

# just actions

Many young people  
don't have reliable role  
models and secure homes



Caring for people, transforming lives,  
reforming society by God's power



**'The single most critical source of the support adolescents must have is the existence of stable caring relationships with adults.'** Graeme Withers and Margaret Batten

Home is a place where a young person belongs in a web of relationships. But these relationships are often being abused or neglected in a number of ways in New Zealand homes: from physical and sexual violence, to the complete absence of parents and/or parental figures (see the 2007 research figures of NZ secondary school students, go to [www.youth2000.ac.nz/publications/reports-1142.htm](http://www.youth2000.ac.nz/publications/reports-1142.htm)).

The local church has the potential to be a cornerstone of the community in modelling and empowering healthy family relations. Not only can this take place through youth and children's programmes, but possibly most profoundly through the everyday interactions between young people and adults who are not necessarily part of the same family unit (Lloyd Martin, *The Invisible Table*, pg 117).

For many young people, churches may be the only place that they have the opportunity to participate in healthy inter-generational relationships.

A key reason for the diminishment of healthy youth-adult relationships could be our increasing focus on the individual, where we no longer consider the needs of others in a deep enough way. Responsibilities are undermined in favour of 'freedom'—what society tells us is the ultimate goal of any individual. It also could be the failure of local society and communities in providing meaningful norms for family relations, where we have to 'be told' by Government-funded advertisements that domestic violence is wrong and that 'It's ok to ask for help', for example.

**Re-thinking the stakes:** get together and discuss

- 1 How do you talk *about* young people?
- 2 Do you expect young people to have something to contribute to you and your community? Are young people given meaningful and responsible roles in your home, workplace, corps?
- 3 What strengths could we discover in our interactions with other cultures within our communities in the development of healthy families that will grow our young people?

**Re-actions:** what can we do?

- 1 Make a point of talking to the young people you encounter. Or better yet, don't: see them as *persons*, not projects. Young people appreciate genuine conversation and interaction without agendas.
- 2 Take youth workers and youth group leaders seriously. The amount of resources and respect given to this area of ministry and development work in comparison to others is indicative of how we see and value young people in our churches and society.
- 3 Take time to discuss with your faith community the role of young people in the family. Work towards building a community together where you can encourage and hold each other accountable in the growing of healthy family relationships.

**Resources for re-formative worship:** take a fresh look

- 1 Lloyd Martin's book *The Invisible Table: Perspectives on Youth and Youthwork in New Zealand* is a brilliant and accessible invitation into a more just approach to engaging with young people.
- 2 Read the book of Colossians and pay attention to how Paul goes from outlining the wonder of Christ and the Gospel (1:15-23) and how this flows through into specific household relations in the Greco-Roman world (3:18-4:1). What would it look like for us to try to do theology like this today? How does Christ inform how we relate to young people and families in New Zealand?