

2005 New Zealand Post Management Excellence Awards

Award Category: New Zealand Post
Community Relationships Award



Converse 05: The ACYC Urban Youth Summit

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Converse 05: The ACYC Urban Youth Summit sits as a catalyst to a wider youth engagement process for Auckland City Council. Auckland City's Community Action Youth and Drugs (CAYAD) project implemented this in partnership with the Auckland City Youth Council (ACYC) and other key stakeholders. The CAYAD project in Auckland City is one of 20 sites around New Zealand funded by The Ministry of Health.

This project strengthens the youth engagement process of the Auckland City Council to include collaborative activity with youth who provide direction and energy in planning and subsequently are key players in implementation (youth participation).

Auckland City's CAYAD project met with the Auckland City Youth Council (ACYC) during its needs assessment process in mid 2004. It was identified that ACYC was interested in engaging with the wider youth community of Auckland city in issues of health and wellbeing, initially around drugs and alcohol. Subsequently, ACYC representatives were invited to join up with a CAYAD action team exploring youth engagement.

Over the next nine months this new Converse 05 project team developed and delivered the project. Run on Friday 13 May, it coincided with the national Youth Week. Entitled Converse05: The ACYC Urban Youth Summit, the theme was 'Re:defining our perceptions of our drug and alcohol culture' (Talk, Think, interACT).

This summit was the first phase (talk) of a three-phase youth engagement process based around the following principles:

1. Talk – an initial process of youth coming together to converse around youth wellbeing
2. Think – an opportunity for ideas to be explored deeper individually and corporately (i.e. Follow up gathering in August)
3. InterACT – empowering the delivery of youth participation 'wellbeing' projects.

Converse has completed its initial phase. Phase 2, the follow up summit is scheduled for August 2005 with Phase 3 being the action projects that come out of the first two phases.

Converse 05: The ACYC Urban Youth Summit

The goal of the summit was as follows:

To ensure youth have a voice on issues that affect them and to assist in building their capacity to be able to take leadership towards positive social responsibility and peer support around drugs and related issues.

Specifically to:

- Provide a safe environment where youth can openly debate issues affecting them
- Empower towards a healthy youth culture around drugs, alcohol and related harm (especially bingeing, drink driving etc.)
- Build a strong base of 'youth' leaders committed to working towards creating a positive and healthy peer culture
- Advocate (where applicable) for policy change/development.

Each of the Secondary Schools from within the Auckland City boundaries were invited to participate by sending three students. One from each of the year groups 11-13. The other major criteria was that the

representatives were recognised as the social and peer leaders in the school not necessarily just the prefects and sports leaders etc.

The summit itself was a great success. 103 participants turned out from 22 of the 32 high schools, the alternative education cluster and other youth organisations. Keynote speakers commenced the day, and then six breakout sessions provided the participants opportunities to dialogue (converse) on specific issues relating to drugs and alcohol.

A short (9 mins) showreel DVD of the summit is attached, as well as supporting planning and evaluation documentation.

The need for and expected benefits of the project and how it furthers the council's vision and strategic direction:

Auckland City is committed to deepening its relationship with young people. It desires to be more accessible and relevant as outlined in its Youth Action Strategy which states:

“Through the Youth Action policy we aim to make Auckland the First City of the Pacific for you, the young people of Auckland. It will be a city where you are encouraged to be independent and make an active contribution, but where someone can give you a helping hand when you need one. It will be a place where you respect your environment, city and community, and you will be respected for it. Auckland will be your home – a place where you belong.

Things Auckland City value

- Accessibility (removing barriers, providing opportunities): *making the city's services accessible and easy for young people to use.*
- Prosperity (good times): *young people having good times and great opportunities.*
- Diversity (be unique): *celebrating and expressing your different ethnicities, cultures, ages, lifestyles, strengths and talents.*
- Communication (it's cool to korero!): *communicating with you openly and honestly, and in ways that are interesting.*

Converse 05 Urban Youth Summit was a key strategy in engaging young people from across the city. The benefits from the project are as follows:

- Youth are engaged to participate in an ongoing and sustainable framework initially around wellbeing
- Building future leaders and active civic engagement
- Recognition that youth are an important facet of our diverse community
- Youth are responsible for setting the direction of the process and for ensuring appropriate delivery
- A vehicle to engage young people of Auckland City for other council business in the future (including annual plan and LTCCP for example)

Converse also feeds directly into Auckland City's priority outcomes as outlined in the Community Vision for 2020: Priority 1. Auckland Leadership, Priority 3. Celebrating and recognising diversity, Priority 5. Strong and healthy communities (See 1.Community Outcomes attached))

Effective project management techniques:

CAYAD was responsible for the strategic planning and overall delivery of the project. This meant that the Urban Youth Summit was coordinated amongst a wider action planning process which includes a detailed planning and evaluation process, regular monthly meetings with our formative evaluator (SHORE/Whariki, Massey University) and regular contact with The Ministry of Health.

The Converse project team had the direct responsibility for the operational planning and implementation of the Urban youth summit. This allowed for a strong sense of ownership and accountability amongst this team.

Project definition: In its first six months, CAYAD carried out a needs assessment process (see 2. CAYAD Needs Assessment report). This highlighted the need for youth engagement around drugs and alcohol. With the subsequent formation of a working group to look strategically and collaboratively at issues around drug and alcohol in Auckland city a specific action team was convened to explore the process of youth engagement in more depth. With the inclusion of ACYC, the Converse project team was formed to specifically organise Converse 05: The ACYC Urban Youth Summit. Critical to the success of the project was the establishment of the project team, which included ACYC representatives, Mental Health Foundation, Road Safety, Youth Line and NZAHD and CAYAD.

The project team's first task was to define its key objectives and project plan (see Converse 05 - project brief attached).

Planning and implementation: The project team met monthly in the first few months and more frequently closer to the summit date. From the outset the project team committed to ensuring all planning was completed utilising a strong youth participation approach. Although this process required more attention and time, it proved to be the strength in the delivery of a well received summit. The ACYC members in the project team were at all times encouraged to drive the implementation of the summit. The Youth on the team struggled at times to maintain commitment in the midst of educational and personal demands. At these times, the role of the CAYAD team, was critical to provide encouragement and motivation.

Communication: In the first few meetings, the project team discussed role clarity and output expectations. It was important to discuss these at the start to ensure a streamlined implementation. The one major threat to the delivery of the summit was due to a conflict in expectation. Being able to revisit agreed upon roles and expectations assisted in prompt mediation and reconciliation. This proved to be a catalyst in building greater synergies amongst the team, and a stronger level of direction and unity.

In the follow up to the summit, presentations have been made to key internal and external stakeholders. CAYAD and ACYC have presented these in collaboration.

Timing: Converse 05: The ACYC Urban youth summit was delivered during the national youth week, to enhance the national activities at a local level, and also to ensure a higher interest in it from both internal and external stakeholders (including media).

Evaluation/ Feedback: An evaluation form was completed by the participants at the summit. A 60% response rate was achieved, although this was lower than expected due to the fact that some of the students had left slightly early due to other commitments (key learning for future summits).

A strong evaluation process was completed by the project team, and specifically by ACYC and CAYAD independently to achieve a greater learning outcome for the ACYC members. (See 5. Converse 05 – ACYC Findings attached). This process and the information generated has provided the key direction for the next phase(s).

A participatory approach to communicating with and getting ‘buy in’ from stakeholders associated with the project:

A commitment to collaboration (including youth participation) was the strength of Converse 05: The ACYC Urban Youth Summit. The main areas of a participatory approach are as follows:

- A youth participation project. The summit was a joint venture with CAYAD and ACYC. The young people on the committee directed the entire project with the co-ordination being provided by CAYAD. It provided a distinct opportunity for young people to engage with their peers around issues of importance.
- Strong partners on the project team. This included The New Zealand Mental Health Foundation, Youthline, NZAAHD and Auckland City Council.
- Backing by wider CAYAD working group. This includes key representatives from organisations and government agencies, community groups and members. The working group is pivotal for all of CAYAD's activity and provides an immediate resource for appropriate partnerships.
- The Urban Youth summit itself was a very participatory forum. The participants had many safe spaces to talk about issues they face, and to speak openly about how it affects them and what can be done. In many cases the keynote speakers and breakout group leaders were young people. ACYC led a breakout group on exploring safe environments for socialising.

Innovation and originality:

Converse is an entirely original concept that has been developed with young people, youth providers and health promoters from Auckland city. In regards to innovation and originality, the following points provide focus:

- Youth participation project: It is easy to assume that we understand what young people want and deliver events for them. Although youth participation takes longer in planning, the final result is far in excess of what would otherwise have been achieved.
- Focus on social and peer leaders: In working with this group there is a huge potential to see transfer of ideas and debates amongst peer groups. This is especially important when looking at wellbeing issues.
- An engagement framework, not just an event: It is important to see this is not just about one off events. It is about a process of engagement with young people towards building their capacity to positively influence their peers around issues that affect them (E.g. drugs and alcohol). From this, we will see opportunities arise for further collaborative action (keeping youth participation at the core). Other points of interest are that this process:
 - can be utilised for other core council process (e.g. annual plan, LTCCP etc.)
 - is transferable into other geographical communities and communities of interest

Successful results, in both financial and non-financial terms:

This was a relatively inexpensive project, but one that has achieved some great results for both the CAYAD project and the Auckland City Council. It has been more demanding on time inputs from a variety of stakeholders (including volunteers). It achieved all of the desired outcomes.

The youth summit had a small budget that has commitment from a variety of stakeholders. This budget was managed by CAYAD and the project expenses came in as planned. Contributions were provided as follows:

ACYC	\$3,500.00	
CAYAD	\$3,500.00	
ALAC (YATA)	\$2,000.00	
Community Planning, Auckland City Council	\$500.00	
Transport and Road Safety, Auckland City Council	\$2,000.00	\$11,500.00

The key results in non-financial terms are as follows:

- A successful youth participation project completed
- Good collaboration with a variety of stakeholders
- A dynamic and connected network of youth leaders/advocates within Auckland secondary schools commenced
- Increased awareness by those young people involved around drug and alcohol issues
- The basis of a strong youth engagement framework established
- Strong action ideas for possible youth for youth type projects generated
- Corporate Sponsorship interested for future summit (Converse NZ Ltd)

The project was a 'good, sensible and right thing to do':

It is evident from the amount of collaborative activity and interest that this project was necessary. It is important to note the following:

- Drugs and alcohol are a huge issue for young people.
- Requested by Auckland young people. That is that they wanted to have a forum to be able to talk about wellbeing issues, particularly drugs and alcohol in the first instance.
- A youth participation project. New Zealand is the only country in the world to have a Youth Development Strategy which is underpinned by youth participation. Youth participation is misunderstood, and Converse provides leadership and best practice.

The scope for seeing Converse translated at a variety of levels is encouraging. The lessons learnt and the process developed through Converse 05: The ACYC Urban Youth Summit will assist Auckland City Council to further enhance the way it engages with its community in the future.