

What is it like for children to live in Auckland's CBD?

Interview results with Auckland CBD-living children undertaken at the holiday programmes of YouthTown & YMCA, & one Saturday morning @ Auckland Central Library

January & February 2008

Introduction

Auckland City Council had sought to undertake a child impact assessment within their 2006-07 Annual Plan outputs. A child impact assessment involves assessing a proposed policy, decision or activity with *'the best interests of the child'* being central to the assessment (Hanna et al 2006). Staff working on the Central Business District (CBD) upgrades were very interested in this concept in light of recent census data which found that Auckland's CBD is one of the fastest growing residential areas in the region and in New Zealand. Particularly, of the nearly 18,000 CBD residents, 2499 are children: this is double the number of children counted in the 2001 census. Of this group, 603 are aged under 14 years. A recent council workshop noted an increase in new babies living in the CBD as well as a number of emerging issues for children and families living in apartments. Subsequent analysis revealed through mesh-block mapping found that children aged <14 years were infact, *widely* dispersed in their addresses around the CBD, and were *not* congregated in discreet pockets as had previously been thought. With this CBD-specific data in mind and with more apartments being built in this location imminently, the views of the emerging population of children living in the CBD were considered to be beneficial. Hence, the research question was born: *What is it like for children to live in Auckland's CBD?*

Implementation

A meeting was held that successfully drew together 'key internal players' from Auckland City Council who could support and endorse a child impact assessment focussed upon children living in the CBD. These staff were drawn from senior and advisory levels of different council units, namely:

- ⊙ Community Development (specifically in and around the CBD)
- ⊙ Community & Social Policy Planning
- ⊙ Special Projects: Auckland CBD
- ⊙ City Planning with responsibilities for the Victoria Quarter

Discussions were held between these staff and AUT's Local Government Centre Manager, Nic Mason, with a broad understanding being quickly realised as to what the key purpose and methods could be, and the potential for very useful outcomes from the research. The 'team' then identified existing council reports, local information and other pertinent literature in support of the creation of their child impact assessment implementation framework. The data sourced by staff was comprehensive and included:

- ⊙ recent (and thorough) analysis of census data specific to the CBD locality;
- ⊙ a social audit report about the learning quarter within the CBD;
- ⊙ recent notes from a workshop about CBD neighbourhood issues;
- ⊙ a CBD resident's-authored newsletter,

AUT was able to contribute to this pool of information with academic articles pertinent to children and metropolitan urban design issues from New Zealand and international authors, as well as broader connections into the impact assessment field of work. With this information in hand, the council's Child Advocate – Sarah Uppard - authored the 'scoping and justification' paper which secured both the financial support and the staff engagement across council.

Children aged under 12 years were considered to be the ideal survey participants, as there was fundamentally no qualitative information available about this age group in council reports.

With the onset of school holidays (Christmas 2007 - New Year 2008), innovative ways of reaching the children were required. It was a better research proposition to 'go where the kids were' and this was achieved through accessing children through their attendance at school holiday programmes in January - February 2008, and at child-friendly recreation locations such as the Auckland central library.

The survey content drew from comparable local research undertaken with parents of young children who were asked to identify the range of services and amenities important to them in their caregiving roles (Witten et al, 2006) and from the New Zealand researcher Claire Freeman's work about children's needs of urban design. A survey was used because it offered the opportunity for new information to be gathered in a systematic way from actual CBD residents. It was a mechanism which the staff were familiar with, and which could record information of use to their immediate spheres of work. Therefore, new qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from children under 12 years through face-to-face 'interviews' by a Council youth cadet (aged 16 years). She was initially briefed and then supported by members of the project team at each interview site.

The potential audience for the eventual reporting was considered to be:-

- ⊙ Auckland City Council Policy, Community Development, CBD, Planning Teams;
- ⊙ Planners
- ⊙ Developers
- ⊙ Children and their families
- ⊙ Office of the Children's Commission
- ⊙ AUT Local Government Centre

There were other agencies and people with a potential interest in this process and the resultant outcomes. Many different external agencies are involved in CBD-based work, for example, Plunket and Auckland City Mission. Additionally, the Mission's significant future CBD development and accommodation plans are well underway and the findings

could be useful for their development purposes. The community agency 'Safekids' had proactively contacted the AUT Local Government Centre seeking further information about this work. The City Planning Manager for Victoria Quarter thought that external planners, builders and developers external to council as well as the in-house planners would be interested in the research outcomes because of the survey's specificity around apartment-based living experiences of children. Awareness had already been registered from social research agencies such as SHORE (Massey University-based research agency) and from other councils around New Zealand in this research. It was considered by the council team that the most pragmatic way forward would be to widely communicate the research's purpose and intention, with a full commitment to sharing the results as expediently as practicable.

Analysis of results

There were 44 participants in this survey, which was undertaken in January and February 2008. The participants ranged from 4-12 years of age, with 7 years olds comprising the majority (25%), whilst the fewest number of participants were aged 4, 6 and 12 years old (each 4% of the total sample). There was a good proportion of male (43%) to female (57%) participants. The predominant ethnicity of the participants was Asian (27%) closely followed by Pakeha and 'mixed' ethnicities (both 23%); the fewest were Pacific children (4%). The majority of the participants went to local public primary schools, namely Freemans Bay (39%) and Newtown Central (23%), with a range of other schools being noted.

The vast majority of subjects lived in an apartment (91%). Most participants lived with their mum and dad (68%) or in a single-adult household (27%), predominantly nominated as being 'mum'.

Of the 44 participants, 34 (77%) stated that at least one adult in their household worked nearby to where they lived. When asked about what they liked about the inside of their house, the children spoke of it being warm and safe (equally 44% of responses). They also stated that they liked having their (own) bedroom, and that their home was cosy / comfortable. In responding to the following question pertaining to what could be better about the inside of their home, the children overwhelming spoke of wanting it to be bigger (29 of the 38 responses – 76%). The next leading improvement the children wanted was that they could have their own room (24%).

The children were then asked about the outside of their home – what was good and what they did not like. The children liked playing and riding outside of their apartment and being near a park equally (32%). What 60% of the children did not like was noise – people, traffic, construction, music, ships etc. Some children spoke additionally about the resultant difficulty they had in getting to sleep. The next most popular dislike was that there was not a lot of space / no grass area / no play area / no outside area or that the outside area was dirty (43%).

Slightly higher proportions of the child respondents did have friends near where they lived (57%), although most respondent did not have family nearby (68%). Nearly all children stated that they did not have a pet or were not allowed a pet (92%). In the

majority of cases (64%), the children felt that their neighbours were friendly, although 11% had not yet met their neighbours, and a quarter of the children felt that their neighbours were only sometimes friendly, or were not friendly towards them.

When considering their recreation opportunities, the children were asked about when the last time was that they had played at the beach, in the bush, climbing trees, or been at the park. Given that the questionnaire was administered in the peak of a very sunny January school holiday period, 43% of the children stated they had done at least one of these activities in the last few days or the day before. Sixteen percent said that they had not at all, with the remaining majority (29%) commenting that they had done so within the last few weeks or before Xmas.

The children were asked about where they 'hung out': thirty four percent hung out at the pools / swimming with a similar number (32%) 'hanging out' at home. Given the children's age, this is not surprising as they still need to be supervised. Parks (25%) and YouthTown (23%) also featured in this response. The children were then asked about what they got up to with their mates, with playgrounds / parks, as well as the beach and pools being the most popular options pursued by 32% of the children.

Conclusion

There are clearly some positive opportunities as well as some challenging issues which CBD-living children experience. Leading issues identified by the 44 children involved in this survey included:

- 媏 Their need for more space inside of their home (76% respondents) and outside of their home (43%)
- 媏 60% of the children not liking the noise made by people, traffic, construction, music, ships, with some children speaking spontaneously about the resultant difficulty they had in getting sleep.
- 媏 57% had friends nearby, although 68% respondent did not have family nearby
- 媏 Virtually no children had a pet (92%)
- 媏 64% of the children had friendly neighbours, although 25% felt that their neighbours were only sometimes friendly, or were not friendly towards them
- 媏 during their holiday period [of sustained sunny weather], 16% of the children had not played outside in the bush, climbing trees, or been at the park, whilst 43% had done so within the previous week
- 媏 Almost all of the children had a parent who worked nearby (77%)
- 媏 The majority of children (68%) lived with their mum and dad, or in a single-adult household (27%)

These issues may well transliterate to other specific populations' experiences of inner-city living. With the continuous pressure to house families in cities, these matters will potentially become more accentuated if city planning and urban design, including the design of buildings and their surrounding space, are not altered to accommodate these issues. The identification of strengths, needs and issues for 'apartment-living people' is a relatively new field of enquiry in New Zealand. A similar 'apartment-dwellers' survey

has been recently initiated by Wellington City Council, to which these results might usefully be cross-germinated with.

Results

Age counts & % of total			Gender counts & % of total			Ethnicity counts & % of total		
4 year olds	2	4%	Female	25	57%	Maori	3	7%
5 year olds	6	14%	Male	19	43%	Mixed	10	23%
6 year olds	2	4%				Pacific	2	4%
7 year olds	11	25%				Pakeha	10	23%
8 year olds	4	9%				Asian	12	27%
9 year olds	4	9%				Other	7	16%
10 year olds	7	16%						
11 year olds	6	14%						
12 year olds	2	4%						
TOTAL 44 (100%)								

What kind of a home do you live in? (Tick one)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apartment 40 (91%) | <input type="checkbox"/> Office building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> House 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Shop building 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Townhouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (flat) 1 |

How many adults normally live in your home? (Tick one)

- 1 adult **12 (predominantly "mum") 27%**
- 2 adults **30 (predominantly "Mum and dad") 68%**
- 3+ adults **1 (Mum, Poppa, Nana) 2%**
- Other (4 adults) **1 (Mum, Dad, Grandpa, Grandma) 2%**

Does the adult(s) in your home work nearby?

YES 34 - 77%
NO 5 - 11%
SOMETIMES 1 (work from home)
NO ANSWER 3 - 7%
RESPONDENT DOESN'T KNOW 1

What do you like about the inside of your house? (PAUSE, then prompt its warm, lots space, comfortable, safe). There were **43 / 44** responses to this question. Key themes mentioned were:

- warm (**19**); safe (**19**); cosy / comfortable (13); own/my bedroom (12); deck / balcony (6); views (5); clean (3). Two children commented that they liked the colourfulness of their homes

The question used the prompts of 'warms' and 'space' and 'comfortable' and 'safe' which may have similarly 'promoted' these options in the children's minds

When was the last time you played at the beach / in the bush / climbing trees / at the park?

- Yesterday **5 – 11%**
- Last week **14 – 32%**
- A few weeks ago **8 – 18%**
- Before Xmas **5 – 11%**
- Not at all **7 – 16%**
- Not sure / no answer **1 – 2%**
- Can't remember **4 – 9%**

Where do you hang out? There were **44 / 44** responses to this question. Key themes mentioned were: swimming / pools (**15**); at home (**14**); parks (**11**); YouthTown (**10**); library (7); Rainbows End (6); shopping / shops (6).

The question did not use prompts; however, two of the three locations of the surveys were YouthTown and the library, which may have 'promoted' these options in the children's minds

What do you get up to with your mates? (PAUSE, then prompt.... like clubs, swimming pool, parks, playing areas, basketball?). There were **44 / 44** responses to this question. Key themes mentioned were: playground (**14**); beach / pools (**14**); YouthTown (6); video / computer games / game parlour (5).

The question used the prompts of 'clubs' and 'swimming pool' and 'parks' which may have similarly 'promoted' these options in the children's minds

Which school did you go to last year? (44 responses)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Freemans Bay 17 - 39% | Green Bay Primary 1 |
| Newton Central 10 - 23% | Pt Chevalier School 1 |
| Ponsonby Intermediate 5 - 11% | AUT Kindergarten 1 |
| Parnell Primary 4 - 9% | Chelsea School 1 |
| Laingholm Primary 1 | Ferndale Kindergarten 1 |
| New Plymouth 1 | Ponsonby Kindergarten 1 |

How did you get there and home again? (Exclusively use this transport)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walk 8 – 18% | <input type="checkbox"/> Skateboard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bus 5 – 11% | <input type="checkbox"/> Car 7 – 16% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bike | <input type="checkbox"/> Taxi |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scooter | <input type="checkbox"/> Mix transport 24 – 55% |

How do you get to school and home again? (Tick all options)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walk 22 | <input type="checkbox"/> Skateboard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bus 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Car 26 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bike | <input type="checkbox"/> Taxi |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scooter | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

What is some free stuff you would like to have nearby?

媿 Swimming /wave pool /baths /waterpark = 29	媿 Game parlour / laser strike / arcade = 3
媿 Sky tower = 13	媿 colouring in / painting pictures / art lessons = 3
媿 movies = 8	媿 YouthTown = 3
媿 park (and shady trees) = 7	媿 Kids / animal shows = 3
媿 Rainbows end = 5	媿 Ice cream = 2
媿 Zoo = 5	媿 games at parks = 2
媿 Beach = 3	

Single suggestions from children included

媿 Warehouse	媿 JBHS
媿 library	媿 Internet
媿 telephone store selling octaphones	媿 Pretty flowers outside my door
媿 DVD shop	媿 Motat
媿 McDonalds	媿 Bus / train rides
媿 Seaworld	媿 Martial arts classes
媿 Movie world	媿 Dancing places
媿 Splash world	媿 Mini golf
媿 Trampoline	媿 Have my dad nearby
媿 Butterfly creek	媿 Skatepark / biking park

How long you been living in your home?

1-6 months 9 – 20%	unknown months 1
7-12 months 0	unknown years 9 – 20%
1.2 years 15 – 34%	unknown 1
2+ years 8 – 18%	unanswered 1

Do you live at another address?

YES 11 – 25%
NO 30 – 68%
SOMETIMES 3 – 7%