



Otautahi Youth Council in
conjunction with the White Elephant Trust
proudly present

WE SPEAK 2011

WE Speak 2011



Contents

Introduction	2
Background.....	2
Format of the Day.....	3
Issues Identified	4
Transport.....	4
Activities/Socialising	4
Rebuild	4
Impact on the Community	4
Forum Summaries	5
WE Speak 2011 - North.....	5
WE Speak 2011 - East.....	5
WE Speak 2011 - South	6
WE Speak 2011 - West	6
Solutions.....	8
Gap Filler project.....	8
Community Gardens	8
Free, all-ages outdoor event	9
On-going Youth-led events.....	9
Youth Event Guide	9
Subsidised Public Transport Options	9
Replacing social spaces in the east.....	10
Youth voice in the rebuild process	10
Where to from here?	11
Contact Information	11
White Elephant.....	11
Otautahi Youth Council	11
Acknowledgements	11



Introduction

WE Speak is an annual youth conference held in Christchurch New Zealand. Traditionally it has been hosted by the White Elephant Trust but since 2009 the Otautahi Youth Council has joined forces to provide a truly youth led and youth attended conference. WE Speak provides a forum for young people to discuss issues specific to our city that they face, learn new skills to empower them to combat these issues and every year a WE Speak report is generated and passed on to local and national politicians, community leaders and change makers.

The purpose of this report is to outline the conference itself, record the issues affecting youth in Christchurch that have arisen since the earthquakes and to provide solutions that were developed in the conference. Since the conference the White Elephant Trust and Otautahi Youth Council have worked closely with a number of youth to develop and execute a number of youth led projects which will benefit young people and the wider community in Christchurch and combat issues that have arisen since the Earthquakes.

Background

Traditionally WE Speak was held on a Friday; an opportunity for young people to choose having their voice heard over a day of school. The conference has always been held in the central city as this has been a central hang out place for the youth of our city. Since the February 22nd earthquake the central city has been closed and accessibility around the city is limited. Schools have lost a significant proportion of their school days so asking young people to take a day off school was not an option. As a result WE Speak was held on a Saturday in four venues, one in each corner of the city: North, East, South and West. Each separate conference was a smaller more intimate event than previously but all retained a similar format to ensure collectively a strong voice was still heard.





Format of the Day

All four forums had approximately the same layout for their day. The plan was as follows:

10:00 – Introduction – The plan for the day was outlined and the history of WE Speak was explained.

10:30 - Your Snapshot – Attendees discussed three topics: What was it like on February the 22nd? What have the issues been for the last 3 months? What are the issues now and what will issues will be faced in the future?

12:00 - Lunch

12:45 - Guest Speaker – A video produced by I am Dan was presented to the forum, in which he explained his I am Challenge. He later came to the forum and spoke further about the issues.

1:00 - Dreams to Reality – This was a workshop focused on turning the issues highlighted by the attendees in the first half of the day and discussing solutions to them. This used the Collaboration Café format and therefore involved three stages of discussion: What is the idea? What do you need? What is missing?

3:00 - Afternoon Tea

3:15 - Where to from here – In this section a member of White Elephant explained their process for initiating and planning a project. This workshop was followed by an Otautahi Youth Council member's speech of how to get involved with the Council following the forum.

4:00 – Finish





Issues Identified

The initial segment of WE Speak 2011 was dedicated to identifying issues arising from the earthquakes and their aftermath that particularly affected youth in Christchurch. A categorised list of these issues is below:

Transport

- Congested Roads
- Road-works
- Difficulties with buses and public transport

Activities/Socialising

- Congestion of remaining facilities
- Poor communication about on-going activities
- Uncertainty about QEII Recreation Park
- Lack of social spaces/ facilities
- Loss of a central meeting place

Rebuild

- Uncertainty about housing
- Uncertainty about the CBD
- Sustainability
- Mass exodus of young people
- Lack of out-of-town and exchange students
- Earthquake used as a scapegoat/excuse to implement unpopular measures
- Businesses relocating
- Need for a youth voice in the rebuild

Impact on the Community

- Mental health and stress issues
- Having to deal with death and uncertainty on a large scale
- Losing amenities (sewage, power, water etc.)
- Forced to move away from home community
- Onset of winter in damaged houses
- Huge financial impact
- Loss of jobs and job prospects
- Pollution in waterways
- Constant visual reminders
- Fears for safety
- Need to share schools
- Impact on University/Polytechnic/School Curricula

Following the identification of these key issues, we selected several important issues which participants felt could be immediately addressed. We then focused in on these issues and developed solutions for them.



Forum Summaries

WE Speak 2011 - North

The forum for north Christchurch was held at Te Koru in Papanui and involved a broad range of participants. There were approximately equal numbers of tertiary (from the University of Canterbury and CPIT) and secondary students (from Burnside High School, Avonside Girls' High School and Hagley Community College). Everyone who was present had been affected by the earthquake in some way, with experiences ranging from moderate disruption of university, to more significant disruption (sharing schools) and even to the extent of having lost loved ones in the disaster.

One of the core issues suggested at the forum was the importance of youth being involved in the decision-making process of the rebuild. This is very pertinent as young people will be living with (and paying for) the rebuild city for most of their life. A point was made that without the consultation of young people, many would choose to leave the city (or not come here at all in the case of students), depriving Christchurch of the chance of future growth. Some specific solutions were proposed, including: youth representation on the Christchurch Earthquake Recovery Authority, the OYC being used to inform decision-makers of youth opinion, greater consultation of youth being implemented via the use of technology such as online forums.

Another issue raised involved creating activities for young people after school and in the evenings. A recurring theme was the lack of entertainment and venues for young people to socialise in Christchurch after the earthquake. Particular emphasis was placed on the fact that for students learning in the "late-shift" of shared schools had little to do after school. To combat this it was suggested that: Youth-based events could be run regularly in time-slots that suited young people, an events guide be published around schools (and other youth-based institutions) that would let youth know which events were on where, potentially seeking the establishment of permanent venues to hold youth-based events in the future ("like a youth group but non-religious")

Finally a youth music festival could be held. Alongside a more long-term series of events, many participants wished to see a major festival/concert being organised in the short- to medium-term in order to let youth release some of the stress of the earthquake and enjoy themselves. There was strong enthusiasm for this from one participant in particular, and he was adamant about co-ordinating with the White Elephant and other interested youth in order to have this festival come to fruition.

WE Speak 2011 - East

The east side of Christchurch was worst affected by the earthquakes for several reasons. Areas such as Bexley and New Brighton were very devastated with many streets needing to be entirely evacuated. Moreover, many of the basic needs that individuals have were not met for several weeks including shelter, sewage, water and food shortages. Moreover they also had similar issues of other suburbs including a lack of opportunities to socialise.



A diverse age group attended the East forum at New Brighton Library, which ranged from early high school all the way to university students. Discussing experiences around the earthquake provoked emotional discussion. This includes concerns about parent, families, communities, school and what would happen in the event of another big aftershock. Another problem that came out of this talk was the media attention that surrounded the eastern suburbs. The youth at the forum highlighted the value of the present forum because it gave them a chance to talk, rather than be talked to.

One of the first issues brought up involved a concern about how there was nothing for youth to do anymore and that this was a problem even before the quakes. One project suggested to remedy this is to replace QEII with a new facility that would integrate a pool and a recreation centre.

Youth outlined a desire for the rebuild of the city central to emphasise sustainability. One way this is suggested is to create gardens in the central city as part of the rebuild as well as temporary gardens while the rebuild is taking place.

WE Speak 2011 - South

The south side of Christchurch was affected in different ways depending on the suburbs. Areas like Sumner were devastated whereas suburbs like Spreydon were relatively unaffected. This means that some suburbs faced immediate concerns such as sewage, silt and places to live. However, areas like Spreydon faced concerns over lack of venues for socialising.

The forum for south Christchurch, held at New Life Church Cashmere consisted of a wide range of ages from early high school students, including home schooled youth, up to tertiary students from the University of Canterbury and Christchurch Polytechnic. Most of the attendees were affected by the earthquake, let it be primary (e.g. Broken house) damage or secondary (e.g. school joining with other schools).

The first issue highlighted was the importance of having a youth voice in the Christchurch rebuild. Prominently discussed were making the new Christchurch a city that the youth want.

Moreover transport was suggested as a major problem. As most youth use the public transport, we expect buses to be on time. Often this is not the case and can affect things like schooling and socialising.

One idea proposed was to support Gap Fillers. Some ideas that were suggested include: Vegetation gardens (have community vegetable gardens) and temporary café/gathering spot (provide youth venues to socialise).

WE Speak 2011 - West

The west side of Christchurch was relatively unaffected by the September and February earthquakes. Every second road was not abandoned. The utilities were not lost for extended periods of time and Portaloos did not litter the street. It truly was a tale of two cities. For these reasons it was clear that the issues raised by a forum in this area would not be the same as those in other areas. The forum opened with a diverse group of attendees. Most of which were above school age and many were



also students at the University of Canterbury. Furthermore there were a significant number of people from the disabled community, thus providing a different perspective for the forum.

The attendees cited that having too few opportunities to socialise was an issue. This was identified as a failure to communicate the events that were available, rather than a lack of quantity. For this problem the solution was suggested that a dedicated service is created to provide youth this information. This was suggested to come in the form of a website service in which users sign up, list their preferred hobbies and are updated accordingly. This service would be integrated with text and social networking services.

The issue of poor bus transport was explained due to several reasons: limited number of routes, especially to outer suburbs; infrequent service; unfriendly drivers and an expensive fare. The solution that was discussed considered two important factors: increasing the amount of service and decreasing the cost. It is believed that tertiary students are most sensitive to price on services like public transport because they must pay for it themselves (as opposed to younger adolescents who have other's pay). The solution proposed to this was to lobby to groups like the UCSA and the CPSA to subsidise the costs of these services by approximately 50 cents.

The final issue extensively discussed referred to the concern felt by attendees that the decisions surrounding the earthquake by government and council bodies were not being communicated effectively. Moreover there was a desire for there to be consultation with the people to who would be affected. Most importantly it was highlighted that youth needed to have a voice, as it will be them who inherit the decisions made in the present. Solutions proposed involved ensuring that there was youth representation on CERA and that focus groups of youth could be put together in order to canvas their opinion.





Solutions

The main focus of WE Speak was on developing youth-led initiatives to address the issues raised by the Christchurch Earthquakes. Each separate location focused in on 2-3 projects which their participants were particularly enthusiastic towards. Using the Collaboration Cafe method of project development, participants identified the aims of each project, requirements for it to be completed and any potential difficulties that needed to be addressed. The key projects coming out of WE Speak 2011 were:

1. **Youth-led Gap Filler project in New Brighton** (East)
2. **Community Gardens in abandoned sites** (South)
3. **Free, all-ages outdoor event** (North)
4. **On-going youth-led events** (North and South)
5. **Youth event guide** (North, South and West)
6. **Subsidised public transport options for youth** (West)
7. **Replacing the social spaces provided by QEII with separate venues in the Eastern Suburbs** (East)
8. **Youth voice in the rebuild process** (all areas)

Some of the solutions have already become projects which the OYC and White Elephant are supporting. Others are left open for anyone else to pick up and make happen.

Gap Filler project

Gap Filler has been a very successful initiative that has brought communities together into spaces left vacant after the demolition of earthquake-damaged buildings. Gap Filler uses these spaces as venues for temporary community events and activities. The focus has mainly been on the inner city, but there is a clear need for this kind of initiative in the eastern suburbs – especially given the issues identified in WE Speak regarding the loss of social spaces after the earthquake. Participants in the East forum saw a clear need for youth-based Gap Filler activities in these areas.

As a result of this, since WE Speak the White Elephant Trust has built a robust relationship with the Gap Filler Project in order to allow the facilitation of a youth-led Gap Filler event in the eastern suburbs.

Community Gardens

One idea that was raised at WE Speak South was to take advantage of the empty spaces left after earthquake demolitions by planting community gardens. These gardens could have two immediate benefits: firstly, they would aid in the reconstruction of post-earthquake fragmented communities; and secondly they would aid the sustainable development of Christchurch –allowing the city to live up to its ambitions of being the Garden City of New Zealand.

This project is one which is best developed in the long-term, when more demolitions have taken place and a clear picture has been established of the new nature of Christchurch.



Free, all-ages outdoor event

Something that was mentioned at the WE Speak North forum was the benefits of the Band Together event after the September earthquake, in terms of acting as a psychological boon for the community. Therefore, participants were very enthusiastic about organising and running a similar event (though on a smaller scale) later in 2011.

The OYC and the White Elephant have been in communication with one of the participants who was particularly enthusiastic about this project, and together are working towards creating a free youth-led outdoor event or series of events. As the weather clears up towards summer there is potential for regular outdoor community events.

On-going Youth-led events

WE Speak 2011 reiterated the desire for continuing youth-led events around Christchurch. A particular emphasis was placed upon the desire for a youth group that was not affiliated with a church or religious groups.

This was of course of particular importance to the White Elephant Trust, and since WE Speak they have invited participants to work together with the White Elephant to organise and run youth events around the city. Approximately 40% of the invited participants have taken up this offer, and the White Elephant continues to offer, and encourage other young people to get involved in, youth-led events as a key part of their mission.

Youth Event Guide

A recurring theme at different WE Speak events was the need for better communication about what youth events were running in the city. A suggestion was to collate and publish an events guide that could be distributed to schools and other youth institutions, as well as being published online. An additional suggestion was to introduce a Facebook-based “Top 20” list for businesses offering youth services. This would promote competition among the facilitation of youth events.

Both the OYC and the White Elephant are enthusiastic about this idea and look forward to its implementation in the future.

Subsidised Public Transport Options

Many youth don't own their own vehicles and so rely on public transport for much of their travel around Christchurch. However, once a person reaches the age of 18, the charging of adult fares (double that of child's fares) on Metro services puts financial stress on many young people. This is particularly a problem for students, most of who have to pay for their transport themselves and are already on a tight budget.

A proposal is therefore being prepared by the White Elephant and OYC to be presented to Student Associations as well as Environment Canterbury whereby the Student Associations will subsidise the fares for students.



Replacing social spaces in the east

A key concern in the eastern suburbs was the potential loss of QEII as a social space for youth. A key issue was therefore the replacement of these facilities by obtaining a venue for youth activities. This would help tie youth and the communities closer together.

The White Elephant has recently obtained funding in order to build a new social space in the central city which could be used in this regard. Both OYC and the White Elephant also are looking to work with any youth who would like to establish a specific venue in their community. The eastern suburbs would also benefit from one or a few community spaces for youth and their community alike to socialise in.

Youth voice in the rebuild process

The most common theme coming out of WE Speak 2011 was the need for a youth voice in the rebuild decision-making process. This was seen as especially important because young people are liable to leave the city if their wishes are not taken into account, thus stunting future growth. As well as this, since young people will spend the most time and money dealing with rebuilt Christchurch, there is a moral obligation for their wishes to be taken into account.

The OYC has had considerable success in this area since the appointment of Joseph Chamberlain (an OYC member) to CanCERN (the CERA community advisory forum). This will allow the OYC to continuously improve advocating of youth opinion in Christchurch. Other young people with an opinion on the rebuild are encouraged to communicate them to the OYC and the public at large through mediums such as shareanidea.org.nz.





Where to from here?

White Elephant continues to operate its daily service delivery to the youth of Christchurch in their suburbs. Attendees of WE Speak and any other young people who want to provide solutions to issues youth face meet at these suburban hubs to plan and carry out projects that will benefit the wider community. Youth led all ages raves are being held mid and end of term to give young people a safe and alcohol and drug free avenue to blow off some steam and soon free outdoor youth led events will be held too. The Otautahi Youth Council are currently working towards building a 5000 strong network of young people, who will communicate about youth issues and the Council will regularly report to local and national community partners about issues and news they have identified. Their next major campaign will be around encouraging young people to vote in the general election.

If you or your community group are interested in getting involved in any projects outlined in this report or any other projects which you think can help combat the issues that we have identified please get in contact. Help with funding, volunteering and ideas are always welcome and appreciated! Contact Nathan at the White Elephant Trust for further details on how you can help and get involved.

Contact Information

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