

# Intergenerational Forum at Mercy Spirituality Centre, Epsom

11 May 2017

For the third year, the Mercy Spirituality Centre has organised an annual Intergenerational Forum.

Four tables were set up with a group made up of students, senior adults and a facilitator who was there to give everyone a chance to contribute to the discussions. The participants had two rounds at one table and then joined another table with different people and different topics.

This way, each participant discussed four different topics which were chosen at the beginning of the event.

The manager of the Centre opened the event with a Maori welcome and acknowledged the interest of the participants with the youngest being 15 and the oldest 91 years old.

All participants had been asked when registering for the event to suggest a topic for discussion.

It was not easy for the organisers to choose the topics out of the many received.

The topics ranged from the environment and mental health to democracy and a bi-cultural society.

Thanks to the facilitators, the main comments from the discussion groups and their suggestions for positive action were noted.

Some of the bullet points and results of the discussions:

1. Of "It takes a village/community to raise a child" – how can we prevent communities from breaking down"?  
*Present Situation:* housing problems (affordability, need to move frequently), immigration, social media instead of getting involved in the community  
*Suggestions:* "buddy centre", encouraging more involvement of children, youth and older people, community BBQs
2. Anxiety / Depression /Mental Health  
*Present Situation:* depressing news/info concentrating on sickness and violence, fictional programmes too negative and violent, more

work/stress, more loneliness

*Suggestions:* recognise peer pressure – and awareness of support available

3. Democracy / Voter Participation

*Present Situation:* lack of knowledge about how Local/National Government or Councils work, not aware of the impact of elections (elections not taken seriously)

*Suggestion:* compulsory Political Science education by unbiased teachers, presentation of information in an interesting way, encourage all ages to contact Local Boards / Council. Movies/ theatre/ music/ drama/ plays about important politicians who managed to bring positive changes for the people. Create awareness about politics on TV (not just political channels) and in churches/faith communities – in an unbiased way!!

4. Te Reo Maori – compulsory at school?

*Present Situation:* most schools have Te Reo and haka teaching as electives – subjects are often not taken seriously (not even by the teachers), “Maori Language Week” helps but impact is limited

*Pro:* Recognition of Treaty of Waitangi, understanding of language and tikanga is paramount for accepting and respecting Maori, important to know one’s roots

*Contra:* “all Maori speak English anyway”, Te Reo only spoken in NZ, no need for bilingualism to show bi-culturalism

*Suggestion:* Te Reo and Tikanga Maori should be taught at all schools, encouraging people in NZ to learn Te Reo and Tikanga. Schools should advocate for Maori, all age groups should be taught the basics, more general promotion of “Maori Language Week”

Idea: Te Reo Maori as “Lingua Franca” for the Pacific? – learning Te Reo helps when learning other Polynesian languages...

5. Environment – pollution in NZ rivers/waterways – the Government’s responsibility?

*Present Situation:* “disheartening to see fellow student littering”, some teachers/principals remind students weekly to have respect for the environment. New Zealanders are viewed positively worldwide – danger of getting complacent. More pre-packaged goods, packages are more solid, people are tempted to fill the big bins. Today rubbish bins have lids (was not the case in the past – dogs made mess), “cleanliness begins at

home”

*Suggestion:* encourage the young to avoid producing rubbish, need to change farming culture, join clean-up groups, sewage and manufacturing need improvement, reuse oil by-products, find a balance between productivity/jobs/industry/environment/saving/conserving, no wasting water, recycle, “water will be the gold of the future – we need to look after it!”. Need tougher laws and charge people who litter  
clean environment is everybody’s responsibility!

One of the students at the Intergenerational Forum wrote in his evaluation form: “It was amazing to talk to different people and hear about another perspective or a topic in order to empathise with other generations”. Other participants shared this view. One of the adults wrote: “What a privilege to be involved!”.

While the groups were discussing with open doors, a passer-by commented as an external observer: “The variety in the age-groups, cultural groups and gender-mix impressed me. I also noticed the eagerness and willingness to participate in many. Forums like this are quite valuable in building a sense of community among the cross-section of society and facilitate dialogue between various groups. Congratulations on a successful enterprise!”

*Beate Matthies*  
*Manager*

