



NEW PLYMOUTH DISTRICT COUNCIL
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OUR PEOPLE OUR FUTURE

The New Zealand Post Management Excellence Awards 2003
Project Title: Our People, Our Future
Award Category: Management of People





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Plymouth District has a below average proportion of its population in the 18-24 age range and the level of educational achievement for these people, living in the district is significantly lower than the national average. In addition, youth make up a disproportionately high percentage of the district's long-term unemployed and that Maori are particularly at risk.

A three-pronged approach to these problems was identified in July 2002, where the council would:

1. Take on young long-term unemployed as "cadets" and give them one year's on the job training with assistance to cope with transition into the workforce.
2. Set up an ongoing apprenticeship scheme in "trade" aspects of the council's operations – primarily horticultural activities.
3. Offer scholarships to students from the district, which would cover university fees, provide holiday work and then bond the students to the council for two years after the completion of their degrees.

These programmes are ongoing, not a one-off response.



THE NEED

Demographic analysis shows that New Plymouth District has a below average proportion of its population in the 18-24 age range (see appendix 1) and that the level of educational achievement for people, in that age range, living in the district is significantly lower than the national average (see appendix 2). Youth also make up a disproportionately high percentage of the district's long-term unemployed and Maori are particularly at risk.

The low youth population and low levels of education attainment are attributed to academically oriented youth leaving the district for university towns and not returning due to a perceived lack of local employment opportunities. Most of these people will go on to work in the main centres, or overseas on the completion of their degrees.

The high levels of youth long-term unemployment are attributed to lack of basic skills, and/or inadequate on-the-job training opportunities. There is also a perceived loss of faith in, and ability to relate to, the post 1980s economy by Maori, which for many has led to a loss of faith in themselves.

New Plymouth District Council (NPDC) has experienced problems recruiting professional people to work in its varied activity areas. These people are in high demand nationally and NPDC has resorted to recruiting overseas, which has generally been quite successful. As a community based organisation we prefer, however, to offer employment locally in the first instance.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In 2002, after this analysis and much consultation, NPDC identified a vision for the district 'New Plymouth District will be a caring, dynamic, diverse and safe place to be' and five strategic areas it wanted to focus on over the next ten years. One of these is "Youth-Rangatahi".

The strategic objective for the Youth-Rangatahi issue is "the specific needs of youth are reflected in community decisions and youth make a positive contribution to the community". Among the associated success indicators are "an increase in training initiatives in the district" and "all youth either employed or in training education".

The Youth-Rangatahi issue was strongly supported and brought into sharper focus by three related strategic issues - District Growth, Iwi Relationships and Quality of Life.

COMMUNICATION & THE PROJECT

Discussions within NPDC, with other players in the employment and workforce training areas, along with participation in the "Mayors' Taskforce for Jobs", led to a realisation that NPDC could take a lead in youth employment in the region. This response would need to address youth long-term unemployment, particularly that of Maori, retention of our best and brightest, as well as provision of increasingly rare on-the-job vocational training.

In addition to the contribution made to the vision and strategic direction, there was also an expectation that any scheme would also strongly benefit NPDC's own work-force planning and capacity building.

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2. Offer scholarships to students from the district, which would cover university fees, provide holiday work and then bond the students to the council for two years after the completion of their degrees.
3. Set up an ongoing apprenticeship scheme in "trade" aspects of the council's operations – primarily horticultural activities

These programmes are ongoing, not a one-off response. That is the council will continue to take on cadets, apprentices and scholars each year.



CADETS, SCHOLARSHIPS, APPRENTICES

Cadets

The cadet scheme has the council to taking on 14 cadets per year with a set target that at least 50% of these would be Maori. The scheme began with a six week training programme including life skill training and then cadets started employment throughout the council in specially created jobs.

Scholarships

The scheme takes on three scholars each year. The council pays their course fees and provides holiday period work of up to 10 weeks per annum. In return, the scholars are contractually bound to work for the council for two years after the completion of their study. This contract may be exited unilaterally by the council at any time, or by the scholar on return of all fees paid to the council, or by other mutual arrangement.

Apprentices

The NPDC takes on apprentices who train three years at the council's Parkscape unit. This is in conjunction with the New Zealand Horticulture Industry Training Organisation and results in each gaining a level four National Certificate in Amenity Horticulture qualification.

PARTNERSHIPS, FUNDING & BUY-IN

While the council could absorb the costs of apprentices and scholarships within its own staffing and training budgets, the costs of the cadet scheme would have strained council finances – particularly if they were to be employed in large enough numbers to make an impact and a statement to other employers in the region.

Cadet scheme

Communication with other agencies concerned with youth employment in the region was necessary at an early stage. This proved fruitful, with Work and Income (WINZ), Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), the Community Employment Group (CEG), Te Puni Kokiri (TPK) and a local iwi all contributing to the costs of the scheme. This included funding for a full time “camp-mother” whose role is to coordinate induction and on-going training, as well as trouble-shooter. There was no impact on rates resulting from the cadet scheme.

Scholarships

Given the varying length of degree study periods, the council will be supporting between nine and twelve students and then as the scheme matures employing between six and nine graduates under the scheme at any one time. This requires careful planning to ensure that there are not concentrations of graduates in some disciplines and activity areas, while there is a dearth of them in others.

Costs can vary between \$37,000 and \$132,000 depending on the year of the scheme and the mix of academic discipline selected. They are paid from each council department employing the students. Employment costs, after graduation are considered normal remuneration costs and met from activity budgets.

Apprentices

A key partner involved in the apprentice scheme is the New Zealand Horticulture Industry Training Organisation who works closely with the council and internal assessors to provide training and help apprentices work through the qualifications.



SELECTION

Cadets

WINZ provided council with a list of 30 candidates. These people were given a presentation by council and told what they could expect if selected. They were told that they would receive training, personal development counselling and a qualification at the end of the year. In return it was made clear that they would be obliged to show up, work, show good conduct and not work under the influence of drugs and alcohol - for which they would be tested. Several candidates withdrew their applications.

Of those that remained 14 were selected, via interviews, written tests and I.Q. tests. Cadets were chosen on the basis of what they would gain from the programme. All of the candidates were long-term unemployed and 13 of the 14 have whakapapa, with most identifying themselves as Maori. It was not simply a case of “cherry picking” the best candidates – some that were selected were not WINZ’s first choice at all. Council staff, however, believed that these people had the right mix of attributes to be successful – and they were right.

Scholarships

Candidates are selected from responses to council advertising. They must be from the district and be studying in a field relevant to local government. Which areas of the organisation get scholars is determined via negotiation with Human Resources, with final determination by the Executive Management Team. Selection is carried out via standard recruitment practice, consideration of C.V.’s and interviews.

Apprentices

Positions are advertised and selection is carried out in a similar way to scholarships. This scheme works in well with the cadetship scheme – where cadets who choose to work at Parkscape are able to apply for apprenticeship positions.





MANAGEMENT

The cadet scheme required by far the most project management – both well before beginning the recruitment through to day-to-day looking after the cadets.

In order for the project to be successful it was important to realise the external pressures on the cadets and manage the scheme appropriately. An intensive induction and training programme was provided for the first six weeks using a number of high-quality external trainers and experts. This training was pivotal to the success of the programme. For that reason it was carried out by nationally recognised first-rate trainers. This taught basic work-skills, as well as life-skills. Included in the programme were:

- Induction to the council
- Goal setting and attitudes
- Working in teams.
- Communication skills
- Change management
- Problem solving
- Conflict management
- Personal presentation
- First aid training (to certificate level)
- “Cook for less” budget and self-sufficiency training

At the end of this period the cadets began work in various parts of the organisation. The selection of which areas they went into occurred only through dialogue with each cadet and after an interview process. They now work in various parts of the council, including pools, parks and recreation, libraries, support services, finance, regulatory, community development, and customer services.

During the induction, the cadets got to know the council staff member that they would have the closest relationship – Camp Mother (official title, Coordinator and Coach – Cadetship Programme), a human resources specialist paid for via the funding partnership. At this point Camp Mother began what has proven to be the most crucial role within the scheme - mentoring and problem solving for these young adults on a daily basis.

Mentoring, counselling, monitoring and organising 14 cadets is, and needs to be, a full time job if they are to get the maximum benefit, remain in the workforce and live successful lives. When people are long-term unemployed there is always a reason and those underlying causes need to be resolved if the cadets are not going to revert to unemployment at the end of the scheme.

Camp Mother is the project manager for all aspects of the scheme. The choice of the person in this role is critical. They have to be down to earth and tough but sympathetic if they are to gain the respect and trust of the cadets. They need to remain focussed on the objectives of the programme if they are to keep the cadets moving toward a lifetime of employability. They also needed the project management skills necessary to achieve long-term results.

The cadets receive 16 hours training per month, plus other selected training. Three of the cadets have just returned from the “Young Maori Leaders – He Whakatakoto Kaupapa” conference in Wellington. This was to expose them to role models within their own culture and also as recognition of their own potential as future leaders. Fees were covered by the council’s partners.

All cadets are expected to complete their NZQA National Certificate in Employment Skills provided by the Western Institute of Technology in Taranaki (WITT) by the end of this year. All have their NZQA First Aid Certificates, two have completed Life Guard certification, one is completing their NZQA ETITO Call Centre Operations Qualification and two are completing a national Visitor Information Networks qualification. All, including Camp Mother, attend Te Ara Reo Maori language training each week.



INNOVATION & ORIGINALITY IN MANAGEMENT OF PEOPLE

To our knowledge no other organisation in New Zealand has taken a sizeable group of long-term unemployed young people and invested in them as intensively and thoroughly as NPDC and its partners have.

This is clearly a high-risk project with considerable resources (over \$300,000) being contributed by the partners over the year. At approximately \$20,000 per cadet, however, the payback period will be between 6 months to 2 years (depending on measurement method) if all cadets remain in the workforce.

This is a pilot study, seeking to demonstrate that an intensive one-year course of training and employment can turn around the lives of young people who are clearly at risk of a lifetime of unemployment and the human and behavioural costs associated with that.

In addition to the intensive personal training and coaching discussed elsewhere, specific requirements of the scheme are:

- Individual participant assessments (also used for assessment of overall project)
- Participants to provide self-assessments
- Participants to provide assessments of the scheme
- External monitoring and assessment by the Ministry of Social Development, TPK and TEC
- Individual training plan for each participant for the duration of his or her participation and for future training needs.

This information will be used to assess the effectiveness of this pilot scheme, to refine it and to promote it to Government, other councils, institutions and private employers.

Add the scholarships and apprentices into the mix and we know that this is an innovative and original way of managing people. The council was willing to be a leader in our district and in New Zealand to ensure capable human resources are available in the future – and the gamble paid off.

RESULTS

The results from all three areas have far exceeded expectations. Not only has this proven worthwhile for the council internally but has proven to have been the 'right thing to do' for the district as a whole and for the youth of the district. Specific results for cadets and scholarships:

Cadets

- All fourteen cadets are still with NPDC (hear from them in appendix 3)
- We expect to retain over 50% of them as full time staff at the end of the programme
- Response to training courses much better than expected
- Low absenteeism
- Strong supportive culture and friendships within the group, whereas few knew each other prior to the programme
- Strong buy-in and enthusiasm from rest of the organisation
- Employability of Cadets greatly improved.

Scholarships

- Three high quality applicants selected from a surprisingly high quality field (very hard to choose due to quality of applicants)
- University holiday work undertaken to-date up to a high and very usable standard.
E.g. complete review of legal opinions for compatibility with new Local Government Act
- Expectation that the three scholars to date will make excellent additions to the NPDC workforce
- Council intention to hold on to these employees after two-year contractual period is up
- Scholars appear pleased with and challenged by project work offered over holidays
- Tough competition emerging between council departments to get into what is already a very successful scheme.



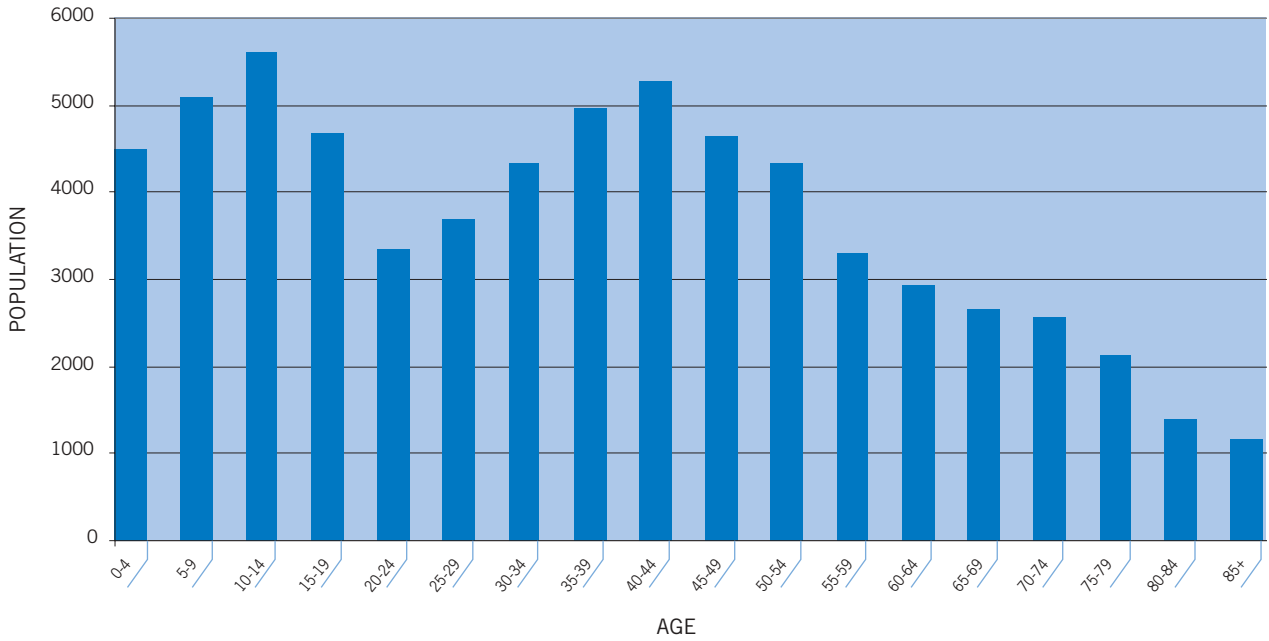
APPENDICES





APPENDIX 1

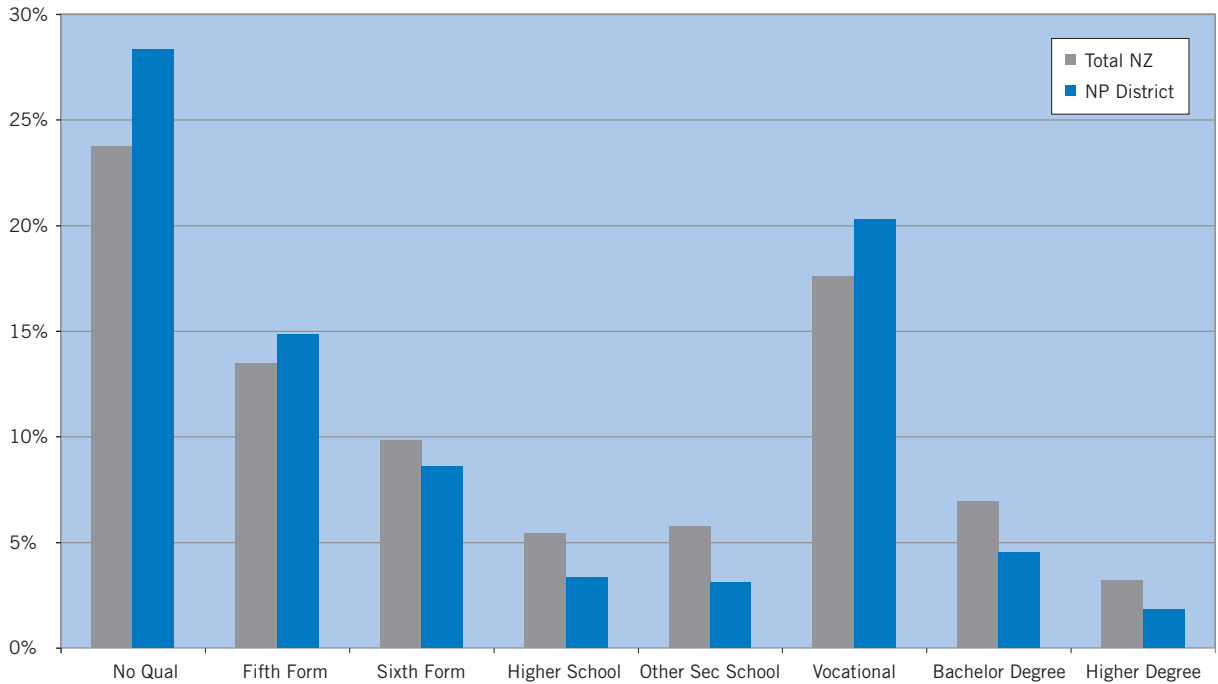
NEW PLYMOUTH DISTRICT AGE GROUPS



Source: Census 2001

APPENDIX 2

QUALIFICATIONS NZ AND NEW PLYMOUTH DISTRICT



Source: Census 2001



APPENDIX 3



TALIMAI WALLER

The Cadet Scheme to me is a once in a lifetime opportunity and a step closer to the doors of my future.



IDA RIMA

This cadetship has been incredible. I've had a lot of opportunities and learnt so many new skills that will help me in the career that I want. There have also been a lot of challenges, but they've been easy to handle, because I've had 13 friends beside me the whole time.



TINA TAIAROA

The cadetship programme to me has been very challenging which I have thoroughly enjoyed. I have learnt a lot over the past few months and feel this is just the beginning towards a great future.



TEOMARIE KATENE

I would never ever have dreamt that I would ever have the job that I have got now - working in the library at Puke Ariki. The cadetship has given me the opportunity in taking the first step to a lifetime goal.



KELLEE FRENCH

The cadetship scheme has given me confidence and maturity to work in the workplace. It has also given me the confidence to deal with different and difficult situations.



MEREDITH MORRELL

I wanted a career and this gave me the opportunity to work towards that. I like history and saw this as the chance to work in a Museum and Library. It is also an opportunity to promote myself in a wide range of community organisations.



MEGHAN CRAIG

The cadet scheme has really helped me to develop as a person. When I first heard about Puke Ariki I would never have thought that I would be working there when it opened! It has been very exciting and the level of support I have had from people both in the Council and the community has been amazing. Thanks for believing in me!



BENJAMIN WHITE

This Cadetship training has been a helpful experience in my life because I have gained and developed many skills. The workplace environment is the best. I enjoy the people I work with and the customers I serve. I have insight and confidence to do what I want to do in my life for a career.



JANE WEBSTER

To me the cadet scheme is an amazing opportunity. The experience will be great for my future ventures.



LISA WHITE

For me personally being given the opportunity to work in local government is an honour. Working in community development has given me direction in which field of study and job area that I want to progress in.



JIMO RANGI

I believe the scheme provides an opportunity for people who are unemployed to experience what it is like to work in local government and maybe carry on working for the council, become an apprentice or gain a scholarship.



STEPHANIE BELL

I enjoy being a cadet, having this opportunity to work for the council and gaining unit standards and training along the way is a bonus. I have met a lot of new people as well as the cadets, whom I have grown friendships with, and thoroughly enjoyed working and training alongside.



ANGEL MARTIN

Thank-you for this opportunity. Before my work with the Council I was at a crossroad with what to do with my life and now I look forward to furthering my knowledge with Parkscape, Te Reo Maori and the training I am involved in. In the future I hope to continue working at Parkscape.



CHARLENE LEACH

The scheme with the NPDC has given me a lot of opportunities and qualifications in this area of recreation. If you get a chance, grab it with both hands-it's an experience you'll never forget!