

How can we support young people to participate in healthy and active lifestyles?

Submission from VNZ Youth Working Group to Youth Parliament 2022, 29 May 2022.

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The Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ) Youth Working Group is a team of young people from across Aotearoa that works to promote and support rangatahi within the volunteering sector. We strongly support giving young people more opportunities to volunteer and making it easier for them to access volunteering opportunities that fit their needs and abilities. In a country where volunteering contributes the equivalent of the construction industry to GDP, we need to be looking to the future to build and grow the sector. Part of this includes engaging young people to take part in volunteering at a young age.

Volunteering

It is incredibly important to ensure that young people can participate in healthy and active lifestyles. One of the ways that we can support our rangatahi to do so is by promoting and engaging with young people more in the space of volunteering.

Volunteering plays a role in healthy lifestyles through a multitude of ways. Firstly, it is more often than not a physically active experience, from planting native trees to looking after animals and even walking around to deliver pamphlets. Of course, volunteering does also come in other shapes and sizes - and sometimes the work that young people do is not seen as traditional "volunteering". But in any form that it comes - often volunteering provides a great escape for youth and supports them to lead healthy, happy and active lifestyles.

One of the most significant outcomes of volunteering is the sense of community and belonging that occurs, especially for our youth who have had less opportunities to engage and connect outside of video calls during the Covid pandemic. Encouraging young people to get involved with a local group feels more crucial than ever - this key social development stage during high school and tertiary education has been somewhat tumultuous over the past two years, therefore uplifting engagement and building frameworks into these institutions that ensure everyone can get involved in their community, develop skills, and find something they're passionate about is vital moving forward.

There should be greater promotion and access to volunteering opportunities for young people. We know that our youth tend to be time-poor and don't want to necessarily commit themselves to a large amount of volunteering right off the bat, so more agencies need support to understand this and guide students into on-demand and suitable opportunities. Allowing young people to

come and go as they please and be in control of their volunteering - as seen in examples such as Everybody Eats - is a great way to allow young people to engage in great opportunities and support causes dear to their heart. We know that when young people do this, they tend to feel a greater level of satisfaction and purpose in life and can develop close relationships outside of their traditional friend circles.

Physical health

Outside of volunteering, physical health is an incredibly important aspect of looking after yourself. Often, young people don't participate in physical exercise because of the price. Students don't want to spend \$15 a week for a gym membership that they don't have the time to use fully, especially if they're in university and having to pay for rent. Sports clubs also often have excessive membership fees and can be hard to get into. There needs to be some sort of subsidy or support by the Government to support our young people to engage with physical activity, particularly in their final years of high school and through university as PE no longer becomes a compulsory class.

It is important for the Select Committee to note that youth are also more enticed by convenient forms of entertainment - such as online gaming and social media. These are often things that do not involve physical exercise and can have a detrimental impact on their mental health as well. More young people have become used to working and studying from home, and so there should be a greater push to support youth and indirectly promote more exercise. Things like subsidized tours at local sceneries, promotion of hikes and local trails, more local events and greater advertising of volunteering activities would help to do this.

Diet

We also know that diet plays a significant role in a healthy lifestyle. New Zealand has the second highest rate of childhood obesity amongst OECD member countries. One in 10 children are obese, and a further one in five are overweight. A lot of this stems from the convenience and price of unhealthy food, and the lack of support to engage in physical exercise - particularly promoting it. There is little support from schools, except at a basic level, to teach kids the importance of eating healthy, although programmes such as Ka Ora Ka Ako (healthy lunch in schools programme) are positive steps.

There should be greater promotion of healthier diets, and greater accessibility to healthy foods. More support should be given to young people to afford healthier alternatives, particularly with the "noodle" culture of students' diets being well-known, often as a cost-saving measure. Some form of financial support or guidance for young people is needed.

As Aotearoa New Zealand successfully transitions into a smoke-free country by 2025, the increase in vaporisers/e-cigarette sales must be held under a spotlight - especially with the uptake in youth targeted marketing campaigns and ease of purchase through dairies, gas stations and the ever-increasing range of vape stores. Although it appears that vaping is less harmful than smoking, preventing young adults from building a dependence on nicotine products should be discussed while the road to a smoke-free country is coming to a head. Along

with the financial burden that a nicotine habit adds to an already tight budget, the concern around the accessibility of these products is that young adults may choose to spend more on these appetite suppressants than on nutritious food.

Conclusion

There are lots of things that we can do to support rangatahi across Aotearoa. From promoting more suitable volunteering for young people to reducing the cost of healthy foods in supermarkets and school canteens. We need to be doing more as a country to support active and healthy lifestyles.