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Getting Connected: New Ways to Attract the Young

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Take a new library, in a stunning location, built with the aim of attracting the young and the non-traditional user back to the library.



This is New Brighton Community Library, one of the Christchurch City Libraries network, built right on the foreshore at New Brighton and opened in July 1999.



Take a popular recreational activity, which first became a craze in the 1970s (I confess I do remember it!) and which is now enjoying a resurgence. What have you got? A beautiful new library which doubles as a

skateboarding venue! How considerate of the City Fathers and architects to design a building with so many inviting ramps and slopes, not to mention beautifully tiled areas, which are perfect for youth on wheels. Even more important for the skateboarding fraternity is that it is so PUBLIC! Skateboarders like to be visible – after all, what serious athlete does not enjoy being able to display their ability to an appreciative audience.

Added to this is the fact that the local park used as a skateboarding venue was in disrepair with broken, uneven concrete and was slightly hidden from view, making it a far less attractive option than the Pier Terminus building.

The problem: How to encourage young people to use the library but also to enable all users to have access to the building without feeling intimidated by groups of unkempt youth careering past them on unsteady missiles.

While we librarians hate to admit it, we have to confess there are often yawning gaps in our knowledge of youth culture; what's cool, what's not, what rocks and what sucks. The dilemma is finding a way to make the library an attractive place for the "young adult" group without treating them like some sort of foreign and vaguely frightening species. Young people should be encouraged to think of the library as a cool place, a place where they belong as much as anyone else. However, anybody using the library should be able to do so without risking life and limb.

The solution: Why not hold a skateboarding workshop close to the library but away from the main entrance? The skateboarders need not feel persecuted (but at the same time become aware of the needs of others), while other library users enjoy free access to the building, and library staff build further links with their community.

Background:

New Brighton Community Library opened in its new premises in the Pier Terminus Building, New Brighton on 29 July 1999. The style of the building together with its location, and the fact that the Library houses interactive recreational equipment has made this facility immensely popular with local youth.



Above: The "Pipeline": an area containing multimedia activities for young people

This is exciting for the Library, as one of our aims was to attract what can be perceived as "non-traditional users" back into the Library. Young people around the ages of 15-25 often fall into this category. However, succeeding with one aim has also created issues for all users; one of those issues being the popularity of the entrance area and library steps as a skateboarding venue.

While the Library did not want to discourage a segment of its community from using the facility, it also had the needs of all users in mind. Library staff were particularly aware that some elderly users were discouraged from using the front entrance because of the numbers and activity of the skateboarders. In one incident, a collision between a skateboarder and an elderly lady resulted in the woman suffering a blow to the shins. The proximity of the steps from the foyer area to the tiles and then to the road also create hazards for passing traffic and skateboarders. The steps have become a popular “leaping-off” point for boarders who then zoom across the road, with the potential for serious injury horrifyingly apparent.

In an effort to continue to build relationships with young people and also to enable all users to enter the library without hindrance, library staff decided to run a skateboarding workshop in the nearby amphitheatre at the southern end of the building. It was hoped that by doing this, the library would be able to communicate to our younger users that libraries could be fun and exciting places, but also, that respect for all library users was encouraged.

Process:

Mindful of the fact that the Christchurch City Council had included skateboarding events in its Summertimes programme, the Youth Librarian at New Brighton Library contacted Kate Rathburn at the Fendalton Service Centre, who had organised the summer youth *Big Sk8 Out* programme. Kate was able to advise on details such as contacting tutors, safety requirements and loan of equipment. Previous Christchurch City Council activities such as the *Big Sk8 Out* involved obtaining parental consent before young people could participate. Parent/caregiver Information/Declaration forms were provided covering supervision, safety, cancellations, health and medical conditions, as well as programme/workshop hours, what to bring and behaviour management. The form also included a disclaimer, which stated that although "every care was taken to ensure the safety and supervision of youth attending the workshop, the Christchurch City Council accepted no responsibility for youth travelling to and from the programme." Similar forms were also used by New Brighton Library and parental consent was obtained before anyone was able to participate.

Following advice from colleagues involved in organising previous events such as these, New Brighton Library contacted the St Johns Ambulance Association and arranged for two St Johns Ambulance officers to be present for the duration of the workshop.

Linwood Service Centre has portable skateboarding equipment which is hired to various community groups. As a unit of the Christchurch City Council, the Library was able to use this equipment at no charge. The equipment was in use by a local community group during the week prior to the planned workshop and this group delivered the equipment to New Brighton Library on completion of their hire. CanRoad were contacted to transport the equipment from the Library back to Linwood Service Centre on completion of the workshop at a charge of \$65.00 per hour.

Publicity material was displayed around New Brighton Library. The skateboarding workshop was aimed at the 10-14 year age group and anyone interested in taking part could collect consent forms from the Library.

The workshop was split into two sessions, one from 10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and one from 1.00 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. with sign-in sheets available for each session. Two tutors were employed for the day. The tutors indicated a preference for group numbers not to exceed nine per tutor, so by splitting the day into two sessions it was hoped that more young people would be involved.

Evaluation forms were handed out at the end of each session to gain feedback from those participating.

Evaluation:

Unfortunately, the weather had an effect on the day, with the second session being called off early due to rain. However, some interesting feedback was received.

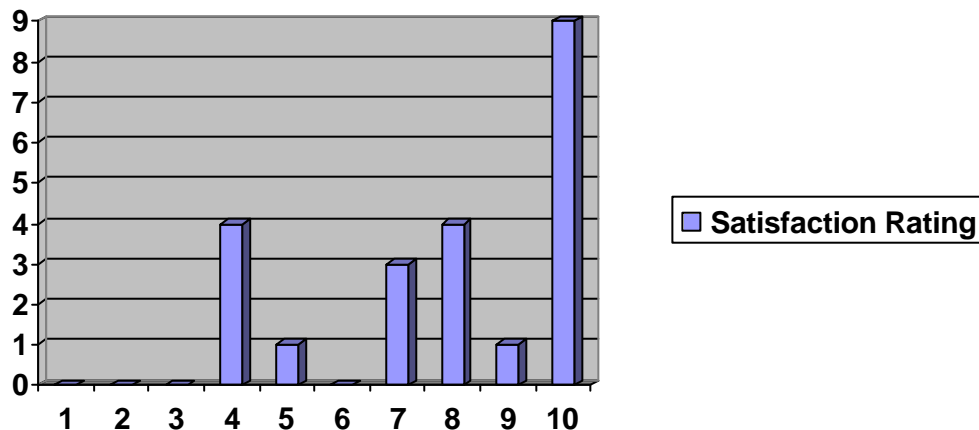
In total we received 17 signed consent forms and 19 completed evaluations. We are certain that more than 19 took part in the workshop, though it was difficult to monitor those coming and going. Although we had aimed the workshop at those aged between 10 and 14, there was considerable interest from older groups, particularly those who happened to pass by on the day and Also, some of those attending the morning session stayed to take part in the afternoon session as well.

Levels of Experience: Of all the skaters participating in the workshop, 3 regarded themselves as "experienced" skaters, another three as "in-between" and the rest as "beginners".

Ages: Ages of participants ranged between 8 and 26, with most being 14 (six people) or 12 (three people).

Length of Workshop: Most participants were happy with the length of the workshop, though some wanted a longer time (one suggestion was 9am - 3pm).

Level of Satisfaction: When asked to rate their satisfaction with the workshop from 1-10 (with 1 being not satisfied and 10 very satisfied), responses were:



When asked how we could improve the workshop, we received these comments:

- keep practising
- have bigger ramps, more rails, grind boxes and a halfpipe (two comments like this)
- have pro-skaters
- have a workshop every weekend
- keep it permanent (mentioned twice)
- more and different kinds of ramp, more concrete area, more tutors
- more ramps, bigger area

Equipment: As most participants were "beginners", they were generally satisfied with the equipment provided. However, of the "experienced" skaters, we received comments wanting more transitions, more equipment and more "pro-skaters" as demonstrators.

Venue: Participants were asked whether they would prefer workshops such as this to be held in the amphitheatre next to the library with portable equipment, or at another local venue. Comments received include:

- anywhere, so long as the cement is smooth
- either (mentioned twice)
- at Thompson Park with this equipment
- skate park
- amphitheatre
- would like it (the workshop) to be permanent
- amphitheatre
- library
- permanent park in New Brighton
- one or the other
- in a permanent place
- here, with portable equipment (mentioned twice)

Interest in Attending Further Workshops: 17 workshop participants said they would be interested in attending other such workshops.

Other Activities of Interest: Participants were asked about other activities they would be interested in attending. Responses included:

- surfing, skateboarding, snowboarding
- bodyboarding, BMX
- parties, skate demos
- bodyboarding, surfing
- skating (mentioned twice)
- ramp skate, jump ramps
- surfing, bodyboarding, snowboarding
- roller-blading
- bodyboarding, surfing, skating, snowboarding, rugby
- watching competitions, lessons

Activities the Library Should offer: When asked what the Library should offer in the way of activities, responses included:

- build a reef out the front
- bodyboarding, surfing
- more skateboarding movies
- skateboarding
- skating
- surfing

Use of the Library: Participants were also asked what they used the Library for at present. Responses included:

- watching skating and surfing videos
- borrowing books, music, meeting friends, listening to music
- borrowing mags
- borrowing books
- using playstations, homework
- using playstations
- skating and watching videos
- videos, homework, cooling down after skating
- videos
- meeting friends
- homework
- watching skating videos
- school projects
- homework, books, skating on steps
- skating
- mags, books, homework

Costs for the Workshop:

New Brighton Library arranged the workshop, which included organising two tutors to be present all day, pick up, delivery and storage of equipment, and presence of two St John Ambulance officers. Costs involved were:

Tutors	two people at \$15.00 per hour for six hours each	\$180.00
Pick Up and Delivery of equipment	two men at \$65.00 per hour each two hours total	\$260.00
Hire of Equipment		no charge
St Johns Ambulance	donation	<u>\$ 80.00</u>
Total costs for Workshop		<u>\$520.00</u>

The donation to St John Ambulance was paid by the New Brighton Project, so total costs incurred by the Library were \$440.00

This compares well with other events held regularly by the Library. For example:

Professional Storytelling	- \$100 - \$250 per hour
Music & Movements session for preschoolers	- \$ 70 - (half hour)
Face-painting	- \$100 - (one hour)

General:

Library staff, workshop tutors and participants all had positive responses to the workshop. Although part of the day was lost due to bad weather, the workshop created good feeling between library staff and young skaters (who may or may not be users of the library). We received feedback, both formal and informal, which suggested that everybody felt such a workshop was a good idea and one that they would like to see continuing. One participant commented that he was really pleased that the library was holding such a workshop and was also surprised that they would as he "didn't think the Library liked us". It was obvious that holding a workshop such as this helped bridge the gap between the Library this segment of its community.

While the workshop was being held, there were no skateboarders outside the Library so all Library customers could access the building without feeling intimidated by skaters.

The day after the workshop, young people who asked for the equipment to be set up again for their use approached staff. Unfortunately, this was not possible, as the equipment did not belong to the Library and the presence of St John's Ambulance officers or supervising staff could not be offered. However, it was pleasing to see young people who are usually uncomfortable about approaching staff, feeling comfortable enough to enquire about facilities. Staff also noticed that older skaters were offering advice to younger skaters and were even suggesting to young skateboarders to move away from the area directly outside the Library entrance.

Recommendation:

The Library felt this workshop had been immensely successful. It provided local skateboarders with a venue as well as professional tutors to demonstrate and offer advice. It also meant that skateboarders were not using the Library entrance as a venue and therefore, other customers were not inhibited in using the library.

The workshop also contributed to a positive relationship with local community groups, such as the New Brighton Project, who donated \$80.00 to the St John Ambulance Association, covering their attendance that day.

While the workshop took up some staff time as far as organisation was concerned, this was mainly because it was a "first" and arrangements, requirements etc. were new to library staff. Subsequent workshops would not require as much time.

Costs involved were comparable with other Library events and were not considered prohibitive.

We felt that the effect of organising and holding a workshop such as this were overwhelmingly positive. Some people asked if this was the sort of thing libraries should do. We felt as a community place, it was important to be in touch with the needs and desires of our community. Libraries struggle more and more today with the problem of remaining relevant to the communities that they serve. To counter this, they are seen more and more as important social places for everyone. We felt organising an activity like this was completely valid, given the needs of our particular community and was also a simple solution to the dilemma apparent in trying to encourage access to our building to all groups in the area. Since the workshop, we have continued with our aim of attracting the young by staging several events in this year's *TILT Youth Festival* (a citywide festival focusing on the 14-18 age group), and have planned chat groups with local young people. A second skateboarding workshop is also being planned

Reaction from the participants could be summed up in one comment from a young man surprised but pleased to see the Library organising an activity like this who said: “We didn’t think the Library liked us”. Library staff know that libraries, as institutions, can convey a rather stiff, rule-bound image and despite some of our best efforts, the image, to a large extent, remains. Yet we are still surprised to hear comments such as this from young people. Imagine the paradox apparent to a young person in a building which is purposely designed to have the “WOW” factor, a place which sets out to attract them with multi-media, with technology and up-to-the-minute fittings, but which also sets out to deter those same young people from taking part in their favourite activity.

In the end, everybody wants to be liked – this is a fundamental desire in all of us. The Library wants the community it serves to appreciate it and use it. Is it too difficult to take a chance once in a while? Do something a little “unlibrary-ish” and show the community that you do like them, really.