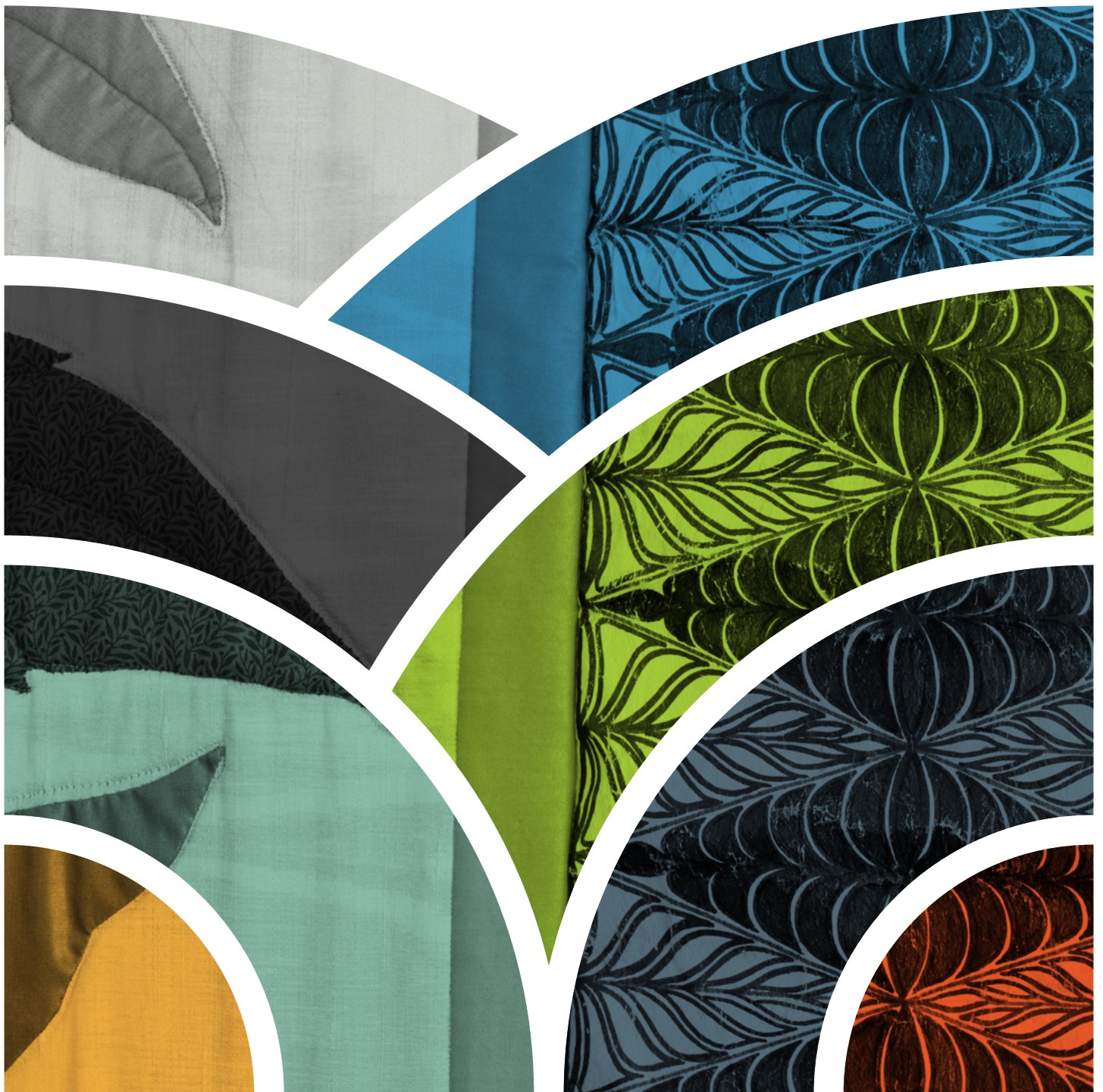


# Positive outcomes and positive futures for youth *in the BayTrust area*

February 2015



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# 1. Executive summary

**There is substantial and growing evidence that to achieve positive outcomes for youth, we must actively invest in ways that foster their positive development as well as reduce the risks they face. To navigate good outcomes and transitions successfully into the adult world, children and youth require a multitude of skills, assets and supports.**

These skills do not happen by themselves in isolation and without purposeful support by whānau, schools, communities and our broader society. This report discusses findings from a literature review about effective programmes and strategies for youth. Programmes that do not work and the types of strategies that should be avoided are also discussed.

**There are some broad philosophies associated with positive outcomes for youth:**

Focusing on fostering positive outcomes and relationships for children, youth and their whānau

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Purposeful activities that build important life skills (academic, social learning and employment)

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Multi-component programmes that address the problem within the context of youth environments

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Integration of family, school and community efforts

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Provision of opportunities to use learned skills and to experience success as participants and leaders

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Creation of opportunities for entrepreneurship, leadership and community contribution

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Fostering a sense of altruism and contribution to society

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Having a big picture approach that addresses community and policy influences.

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**Based on the literature and community consultation, three strategies for BayTrust Board investment in positive outcomes for youth have been identified.**

1. Multi-component leadership programmes that have a positive youth development, academic and future goal-orientated emphasis with strong cultural components.

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2. Programmes for youth that provide opportunities to contribute to society and learn important employment, business and networking skills.

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3. Partnerships with local authorities, government and iwi to develop child and youth friendly policies as a basis for creating liveable and vibrant communities for children and young people to thrive and succeed.

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*These three strategies have the power to provide opportunities for youth to reach their full potential. We trust that this report provides an informed overview of the evidence and opportunities for the BayTrust Board to consider when prioritising funding resources.*

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# 2. Introduction



We all want our children and youth to be happy, healthy, thriving and contributing members of our society. Unfortunately, many youth do not have opportunities to thrive, and sadly some fall through the cracks.

There is substantial and growing evidence that to achieve positive outcomes for our children and youth we must actively invest in ways that foster their positive development, as well as reduce the risks they face. To navigate good outcomes and transitions successfully into the adult world, children and youth require a multitude of skills, assets and supports. These skills develop with purposeful support from whānau, schools, communities and our broader society. This support is not about simple strategies; rather, sustained and collaborative approaches are required.

Philanthropic organisations must decide how best to invest in programmes and interventions that meet their goals to improve outcomes for children and youth in the BayTrust region. This report aims to assist the BayTrust Board to make decisions that are informed by international and national evidence alongside local community need, priorities and aspirations.

This report provides a brief summary of the evidence about what works to foster positive outcomes for children and youth.



# **3. What are successful outcomes for youth?**

Before we can identify what programmes and initiatives are worth investing in, it is important to define what successful or positive outcomes for youth are. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Social Development has a high level outcome that, “All children thrive in childhood, are respected and valued, have the opportunity to reach their full potential and participate positively in society now and in the future.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa<sup>[2]</sup> highlights the skills and attitudes youth need to be a positive part of society, now and in the future. Youth development is shaped by the “big picture”, fostering good quality relationships with whānau, schools and communities. It is also strengths-based (as opposed to deficit focused), and takes place when youth are actively participating in society and have quality information to inform them.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Young Foundation<sup>[3]</sup> suggests that positive outcomes for youth include five major areas: achieving in education, career success, being healthy, having positive relationships and involvement in meaningful, enjoyable activities. A UK report called *Predicting Wellbeing* found that a happy home life was vital for children. This included good relationships with siblings and parent/s, having fun together in the weekends, and no smacking or shouting.<sup>[4]</sup> Good primary school environments and safer communities were highlighted as important indicators. For teenagers, a secure and safe school environment free from bullying was important as well as feeling supported by families and having family meals together.<sup>[4]</sup>

After 40 years of longitudinal research in the US, Masten and colleagues<sup>[5]</sup> concluded that conditions that helped children to thrive were self-regulation, engaged parenting, community resources, and effective schools. They suggested that reducing risk, fostering assets and strengths, and mobilising systems that restore and protect human development were important steps to foster good outcomes.

**For the purposes of this report, successful outcomes for children and youth can be defined by four broad components:**

1. Quality relationships and connections
2. Positive contributions to society through education and employment
3. Supportive and safe environments
4. Good wellbeing.





# 4. What does not work?

Traditionally, programmes and strategies to reduce problems among youth aimed to “fix troubled kids” by focusing on their problems and deficits. While the “problems” are an important focus to help us identify what we need to improve, research has repeatedly taught us that this approach is rarely effective.

For example, programmes that were developed to reduce crime and offending, such as the “Scared Straight” approach, took groups of juvenile offenders into prisons to emphasise the severity of the punishment and scare them into being “good”. Similarly, boot camp approaches took groups of youth for short-term residential periods and exposed them to vigorous (military) training with the aim of reinforcing positive behaviours and punishing negative behaviours. These approaches were ineffective. They resulted in increased rates of offending and were harmful to the youth who participated.<sup>[6]</sup>

Another well-known US school-based programme adopted by the Police was D.A.R.E (Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education). This programme, which aimed to reduce alcohol and drug use among youth using the “just say no” philosophy, was repeatedly found to be ineffective when it was evaluated.<sup>[7-9]</sup> In New Zealand, DARE has significantly modified their programme based on these evaluations and renamed the programme: “DARE to make a Choice”. This name change highlights the differences between the NZ and US curricula. Locally there is an increased focus on a youth development model and more interactive participation by youth. The preliminary outcomes from this New Zealand variation of the DARE approach appear to be more promising.<sup>[10]</sup>

Many teenage pregnancy programmes have also failed. A systematic review of US programmes found that basic sex education programmes (information only, “just say no” approaches, scare tactics) were ineffective at reducing unprotected sex or delaying sexual activity.<sup>[11]</sup> Abstinence-based curricula were associated with increased pregnancy rates among males and thought to increase stigma for those who wanted to access services. The authors of the review concluded that scare tactics, personal accounts/testimonies, and stigma-based strategies did not reduce teen pregnancy. There were, however, significantly fewer pregnancies among youth who had participated in multi-faceted programmes over a sustained period of the curricula and at differing developmental stages.

**In summary, many of the programmes that have attempted to reduce poor outcomes for youth have used ineffective strategies, including:**

Short-term strategies; for example, one-off events or teaching sessions

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Personal accounts or testimonies of people who have “been there”

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Scare tactics, punitive or zero tolerance approaches

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Curricula that provide information only on dangers

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Moral/shaming appeals to avoid undesirable behaviours

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Curricula that only promote self-esteem or growth with no skill development

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Programmes that only gather high risk youth together (may facilitate or amplify unhealthy attitudes and behaviours)

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Programmes that do not involve families/whānau, schools and communities in behaviour change.

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# 5. What does work?

Historically, much of the emphasis in youth programmes and solutions designed for youth has been on personal responsibility—“youth need to drink less, study harder and get a better attitude”.

While personal responsibility is important, evidence suggests that as youth grow and develop, their ability to make decisions is highly dependent on their context, experiences, peers, family, community influences, and opportunities.

Most of the programmes that are successful for youth take a wider youth development<sup>[12-14]</sup> and ecosystem<sup>[15, 16]</sup> approach because they acknowledge that an individual’s behaviours and positive outcomes are shaped by many factors in their environment. Examples of these approaches will now be discussed.

Approximately 19% of NZ students leave secondary school without any formal qualifications, with Māori constituting 36% of that group.<sup>[17]</sup> Improving educational achievement is associated with a range of positive outcomes including improved employment opportunities and earning potential, improved health and wellbeing and improved social outcomes. Keeping youth engaged in meaningful mainstream education is the most effective strategy. For youth who are disengaged from mainstream education, there are a number of strategies that appear to be effective, such as specific strategies to re-engage students, including multi-component programmes over a long term (up to two years); and intensive case management involving multiple agencies that address the wider social issues affecting youth.<sup>[18]</sup>

Over the past 11 years, substance use by New Zealand secondary school students has reduced dramatically with a 66% reduction in uptake of smoking (23.3% of students), 46% reduction in weekly or more frequent alcohol use (8.3% of students), and 41% reduction in weekly or more frequent marijuana use (3.2% of students).<sup>[19]</sup> It is suggested that the successful strategies for addressing substance use are a combination of universal and targeted programmes, including education strategies that incorporate youth-led sessions and social decision-making rehearsals; community and family engagement; social marketing that changes social attitudes toward substance use; effective clinical services; and policies with strong legislative or policy support that restrict access to substances.<sup>[20]</sup>

Despite the high visibility of teen pregnancy in New Zealand, there have been significant drops in teen pregnancy since the 1960s. In addition, the average age of pregnancy during adolescence has increased, with 70% of the teen births to women who are either 18 or 19 years old.<sup>[21]</sup> Effective programmes to prevent teenage pregnancy include the following characteristics: clear and consistent messages about safe sexual behaviour, and interactive teaching methods that address social pressures and build skill development in negotiation. In a review, the most effective programmes used a multi-component programme with a youth development model that focused on the skills and abilities in education and fostered youth vocational abilities.<sup>[22]</sup> Youth with goals for the future are more likely to delay having a pregnancy.

Violence has also decreased over the past 11 years for youth in secondary schools throughout New Zealand.<sup>[19,23]</sup> However, family violence has not decreased<sup>[23]</sup> and we know that youth exposed to family violence are significantly more likely to experience adverse psychosocial and behavioural outcomes including violence perpetration.<sup>[24]</sup> This highlights the importance of family and community-wide engagement to address violence as a societal issue.<sup>[25]</sup> The provision of pro-social adult mentors, such as the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) programme for at-risk youth, is an effective intervention for reducing the violence perpetrated by youth.<sup>[26]</sup> A systematic evaluation of violence prevention programmes concluded that violence prevention programmes needed to be at least one year in duration.<sup>[27]</sup> Anti-bullying programmes that were more intensive, involved families, improved playground supervision, were accompanied by clear consequences for violent behaviour, and supported by school policies were also more effective.<sup>[28]</sup>

New Zealand has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the developed world,<sup>[29]</sup> high levels of depressive symptoms in secondary schools (16% females and 9% males in Clark et al., 2013,<sup>[23]</sup> and even higher rates among youth who have been excluded from school and attend Alternative Education, 25% males and 53% females<sup>[30]</sup>). In addition, over the past 11 years there have been declines in overall emotional wellbeing among secondary school students in New Zealand.<sup>[31]</sup> While there is substantial literature that highlights effective therapies and services for youth with mental health distress,<sup>[32]</sup> only primary prevention/mental health promotion of youth mental health concerns will be discussed in this review. Universal programmes address both the risk and protective factors in the lives of youth. Developing strong bonds with healthy adults and maintaining regular involvement in positive activities creates a positive developmental pathway and can prevent problems.<sup>[33]</sup> In New Zealand studies, it was found that whānau/family connection was protective for Māori youth in regards to sexual and reproductive health and suicide attempts.<sup>[34-35]</sup>

As well as focusing on strategies that improve family relationships, school based programmes can teach important life skills for all youth, including cognitive strategies, and social and emotional skills that help students to regulate their emotions.<sup>[36,37]</sup> These programmes need to be long term and at least one year in duration. More recently, the development of cognitive based therapies delivered via computer games has been an effective model for supporting skill development for youth in New Zealand, including those in Alternative Education.<sup>[38,39]</sup> In summary, ensuring that youth develop purposeful problem solving skills and have supportive families, school and communities is vital to their mental health wellbeing.

Another strategy highlighted in the US literature is the use of “after-school programmes”, although these programmes have been less vigorously evaluated. The evidence suggests that for at-risk youth populations from inner city areas, unsupervised time after school and during school holidays are vulnerable periods for anti-social and risk taking behaviours. Engagement in after-school/holiday programmes that are academically focused while building pro-social adult connections, case management and employment training opportunities appear to be effective strategies for reducing anti-social behaviours. However, there is some evidence that suggests that congregating risky youth together, particularly boys with behavioural problems, in after-school programmes is linked with negative academic and social outcomes.<sup>[26,40]</sup>

Fostering a sense of contribution, altruism, connection and volunteering are important life skills associated with positive outcomes. Numerous studies have also found that supporting these developmental activities and skills is associated with being successful at school, overcoming adversity, maintaining physical health, and delaying risky behaviours.<sup>[41]</sup> Eccles and Barber<sup>[42]</sup> also found that participation in extra-curricular activities was protective of academic outcomes overall, although some team sports were associated with risky alcohol use. Opportunities for youth to participate, lead and be respected for their contributions are essential for healthy youth development.

The emerging concept of youth social entrepreneurship is defined as “engaging youth in problem-solving and critical thinking skills by encouraging them to observe problems in the world, devising new and creative ways to solve them, and starting organisations that can tackle those issues on a larger scale.”<sup>[43]</sup> Fostering the practical application of enterprising qualities, such as initiative, innovation, creativity, and risk-taking into the work environment (either in self-employment or employment in small start-up firms), can be immensely effective in developing personal and community capacity. Social entrepreneurship ventures focus on maximising social gains, rather than maximising profit gains; however, social entrepreneurship is profit-driven to ensure that the activities are (eventually) self-sustainable. The process of engaging youth in becoming social entrepreneurs can ultimately support them to develop career pathways that are linked into local business and employment networks. Characteristics of successful youth entrepreneurship programmes are those that focus on skills training, business counselling and mentorship, intergenerational transmission of knowledge and opportunities, access to dedicated working spaces, supportive policies that value youth, and that promotes partnerships between government, private sector, NGOs, and other institutions. The emerging evidence suggests that youth entrepreneurship is more successful if it has clear objectives, targets the older age groups (15-24 years), is focused on

business outcomes, has intensive support and resourcing when establishing businesses and has skilled and well-trained mentors. A feasibility study exploring the impact of social entrepreneurship on homeless youth found a significant improvements in life satisfaction, peer support and family relationships.<sup>[44]</sup> Utilising the innovation and enthusiasm of youth in the business world with appropriate and supportive mentors can have important positive outcomes for youth themselves as well as their communities.

Overall, the effectiveness of various youth programmes has largely been evaluated in countries that might not reflect the unique cultural and social environments of New Zealand. In particular, few Māori-specific programmes in the literature take a youth development approach. While many Māori communities might take a development approach, this is rarely formally evaluated, which has resulted in large gaps in our knowledge about effective programmes for this population. However, the importance of cultural connection has been explored.<sup>[45]</sup> Elder (cited in <sup>[46]</sup>) summarised research and highlighted how poor mental health stemmed from insecure identity. In addition, a secure identity was seen as a protective factor for Māori youth, reducing the risk of suicide attempts).<sup>[47]</sup> Ware<sup>[48]</sup> explored healthy youth development for Māori youth and concluded that “Māori development goals do not adequately focus on Māori youth and youth development theory does not fully consider culture” (p. ii).

She suggested that there is a need to integrate Māori culture and youth culture in a relevant and meaningful manner, so that Māori youth can positively contribute to Māori development and wider New Zealand society. The relationship between connection with culture and reduced rates of offending was discussed by the principal youth court judge, Andrew Becroft, who identified that young Māori who were well connected to their culture did not offend at a greater rate than any other person (Radio New Zealand, 9 June 2009, cited by Lisa Cherrington<sup>[49]</sup>).

Internationally, there is evidence of the importance for youth wellbeing of fostering strong cultural connection and pride. In Hawaii, Hui Malama O Ke Kai was started as a grassroots effort by a rural Native Hawaiian community that saw the need for an after-school programme that would serve Native Hawaiian youth.<sup>[50]</sup> The mission was to develop community pride and foster leadership in native youth through the teaching of Native Hawaiian culture and values. For youth who participated there were improvements in self-reports of Native Hawaiian values, self-esteem, antidrug use, violence prevention strategies, and healthy lifestyle, family cohesion, school success, and non-violence. In Australia, it was found that fostering a secure sense of cultural identity was a powerful protective factor against self-harm for young Aboriginal people in the Kimberley<sup>[51]</sup> and among First Nations youth in Canada, cultural continuity was an important protective

factor against suicide.<sup>[52]</sup> Lalonde<sup>[53]</sup> concluded that “When communities succeed in promoting their cultural heritage and in securing control of their own collective future, in claiming ownership over their past and future – the positive effects reverberate across many measures of youth health and wellbeing” (p. 67).

Finally, legislation and policy are essential in supporting the healthy development of children and youth, whether at the school, local government or national policy level. A UNICEF initiative called “Child Friendly Cities” asserts children and youth deserve to be well informed and not overlooked when considering city and town planning, as they are major stakeholders.<sup>[54]</sup> An example of this is the Leeds City Council Action Plan that has, in consultation with children and youth, developed a plan to make their city child friendly.<sup>[55]</sup> In New Zealand, Youth Parliament gives youth opportunities to engage in politics on a national level with mentorship by Members of Parliament<sup>[56]</sup> as does the United Nations Youth Declaration.<sup>[57]</sup> Traditionally, even as infants, Māori children contributed to adult conversations and decision making processes (Elder, 1938 cited in Caddie & Ross<sup>[45]</sup>). These activities support opportunities for children and youth to have their opinions and thoughts valued by adults, and foster leadership, skill building and advocacy skills.<sup>[58]</sup>

In summary, evaluation of the evidence suggests that investment in youth programmes if they are carefully developed, implemented and involve collaboration with multiple agencies can improve academic and behavioural outcomes for youth. The programmes that have been effective for youth and are associated with positive outcomes include the following strategies:

- focusing on fostering positive outcomes and relationships for children, youth and their whānau

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- purposeful activities that build important life skills (academic, social learning and employment)

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- multi-component programmes that address the problem within the context of youth environments

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- integration of family, school and community efforts

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- provision of opportunities to use learned skills and to experience success as participants and leaders

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- creation of opportunities for entrepreneurship, leadership and community contribution

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- fostering a sense of altruism and contribution to society

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- having a big picture approach that addresses community and policy influences.

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# 6. Building positive outcomes



There is clear evidence from the literature that youth programmes can have a positive impact on the lives of youth, and therefore improve outcomes for the broader communities within the BayTrust region. However, the results do not point to any quick or easy answers.

**There are several levels of intervention in which BayTrust may wish to invest their efforts. Using an ecological model, we will discuss three options at the differing levels of influence on the lives of youth.**

## **1. The immediate environment: Family/whānau, schools, neighbourhoods**

At this level, there need to be multi-component leadership programmes that have a strong youth development emphasis, cultural components, and are academically and future-goal orientated. These must be led by consistent, well-trained caring adults invested in the lives of youth, for a minimum of one year. The programmes should be intensive and have access to multiple agencies, case management and actively engage families/whānau and schools. Programmes need to be offered to a range of youth (not just those at high risk, nor those who are natural leaders).

### **Rationale:**

Youth need strong and consistent opportunities to connect with caring and skilled adults who can assist them to reach their potential and identify their goals and aspirations for the future. This is a long-term and intensive investment to address underachievement and risky behaviours. Youth who are offered new experiences and opportunities to enjoy life will learn and grow from their successes and failures.

## **2. Social and economic environments: Building community capacity and fostering youth opportunities**

Programmes for youth are needed that provide opportunities to contribute to society and learn important business and networking skills. Partnerships should be formed with local businesses, NGOs and government agencies to help solve local social issues (e.g. housing was mentioned by many communities as important) and provide youth with credibility and opportunities to learn and contribute.

### **Rationale:**

Youth are recognised by the community as a resource, which in turn fosters opportunities to link with others in their communities, foster self-worth and opportunities to “shine” and be recognised. Youth engagement in the business and entrepreneurial world teaches important skills and can provide opportunities for alternative career opportunities for those where academic pursuits are not the preferred option. Youth thrive when they contribute to society, learn important employment skills and a good work ethic, build connections to local businesses and help others.

## **3. Larger society: Building supportive policy and advocacy**

At the policy and advocacy level, local, district and regional policies can provide strong foundations to ensure children and youth are valued citizens, have their interests respected and valued, their knowledge recognised and their contribution to society now and in the future developed. Opportunities for philanthropic organisations to support this include working with local government, iwi, and service providers to develop policies and strategies that create positive and supportive environments for youth.

### **Rationale:**

Policy determines the priorities for a region at the council level. This would provide a strong foundation to ensure children and youth are valued citizens, have their interests respected and valued, their knowledge recognised and their contribution to society now and in the future developed.





# 7. Conclusions

In conclusion, improving outcomes for children and youth in the BayTrust area will require a number of strategies, at different levels of influence. Focusing on positive outcomes and relationships for children, youth and their whānau are essential foundations. Providing youth with skills, opportunities to lead and experience success with aspirational goals will help them to be positive and productive citizens now and in the future.

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