

9. SHIRLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL COUNSELLOR PROJECT

Officer responsible Community Advocate	Author Bruce Meder, DDI 941-5408/Ingrid Stonhill
--	--

The purpose of this report is to familiarise the Board with the counsellor project at Shirley Primary School and to seek assistance with funding for this project.

This project helps to meet the outcomes of the Council's Children's Policy, specifically that of "a nurturing community, safe environment, higher self esteem and positive world view, opportunities to be heard and a future with hope". This project also fits one of the principles of the Healthy Christchurch Charter which states that "Health is a state of physical, mental, spiritual, social and economic wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease" (author's emphasis).

The project further assists the Board in meeting its objective "to promote a safe, healthy community".

SHIRLEY RESEARCH

The Board's commissioned research noted that "the number of families living in the Research Block with children is well above the average for the rest of Christchurch". Indeed, the density of children aged under 10 years is almost twice that of the city average (22% versus 13%). This, combined with high unemployment, low income and low self-esteem in the area contribute to high levels of stress that families work under.

Two of the recommendations from this research are pertinent to this project:

- "Develop partnerships between the Christchurch City Council and local schools for the development of community initiatives, and
- Work with other local and statutory agencies to ensure that a range of support is offered that will meet the different cultural needs of families."

THE PROJECT

The project is a partnership between Shirley Primary School (decile 3) and Presbyterian Support Services. It involves the engagement of a counsellor on site at the school one day per week.

Currently the counsellor works with five children (all boys at present as they present the more significant problems) per day. These children come from the most needy families who are unable to make significant monetary contributions towards the costs.

Because of the contact via the children the counsellor has been able to work with families to a greater and lesser extent. The counsellor, Presbyterian Support and the school all recognise that the success of this pilot scheme will depend on the ability to work with the whole family and not just the children.

Alternatives to this project for the school, the children and families are extremely limited. Referrals to Whakatata House, for example, have a waiting list of at least six months, a significant period of time in the life of a child.

Shirley Primary School belongs to a chapter that has access to a Field Worker in Schools. The counsellor project is not in conflict with this position, indeed it is complimentary. The Field Worker in Schools is able to refer "clients" to the counsellor. Indeed the Field Worker in Schools comments that the Shirley School counsellor project is of enormous benefit to his own work.

FUNDING

The costs of this project amount to approximately \$16,000 per year. The project began in Term 4, 2002 with Presbyterian Support Services picking up the full cost. However, the school is committed to finding funding for a half share contribution, ie \$8,000. Furthermore, although the benefits of the project accrue firstly to the families, the school is reluctant to place a financial hurdle in the way of families on low incomes. (The Shirley research notes that the percentage of families on income levels below \$30,000 per year is almost 60% compared with the city average of just over 30%.) Some form of financial contribution from families is being looked into, however this will not meet the full costs. The benefits of the project go beyond those to the children and their families, with wider benefit to the school (via enhanced learning environments and behaviours) and the wider community (via lessening of stress and tensions and a reduction in delinquency and crime).

The school is approaching local businesses to sponsor this project. The school is also well aware of other forms of funding and already has made applications to a variety of trusts, local businesses, pub charities and funding agencies for activities of a wide nature, including: camp costs, equipment, sports uniforms, numeracy and literacy, library books, text books and towards their hall upgrade.

BOARD CRITERIA RE FUNDING TO SCHOOLS

In June 1999 the Community Board adopted criteria for assessing applications for funding from schools. The criteria are looked at below:

1. Does the proposal fit with the Community Board's strategic plan/vision?
Yes, the proposal fits with the Board's objective of "to promote a safe, healthy community".
2. Are there other sources of funding available?
Yes, there are and the school is actively pursuing these although the possibility of funding being available to fully cover the costs are unlikely.
3. What is the community benefit?
See comments under "The Project" above.
4. Can assistance be given through ways other than funding?
Yes, the potential for advocacy to Central Government exists.
5. Is it an isolated request from one school or likely to be a need from all schools?
The proposal is a pilot one and hence should not be seen as a precedent setting project. Furthermore, the proposal is located in a school in the heart of one of the most severely disadvantaged communities in the city.
6. Is the funding to help fund a core educational/school programme?
No, this is not a core programme of the school although the project will have a positive benefit on the learning behaviours and environment of the children.
7. Do the benefits of the activity pertain primarily to students and/or their immediate families?
To an extent the answer is yes, although wider community benefits can be expected (see the discussion under "The Project" above).
8. How does this funding request meet the school's objectives to the wider community?
Shirley Primary School has shown itself to be very aware of and responsive to its community. This project recognises that the school and its students live in a community of high stress and that this high stress has harmful effects upon students and their learning environment.

The following report was received from Counsellor Ingrid Stonhill:

COUNSELLING PILOT PROJECT

PRESBYTERIAN SUPPORT/SHIRLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL COUNSELLING PILOT PROJECT

As you are aware, a Shirley needs analysis was completed in January 2001. The heading 'It's a lot of little things happening that will make the difference' is very pertinent.

The findings of the needs analysis stated that people living in the research block 'are much more likely to have young children, to have one parent bringing up children alone, to be on an Income Support benefit, to be unemployed, to have a family income less than \$30,000, to have few or no recognised qualifications, to not have a car and to live in rental accommodation.'

The initiative to provide counselling to the children at the school, could not be successful unless it included parent/family participation. You have to be able to influence change on the whole family unit, to reinforce acceptable behaviour of the child, particularly in the school environment.

The needs analysis also identified that some agencies 'were concerned that some children were receiving insufficient care within their families. All believed that some parents needed greater support to parent. There was a wide range of opinions as to why parents needed this support; from stress and burnout of parents, to ignorance of parents...'

The counselling service offered through the school will not only assist the school with trying to break the cycle in being able to deliver an education to the identified children, it may also be able to assist other agencies working in the area to identify children/families at risk and help with early intervention.

Although it could be debated that offering this service through a school is not part of core education services, it certainly can be argued that it is an essential service for this particular area. In this instance the benefits outweigh the negatives.

Whilst the references of the needs analysis more than adequately identify why this service would be beneficial it also fits with the recommendations:

- '4. Develop partnerships between the Christchurch City Council and local schools such as Shirley and Birch Grove Primary for the development of community initiatives.'
- '8. Work with other local and statutory agencies to ensure that a range of support is offered that will meet the different cultural needs of families.'

It is not a large sum of money compared with the benefits. It more than adequately fits the strengthening communities funding criteria. I would urge you to support this project as we work towards giving the children of this community the access to an education they deserve.

Staff

Recommendation: This proposal meets the outcomes of the Strengthening Community Actions Plans (SCAP) funding. Therefore, the recommendation is that a \$5,000 grant from SCAP funds be allocated towards the Shirley Primary School counsellor project.

Chairperson's

- Recommendations:**
- 1. The Chairperson fully supports this proposal and recommends that a grant of \$5,000 be allocated from SCAP funding.
 - 2. That a report on the progress of this project be submitted to the Board at the end of Term 2 (4 July 2003).