

The impact of church ministries on a surrounding community

A report by John McNeil
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Introduction

In June 2006, the then Mayor of Christchurch, Garry Moore, took the unusual step of appearing at all three Sunday services of Spreydon Baptist Church to thank church members for their contribution to the social service fabric of the city.¹

“When I look at the activists of our city, those in social justice are being pumped out of this parish, and you should be really proud of yourselves,” Mr Moore said. “What people appreciate so much is that you hold the hands of those who need your help, and you give them love without qualification, and that’s what Christ expects of us.”

Spreydon Baptist has gained a pre-eminent reputation among New Zealand churches for its wide range of community ministries. In mid-2009, 24 ministries birthed by church members were providing 40 services. A survey of 18 ministries showed they employed 266 staff, with a further 775 volunteers, had annual expenditure in excess of \$11 million, of which 75 per cent came from government sources, and come into contact with an estimated 2,400 people weekly.

The ministries are as diverse as a community preschool, work among at-risk children, a budgeting service that provides loans at no interest, and the largest provider of mental health services in Christchurch outside the hospital system.

The aim of this paper is to briefly examine to what extent these ministries impact the surrounding community and to identify principles that can be applied in other contexts.

History and church ethos

Spreydon Baptist Church had its beginnings when Thomas Jefcoate, a young married farm labourer from England, started a church on the outskirts of the fledgling city of Christchurch in 1865. The first services were held in a sod house. Seventeen years later a larger building was opened on Lincoln Road, and in 1949 the church merged with another congregation that had been established in nearby Lyttelton Street.

In December 1968, Murray Robertson - who had recently graduated from a Presbyterian theological college in Edinburgh - and his wife Marj were invited to take over the pastorate of the now-struggling congregation.

During the 1970s, a foundation was laid of Biblical preaching, neighbourhood evangelism and a growing commitment to global mission. In the mid 70s, the church was completely restructured around small groups. Rapid growth followed, and a new building, the present auditorium, was constructed.²

¹ John McNeil, "Christchurch Mayor Says Thanks To Church For Services To City", *Challenge Weekly*, 3 July 2006.

² http://www.spreydon.org.nz/index.cfm/Information_Centre/History_of_Spreydon

Another new building was erected during the 1990s, this time a multi-purpose building reflecting the growth in mid-week community ministries. In the 2000s, a multi-service approach developed, and there are now five services on a Sunday - one of these a Korean congregation - and one on Tuesday nights.

In February 2009, Murray and Marj Robertson handed over leadership of the church, having celebrated 40 years of ministry in the only church Murray had pastored.

Spreydon is built on the models of incarnation and service to the poor. Its website³ says: *“At Spreydon our [vision](#) is to be a redemptive community, sharing the love of Christ in the world by word, sign and deed so that unbelieving people become lifelong followers of Jesus Christ.*

“We are a redemptive community in that we seek to be a place where the broken can find wholeness, the poor can find empowerment, the sick can find healing, the needy can find support, the young can find hope and the lost can find salvation.”

The push towards community ministries at Spreydon began in the mid-1980s, at a time when attendance had plateaued and the church was asking questions of itself. As a consequence, the church gave its people permission to “dream dreams”, and supported them in what they felt God was calling them to do.

This movement out from within the four walls and into the community has since been taken up by many other churches, with the result that churches are more frequently open throughout the week, and almost every church renovation in New Zealand now includes a café area to provide a social hub. “The old church was institutional,” says Murray Robertson. “You went at 11 o’clock on Sunday morning, and after an hour you went home again. Increasingly, church is now a place where you hang out.”⁴

Many ministries are now operated through specially set up trusts, which frequently work in partnership with local bodies and government departments. For instance, in Christchurch in 2006, 70 or 80 church groups were doing major work in partnership with the city council and many dozens more were thought to be involved in smaller projects. That year the council gave out \$8.2 million to fund community organisations.⁵

Second-generational leadership

As some of the older ministries are moving on from the original visionaries to second-generational leadership, a consistent change is occurring, from the manager being the main visionary to it being carried by both the manager and trustees. In such cases, the trustees are having to step up to guard the vision of the ministry on behalf of the church, and to ensure the ministry remains responsive to the move of the Holy Spirit and community need. Some ministries are coming to the end of their season, and are closing.

Additionally, as the church is making the journey from iconic to replicative, a greater emphasis is being placed on collaboration, with departments in the church and ministries both being encouraged to break away from being “individual silos” to look at how they might work together more effectively.

³ http://www.spreydon.org.nz/index.cfm/information_centre/about_us

⁴ John McNeil, “The State of the Church in New Zealand”, *Challenge Weekly*, December 2006.

⁵ John McNeil, “Council and Churches getting the job done,” *Challenge Weekly*, 24 May, 2006.

Impact on community

As no comprehensive survey has been carried out by Spreydon Baptist Church, it is impossible to give a definitive answer to the question, “what has been the total impact of these ministries on the community?”

However, individual ministries – particularly those carried out under trusts specifically set up for the purpose or by those registered with the NZ Charities Commission – can provide some answers.

Three will be examined in brief case studies:

- a) Caroline Reid Charitable Foundation
- b) 24/7 Youth
- c) Kingdom Resources

a) Caroline Reid Charitable Foundation

The Caroline Reid Charitable Foundation was established in 2004 with the purpose of providing support for children and adolescents aged 7-15 years living in an environment where the mental illness of a parent is affecting their development and impairing the whole family’s quality of life.

The Foundation meets a significant community health need not targeted by other services. “Until the Caroline Reid Foundation was developed, there was no service available for these children.”⁶ Many of the children are referred by government agencies or ngo’s.

In 2008, 40 children and 29 families across Christchurch (not just in the Spreydon area) were supported by “our high quality staff, most of whom have been journeying with our children and families for the last four years.”⁷

The Foundation provides recreation programmes, food parcels, individual, group and phone support, it also advocates on their behalf, visits them and produces a magazine especially designed for their needs. In 2008, it did this with a budget of \$171,000, of which \$40,000 came from the Canterbury District Health Board, and the bulk of the remainder from local bodies and philanthropic trusts. The Foundation has five part-time staff plus a team of 12-15 volunteer workers.

A Christian ethos underpins the work of the Foundation. “Foundation policy acknowledges that Christian belief and practice is central in the work of the Foundation. However, staff help children on the basis of their need, not because of their spiritual interests, outlook or affiliation. The values contained in this policy, such as belief in the value of each person, respect, compassion and care, are clearly evident in the operations of the Foundation.”⁸

Katrina Beach, in a letter supporting the Foundation, wrote:

⁶ Letter from Katrina Falconer Beach, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Child and Family Speciality Service, Canterbury DHB, 17 January 2007

⁷ Prue Parsons, “*Strengthening Families, Building Communities*”, 2009 presentation by the Caroline Reid Charitable Foundation

⁸ Charles Chalmers, *Evaluation Report, Caroline Reid Foundation*, Edudev Services, (Date????????)

“With the family that I referred to the Foundation, they have worked miracles. ...regular contact has led to a very high level of trust which I wouldn't have thought possible for this mother.

“Before the boy (12 years) was involved with the Foundation, he had only gone out on the rarest of occasions. He spent 95% of his free time in his room playing Playstation. He had no confidence in himself and was completely isolated socially. Now he goes out with the Foundation for their activity days, he's been on overnight camps and tried a huge number of activities that he has never experienced before...

“...these kind of things would have been unheard of if he hadn't been able to build up his ability to do things with other people, as he has with the Foundation.”⁹

A parent wrote to the Foundation: *“...Liam now has no problems at school and the Caroline Reid Foundation is a large part of that. He no longer feels sad inside. He can relate to others his age and he has friends at school. ... I know that I too manage better as a parent with a mental illness since I have had the Caroline Reid Foundation in my life.”¹⁰*

In March 2008, the Foundation was presented with a Christchurch City Council Civic Award for its work.

b) 24/7 Youth

24-7 YouthWork is a fresh approach to church-based youth work developed by Spreydon Baptist Church over the past decade that is now finding its way into other churches in New Zealand. Centred on putting youth workers into high schools, it is a trust relationship between a local school and a local church in the context of the local community working together.¹¹

The website says 24-7 YouthWork provides accessible holistic, wrap-around support to all young people in the area. Locally, 24-7 YouthWork is independent and supported by a collaborative network.

The concept had its beginnings as the leadership team of Spreydon Youth Community (SYC) developed an increasing concern for the wider community, along with substantial growth in the number of volunteers and youth people they worked with. An SYC Trust was started in 1997 to provide a more effective support structure.

During the same period, a relationship formed with local high schools as leaders from SYC became involved as teaching staff and volunteers. By 2000, 24/7 YouthWork was putting two part-time paid youth workers into Riccarton High School, with five volunteers working with Cashmere High and Hillmorton High. The scheme was resourced by the church, community funding and by contributions from Riccarton.

The success of 24/7 has attracted interest from all over New Zealand. Serious effort is now being invested by SYC to help other churches establish work in their own schools and communities. As of September 2009, there were 70 youth workers in 31 schools nationwide, provided by 32 churches and agencies from six denominations.

⁹ Katrina Beach, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Prue Parsons, *op cit.*

¹¹ <http://24-7youthwork.org.nz>

The concept is based on building trust in five key areas in which youth workers partner with the school: Developing school spirit; fostering healthy relationships in the school; supporting the school, by developing a role between the staff and students; developing leadership; and integration into out-of-school activities.

24/7 Youth workers are contracted to spend 10 paid hours a week in their school, and 10 volunteer hours with their church youth community. A sample school week might include hanging out with young people at lunchtime, attending a student council meeting or running a sports team practice after school. Examples of “real life action” have also included providing security at school balls, running a lunch-time competition, helping with student fund raising, taking students to the doctor, and even confronting a trespassing drug dealer. One youth worker was asked for advice on improving the layout of the school. Some were invited to run teacher-only days on how staff could connect better to the students.

In 2003, SYC contracted an independent researcher to evaluate its overall organisation and service provision, including 24-7 YouthWork.¹² The researcher conducted 91 face-to-face interviews with SYC leaders, young people and stakeholders, including 10 staff members at 24-7 YW schools.

Feedback about 24-7 YW was overwhelmingly positive. 24-7 YouthWork was seen as delivering considerable benefit for schools and excellent value for money. Staff reported how youth workers reduced teacher loads in regard to sports and other extracurricular activity as well as tutoring and support for students with special needs. They were seen as powerful role models and mentors who were liked and respected by students.

Youth workers were frequently used to support socially isolated students and help them establish relational networks. They were also valued for the positive impact they had on school spirit. Schools also endorsed youth workers leadership development work.

At one school, “The Principal commented that he could not contemplate the school without its 24-7 youth workers, and would expand the number ... if funding allowed this. He saw the great value of the programme as being the modelling of caring, tolerance, respect and ‘old fashioned morals’ by the youth workers and the way they show young people that they are happy living like that and their lives are meaningful.”

In 2005, as part of his studies at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, an SYC staff member surveyed three secondary schools where 24-7 YouthWork was operating.¹³ Three staff members in each school were interviewed, including the principal or another senior management person. In addition, 44 staff chosen at random completed a written questionnaire.

The survey found that “the youth workers are very well respected ... for who they are and what they do.” Schools commonly identified role modelling, mentoring, leadership development, promoting good decision making and being ‘in between’ people as key contributions.

¹² Sarah Wylie, (need title and date of report)

¹³ Luke Gardiner, *What are commonly held attitudes towards youth workers and youth work programs?*, A case study of stakeholders involved the Spreydon Youth Community, 24/7, high schools youth work program, CPIT, 2005.

While SYC as an organisation was highly valued; the concept of in-school youth workers was even more highly appreciated. As one principal commented “If Spreydon Youth Community youth workers pulled out ... I would be looking to find other workers of similar ilk to come into the school and do the sorts of things that these people do because I implicitly believe that it is incredibly important.”

*“They are living treasures – fantastic young people,” says Riccarton High School Principal Gary Coburn, who believes they contribute significantly towards a positive school culture and help provide a safe emotional environment. The youth workers’ independence allows both staff and students to confide in them.*¹⁴

The CPIT report found that the role and value of the 24/7 youth workers could be categorised into eight main areas: role modelling; mentoring; support of teachers and staff; leadership development; potential issues of Christian influence; how the school deals with these issues; promoting good decision making; and expectations surrounding qualifications of youth workers.

Comments from many of the stakeholders showed that the 24/7 youth workers have an influence relationship with young people they are working with.

“Their positive outlook, their sheer decency, their Christianity and the values that underlie that, they give for students an example, an image of decency, of good, and that’s the crucial thing. Because some of those kids don’t necessarily get that sort of role model amongst their peers or in their families. To me, that’s the essence of what the youth workers contribute to the school...” –AG

c) Kingdom Resources

Kingdom Resources is a service that provides budget advice, interest-free loans and banking help, along with careers and employment advice.

The ministry was established in 1988 when Christchurch accountant and pastor Howard Taylor dreamed of a church-based “bank” that would borrow surplus funds from people within the church and then make interest-free loans to people who were in debt. He saw far too many people caught in poverty because of poor money management and high interest-rates on hire purchases and credit cards.

The organisation now has 12 paid staff and around 160 volunteers, the majority of the latter helping as budget advisors. Its 2009 budget was \$590,000. Since 1988, up to 2600 adults and children per year have benefited from KR.

At its website, KR says its motivation is “Christianity with its sleeves rolled up. But our help is available for all people regardless of beliefs who are just seeking advice or going through a rough time.”¹⁵

KR’s general manager, John Exton, is adamant the survival and success of the organisation is deeply rooted in its beginnings. “I believe the dream to set up KR came from God – if it

¹⁴ “Living treasures support youth at Riccarton High School”, *NorWest News*, Sept 8, 2004, p12.

¹⁵ <http://www.kingdomresources.org.nz/1/index.php>

didn't I don't believe it would still be here today. Many investors see it not as their money but as God's money being used, and many volunteers see themselves serving God rather than the organisation. They have a commitment on a higher and deeper level." Another reason for KR's success, he suggests, is the personal relationship between clients and advisors. Volunteers see the fruits of their labour, which strengthens individuals, families, communities and society.¹⁶

Clients come from throughout the city and the surrounding rural area. Some are referred by the government service Work and Income, others come through church contacts or by self-referral after reading of KR in news and magazine articles. A survey carried out by Sarah Wylie in 2005 showed that the largest proportion of clients are aged 45-54 years, followed by 35-44 years.¹⁷

Among the strengths of KR identified by respondents to Sarah Wylie's survey were: the strong team spirit; the Christian way of doing things; the high skill level, passion and commitment of the staff; and sound management.

"In addressing employment needs, Kingdom Resources does appear to impact on client's lives in other ways, addressing social isolation for many clients, and developing social skills", Wylie wrote. "For a number of clients, the intervention from KRL appears to positively impact on mental health and depression, lifting clients and moving them forwards.

"There also appears to be a strong ripple effect from the courses and the one-to-one employment coaching, with many clients passing on their job search knowledge to family and friends, assisting others to find appropriate employment."

One of the tutors said:

"It's not the stats – it's about how far they have moved on as individuals – their self esteem, their confidence, whether they make eye contact, their self presentation... their chattiness and how they relate to each other ... its seeing them blossom and want to move on..."

And a staff member noted: *"I see people go from having no confidence, no direction, to having a purpose in life and self esteem – having the confidence to put their CV out there."*

One funder referred to KRL as a safe place for people to look critically at themselves and see what they are good at and what they need to build on to be attractive to employers.

The courses were seen to greatly enhance client self esteem and confidence and provided a vehicle for friendship and social interaction, something which several respondents noted was lacking for many clients who have experienced long term unemployment.

¹⁶ Harriet Jackson, "Money for Nothing?", *Evidence*, Winter 2003, p44, Maxim Institute.

¹⁷ Sarah Wylie, "Evaluation of the Employment Services of Kingdom Resources Limited, a Charitable Company", July 2005.

Principles identified

Because each ministry at Spreydon Baptist has a different focus and a different “clientele”, each operates according to its own specific guidelines. In many cases, these guidelines also have to take into account regulations and best-practice models laid down by their funding agencies. However, certain common principles can be identified.

Christian foundation

A desire to follow Christ and serve him in the community is the prime motivating factor for all ministries. This foundational motivation provides stimulation in the beginning days of the ministry, and the strength for people to continue through the inevitable difficult times that occur.

Vision

All ministries originated from a vision/dream by congregation members of Spreydon Baptist Church. It is a “bottom up” as opposed to a “top down” approach. Because of this, the ministries are indigenous to the local area.

Control

While the church supports the individuals and the ministry, it has never taken control of any of them.

Support

Because of the church connections, ministry leaders have access to advice and support of both church pastoral staff and others within the congregation with expertise in their fields. While at times in the past some ministries have been left “to do their own thing” a little too much – with the consequent dangers of too little accountability and too little support – this is being addressed by the current leadership of Spreydon.

De-institutionalisation

It is a common practice for community ministries elsewhere to become institutionalised. For example, the Methodist, Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian Support ministries are institutions that operate independently and have little connection with local congregations. Spreydon ministries have resisted this tendency.

Local identity and leadership

While many of the ministries have “clients” beyond the Spreydon area, nonetheless Spreydon remains the hub. Because those heading the ministries generally live in the district, they understand the needs and culture of the local community. One of the mottos of 24/7 YouthWork is “being local, staying committed”.

“This makes us more accessible, more sustainable and more adapted to the local context. Our people live in the local community. This allows a natural continuity of relationship and opens doors to different facets of wider community life. Young people will meet our youth workers not just at school but at the supermarket, the DVD store and the sports club.”¹⁸

Commitment

Generally, the number of paid staff is far outweighed by volunteers in most ministries. These

¹⁸ <http://24-7youthwork.org.nz/node/127>

volunteers have a passion for their ministry and put in long hours.

Appendix 1

Community services currently provided by members of Spreydon Baptist Church¹⁹:

- Caroline Reid Charitable Foundation
- Christmas Grotto
- Chrysalis Seed Trust
- Cobham Village
- Community Christian Fellowship
- Community Preschool
- Community Playgym for pre-schoolers
- Cross Over Trust
- Divorce Care
- Healing Journey
- Keep Active
- Kingdom Resources Trust
- Manaakitangi Clubs
- Mercy Basket
- New Harvest Trust
- New Horizons
- Pre-School Community Playgroup
- Pre-School Music and Movement
- Project Esther
- Single Mums' Support Service
- Sarona Community Trust
- SHARP
- Spreydon English Language Centre
- Spreydon Youth Community Trust
- STARS
- Stepping Stone Trust

¹⁹ Information on those underlined can be found at the website,
http://www.spreydon.org.nz/index.cfm/Community_Services