

Children's views on the Ōtākaro Avon River

A CHILD AND YOUTH VOICES CASE STUDY FROM REGENERATE CHRISTCHURCH

Children and young people should participate in decisions that affect them

Children make up a quarter of our population and should be central to their communities. Decisions we make now affect them both immediately and when they become adults.

Article 12: ...the child who is capable of forming his or her own views [shall have] the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child.... - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Children's Commissioner promotes the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them. When done well, it advances the best interests of children and young people and produces better decision-making overall.

We want to show other organisations the best ways to engage children and young people, by doing it ourselves, and by highlighting best practice when we see it.

WHY ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Asking children and young people their views recognizes their right to have a say, and also promotes leadership and civic engagement. The more opportunities for meaningful participation they have, the more confident children and young people feel to express their views – they bring different perspectives, fresh ideas, and genuine concern for the future.

Organisations that engage children and young people find more creative, equitable and sustainable solutions

CHILDREN ARE WILLING AND ABLE TO BE INVOLVED

Children of all ages are capable of being involved in a range of consultations - they are experts in their own lives and they hold interesting opinions on a wide range of topics. The consultation approach should be child centred and relevant, making sure that it tells them how the process works and what the goals are for participating, and meets their needs.

Supporting and encouraging children and young people to participate will mean they can have a meaningful influence in the decisions that affect them, and to help adults interpret and understand the issues children raise.

See WWW.OCC.ORG.NZ/LISTENING2KIDS/ for more information on why and how to engage with children and young people.



Case study: Regenerate Christchurch: Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor regeneration

Regenerate Christchurch showed best practice when they engaged children aged five to twelve years old in the engagement and planning process for the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor regeneration.

1. REGENERATE CHRISTCHURCH WANTED TO HEAR CHILDREN'S VISION FOR THE ŌTĀKARO AVON RIVER CORRIDOR

Regenerate Christchurch was established under the Greater Christchurch Regeneration Act 2016 to lead the regeneration of Christchurch. The first project was to design a Regeneration Plan for the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor by March - June 2018.

Regenerate Christchurch conducted initial public engagement in March-April 2017 to develop the vision and objectives for the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor. Children are a key group for engagement because Regenerate Christchurch believes listening to children's voices and understanding their needs and ideas regarding the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor is essential to the successful planning and decision making for this area.

"We are planning for the future (their future)"
Principal Advisor,
Residential Red Zone

Children living in or near the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor were the main group identified for engagement. Primary and intermediate schools near the Corridor were approached to take part in the initiative and the following schools were actively involved: Haeata, Rawhiti, Bromley, South New Brighton and Banks Ave schools. Approximately 750 children, aged 5 to 12 years, took part, generating and sharing 1862 ideas.

The approach needed to be child centred and respectful of the needs and demands on schools, and so Regenerate Christchurch engaged two facilitators, both with teaching backgrounds and existing relationships with the nominated schools.

The facilitators designed a 45 minute lesson linked to the New Zealand Curriculum. The lesson focused on what the children believed they needed from the Corridor – what would make them happy, healthy and thriving. The children enjoyed hands-on activities exploring the difference between needs and wants, as well as viewing before and after images and drone footage of the area being discussed. The lesson finale was filling out the 'Wish this was here ...' postcard, writing and drawing what they would like to see in the River Corridor. The postcards were the brainchild of the Avon-Ōtākaro Network, a stakeholder group.

Ideas from both the children and the wider communities contributed to a draft vision for the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor. Since the initial classroom engagement, Regenerate Christchurch has reconnected with participating schools to share the results back to the children. They also invited the children to provide feedback on the draft vision. The final opportunity for the children to participate and have their say will be during the Regenerate Christchurch 'Festival of Ideas', held in August/September 2017.

See [HTTPS://ENGAGE.REGENERATECHRISTCHURCH.NZ/](https://engage.regeneratechristchurch.nz/) for more information about the project.

2. PERSPECTIVES – HOW DID IT GO?

REGENERATE CHRISTCHURCH

Regenerate Christchurch is committed to working with communities and businesses to provide opportunities for genuine community input and meaningful engagement, and be open to feedback. The support of the broader community is critical to the success of Regenerate Christchurch.

"... Children's input seemed really geared towards the future and visioning. Sometimes some of the adult groups were less able to move past problem identification"

*Principal Advisor,
Residential Red Zone*

Underpinning Regenerate Christchurch's public participation and community engagement is the 'International Association for Public Participation's (IPA2)' *core values*. Two core values in particular support engaging children in the regeneration process:

1. *Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process;*
2. *Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.*

Regenerate Christchurch believe it is important to engage with diverse groups, and children should always be one of those groups. Children provide a unique contribution; they see an opportunity from a child's point of view. And, as children will spend the most time benefiting from the work being done, Regenerate Christchurch sees this as truly valuable.

"Working alongside children added integrity and a sense of community, social responsibility and citizenship to the overall process"

*General Manager,
Partnerships and Engagement*

The children's ideas and artwork provided compelling content for Regenerate Christchurch. They were at times surprised but impressed with how quickly the children understood what appeared to be complex ideas. The children were quick to understand the difference between a *need* and a *want*. They were particularly interested to see a great deal of overlap between the adult and children's views.

PARTICIPATING CHILDREN AND TEACHERS

Throughout the engagement teachers and children commented on the importance and capability of children having their say on something that affects them now and for decades to come. Although the invitation to engage was at short notice and the timeframe to contribute was less than a month, over 750 children contributed and 1862 ideas were generated. There was no shortage of enthusiasm and ability to be involved.

When the children were asked why they thought they were being invited to share their ideas on what they need from the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor, they responded enthusiastically and with little hesitation.

It was good to think that my ideas are valued

Excited because the ideas we have might be able to help the Regenerate Christchurch company to think of new stuff that they might not have thought of already

Happy because I think it's really important that us kids get to help make some ideas for the red zone

It was good that they asked us as there would be no point putting things there that no-one wanted

Honoured because it means that the adults actually are listening to us

The children were keen and felt a sense of responsibility to share their needs and ideas about 'their place'. The diversity and number of ideas presented highlights their capability to participate and contribute. Ideas included fun with water and on land, connecting with nature, caring for themselves and others including vulnerable people and animals as well as opportunities to learn and to earn. At every turn, there is evidence of the children contributing to this opportunity with both skill and sincerity.

3. LESSONS LEARNT FROM THIS ENGAGEMENT

Both Regenerate Christchurch and the participating schools strongly support and value the opportunity to work together and contribute to the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor regeneration.

The children demonstrated their ability to be involved and to give valuable insights and make great contributions. Being one of the first opportunities to engage children, Regenerate Christchurch was impressed with their ideas and ability to contribute to the process. They found the children's input provided some of the most stimulating ideas shared by the community.

Regenerate Christchurch found the children's ideas closely aligned with those shared by adults. This highlights the children's ability to take part in and add value to decision making processes. However, children's participation should be independent of other sectors and respected regardless of whether it meets the expectations or requirements from adults. As with other sectors of the community, children have a right to have their say on matters that affect and are important to them.

When engaging the community in decision making, it is important that the experience responds to the capacity of the audience and allows flexibility as the engagement evolves. This is no different for children. Participating schools applauded Regenerate Christchurch who they believe successfully put the child at the centre of the engagement opportunity throughout the process from the beginning. The children were able to see their ideas evolve and be part of and influence a bigger process.

Further reflection from Regenerate Christchurch for future engagement with schools includes:

- engaging support and expertise earlier in the process. This includes having more facilitators, and developing enquiry based learning opportunities;
- broadening their scope of engagement in the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor regeneration to include children beyond Christchurch East. They believe this will add a wider sense of community and place; and
- strengthening their ongoing engagement with partnership schools. This will include the children's participation and engagement in the 'Festival of Ideas' in August/September.



The children really enjoyed the postcard activity and were thrilled to see their postcards up on the Regenerate Christchurch Facebook page - this made them even more motivated as they saw that Sian and her team really valued their opinions and ideas.

*Teacher
Bromley School*

"I have pondered whether we should have included the children's ideas in the wider thematic analysis and think we probably should have – the standalone report gives good visibility to their views if you read it, but the risk is that people go for the wider report only"

*Principal Advisor,
Residential Red Zone*

"They can see their ideas and views are given equal importance alongside the adult's perspectives"

Deputy Principal, Waitakiri School