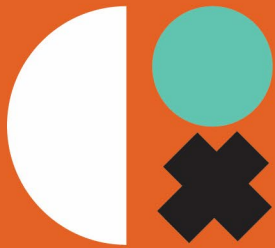



National **YOUTH OUTREACH** survey



National Findings Report

Published 2026



*Undertaken by the Shining Lights Trust
on behalf of the gathering of national Christian youth
ministry leaders.*



Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a late-2025 New Zealand Youth Ministry Survey — one of the most comprehensive national snapshots of church-based youth ministry outreach activity undertaken in New Zealand. Drawing on data from 286 youth groups, the survey covers five focus areas: scale and reach, outreach readiness, school presence, leader connection, and shared events.

Key findings at a glance:

- An estimated 1,200 youth groups are active nationally, engaging approximately 33,000 young people in the Year 7–13 age group — roughly 1 in 14 students.
- 77% of youth groups do not run any intentional outreach equipping for young people. 8% equip at a low level, with only 15% equipping at a higher level — three or more sessions per year — supporting genuine application in practice.
- 17% of schools with Year 9–13 students have an identified Christian group — but 51% of youth leaders are unaware of a group in their area. The significance lies in the understanding that school groups most often come about through the vision casting and support of a youth leader or similar adult. Of greater concern, outreach was an intentional focus for only 22% of the groups that do exist. Outreach as a shared focus remains the exception rather than the norm.
- 45% of youth leaders are not connected to any youth leader gathering. Among those connected within a geographic group, only 42% meet six or more times annually, giving their collective efforts genuine momentum. This represents only around 20% of all youth leaders.
- 85% of youth groups participate in combined events, but only 16% of those events are gospel-outreach focused.

► *The data points to a sector with genuine strength in scale and relational culture — and a significant opportunity in the areas of outreach equipping, school presence, and leader unity for mission.*

Written by Michael Taylor and Dave Mann, Shining Lights Trust.

Data visualisation and charts by Michael Taylor, design and layout by Beau Spicer (Spicer.design).

Colour palette and design elements partially adapted from a SlidesCarnival.com template.



Introductory note — Dave Mann, Director, Shining Lights Trust

There is a uniqueness to this study.

The national Christian youth leaders behind this study have acknowledged together that Christian youth ministry has declined significantly over the past 25 years. As a result, many young New Zealanders are being given no reasonable opportunity to hear about Jesus — whether through a conversation with or invitation from a friend. These leaders want to see that changed. This study seeks to establish a starting measure, revealing the reality of our combined gospel focus.

A common focus of much youth research in recent decades has been on cultural trends and the psyche of young people — perhaps in consideration of their journeys toward faith. Much investment in youth work has been made with awareness of the social, emotional and behavioural challenges young people face. These studies have value and can help us better understand culture and refine our approaches.

This study is different. Instead of measuring how young people think and feel, this study is about measuring what we do.

To illustrate: if a study of the thinking process of young people who come to faith found that very few had responded as the result of an outreach event at which the gospel was preached, we might conclude that gospel-preaching events are no longer relevant for today's youth. What could be missed is the possibility that we are simply not running very many gospel-preaching events.

Our thanks go to the denominational youth representatives and national youth outreach organisation leaders who are behind this study, some of whom also assisted with data collection.

Let's now consider: when it comes to what is most obvious and simple for outreach — how are we doing?



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1: Overview and Methodology

1.1 The Mandate.....	5
1.2 Who is behind this Study	5
1.3 Data Sources	6
1.4 Geographic Distribution	6
1.5 Data Integrity and Limitations	7

Section 2: Scale and Reach

2.1 Youth Leaders — Employment.....	8
2.2 Youth Leaders — Experience.....	9
2.3 Youth Groups — National Estimate.....	10
2.4 Youth Group Size	11
2.5 Young People Nationally	12
2.6 Intermediate Age Ministry (Years 7–9).....	12
2.7 Young Adults Ministry (Ages 18–25).....	14

Section 3: Outreach Readiness

3.1 Overview	15
3.2 Variation by Context	17
3.3 Evidence That Outreach Equipping Matters.....	18

Section 4 School Presence

4.1 Overview	19
4.2 How Often Do Groups Meet?	19
4.3 What Do School Groups Do?	20
4.4 Youth Leader Awareness of School Groups	20

Section 5: Leader Connection

5.1 Types of Youth Leader Gatherings.....	22
5.2 Connection Rates	22
5.3 Meeting Frequency	23
5.4 Connection Frequency and Shared Mission.....	23

Section 6: Shared Events

6.1 Participation in Combined Events.....	25
6.2 Frequency of Combined Events	25
6.3 Types of Combined Events.....	26

Section 7: Reflections

7.1 Summary of Key Findings.....	27
7.2 Turning Insight into Action	28





SECTION 1

Overview & Methodology

1.1 The Mandate

This survey was facilitated by the Shining Lights Trust on behalf of a relationally connected group of national Christian youth leaders.

Its purpose was to provide a national snapshot of youth ministry activity across five defined areas:

- **Scale and Reach** — the current footprint of youth ministry in New Zealand
- **Outreach Readiness** — how young people are being equipped to share their faith
- **School Presence** — the extent and nature of Christian groups in secondary schools
- **Leader Connection** — how youth leaders are gathering and networking
- **Shared Events** — the frequency and nature of combined, cross-church youth events

1.2 Who is behind this Study

The group that commissioned this survey is a relationally driven round-table of some current senior youth leaders from across New Zealand's major denominations and national youth outreach organisations. They have come together around shared strategic interests, and the conversations that emerged from this network gave rise to this study.

The round-table includes representatives from 15 denominations and 10 national youth organisations:

Denominations involved with the network and/or survey (15)

ACTS Churches / Equippers • Alliance Churches • Anglican • Assemblies of God (AOG) • Baptist • C3 • Christian Churches NZ (CCNZ) • Christian Community Churches NZ (CCCNZ) • Elim • Methodist • New Life • Presbyterian • Salvation Army • Vineyard Churches • Wesleyan Methodist

Organisations (10)

Alpha NZ • Catalyst • Christian Camping • For This City • Godtalk.nz (Shining Lights Trust) • Scripture Union • Thinking Matters • UNASHAMED • Word of Life • 24-7 YouthWork

Note: Not all listed have been involved to the same extent.



1.3 Data Sources

The study draws on two primary datasets:

Online Survey (n = 115 youth groups)

An online survey was completed by youth leaders representing 115 youth groups. The survey consisted of up to 45 questions, primarily multiple-choice, with respondents answering only those questions relevant to their context. It provided detailed quantitative and qualitative insight into local youth ministry structures, activities, and perceptions.

Aggregated Leader Insights (n = 171 youth groups)

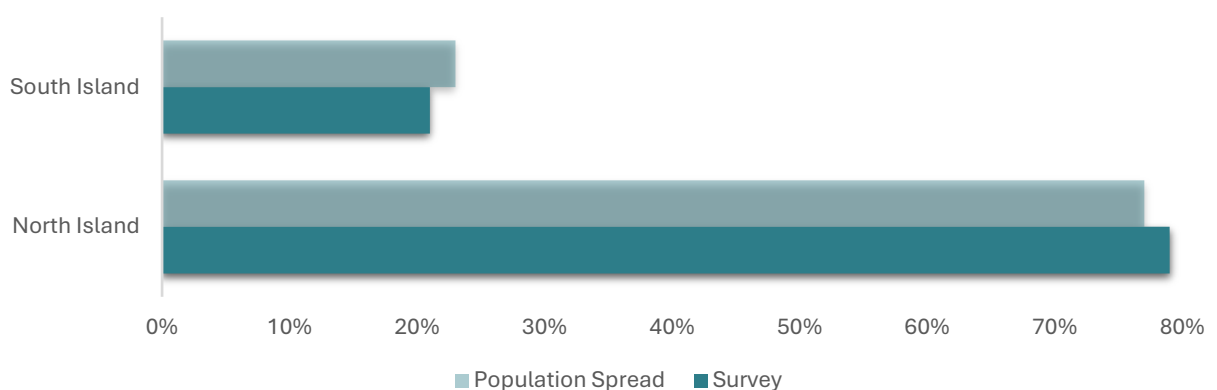
A second dataset was compiled through structured phone interviews with local youth representative leaders and pastors' group leaders, capturing aggregated insights across 171 additional youth groups, collating data on up to 18 questions per interview.

115 Full survey responses	171 Aggregated group insights	286 Total youth groups covered	10–25% Estimated national coverage
-------------------------------------	---	--	--

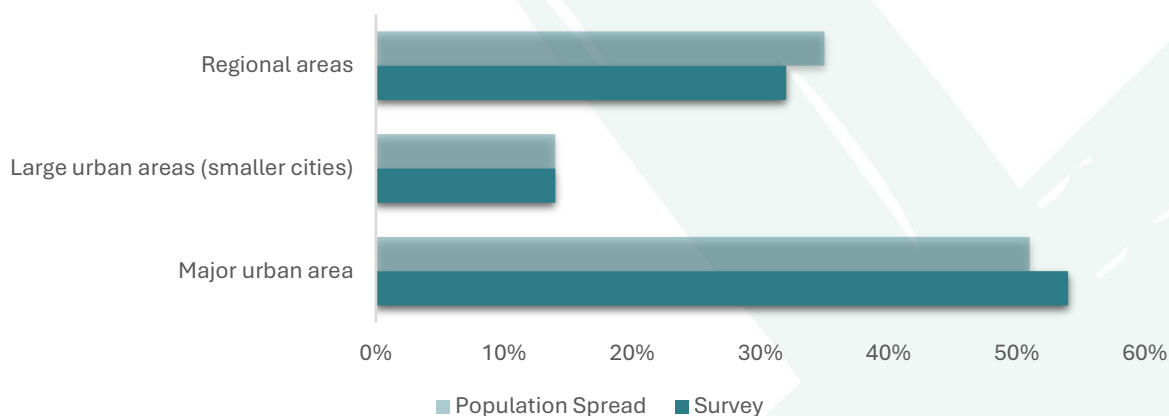
1.4 Geographic Distribution

The geographic spread of responses closely mirrors national population distribution, giving strong confidence that findings are geographically representative across New Zealand.

By island: 79% of responses came from the North Island and 21% from the South Island, consistent with Statistics NZ population ratios of approximately 76–77% and 23–24%.



By location type, the alignment with [EHINZ](#) population data is remarkably close:



Major urban areas defined as Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

► *The geographic profile of survey respondents closely reflects where New Zealanders live — giving confidence that findings represent the national picture rather than any one region or urban concentration.*

1.5 Data Integrity and Limitations

All figures are group-level summaries — data has been fully aggregated to protect church and denominational confidentiality.

Where multiple data sources were available, a conservative approach was applied — using the lower estimate to avoid overstating findings.

Throughout this report, responses are compared across two location types: cities and towns. Towns — also referred to as regional towns in some sections — captures everything outside of cities, including large and small towns and rural areas. These two terms are used interchangeably and refer to the same category.

This is a voluntary response survey, not a random sample. It likely over-represents youth groups that are more connected, more resourced or more engaged in networks, and may under-represent smaller or more isolated groups.

44% of full survey responses came from two denominations with a strong evangelistic focus. This may elevate outreach-related results relative to the national average.

The estimated sampling variability for the online survey component (n=115) is approximately ±8–9% at a 95% confidence level. However, because participation was voluntary rather than randomly selected, this figure reflects variability among respondents only — it does not account for potential non-response bias or represent the full population of New Zealand youth groups.

Results should therefore be interpreted as strong directional trends across engaged youth ministry networks — not as a statistically precise account of all youth groups in New Zealand.





SECTION 2

Scale and Reach

2.1 Youth Leaders — Employment

Note: Employment and experience data reflects the individual survey respondent only, not their full leadership team. Where a youth ministry has multiple leaders, only the primary respondent — most likely the overall youth leader — is represented here. As an example, a youth ministry may have four leaders with the main leader being the survey respondent, while the employment status and experience of the other three would not be captured in this report. These figures therefore represent only a partial picture of the experience and effort invested across any given youth ministry.

The following shows the employment type of survey respondents in youth ministry:



70% of respondents were at least part-time paid, averaging around 20 hours per week (range: 1–40 hours). The remaining 30% served fully as volunteers, averaging around 8 hours per week.

Paid hours are higher in cities (around 22 hours per week) compared to regional towns (around 15 hours per week). Volunteer-only roles are more common in towns (38%) than cities (27%). There is no notable difference between the North and South Islands.

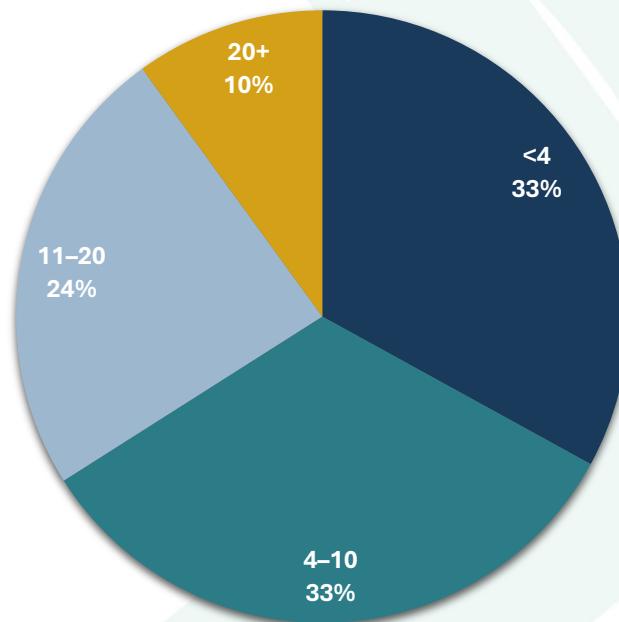
► *With 70% of respondents at least part-time paid, the data reflects a genuine valuing of youth ministry investment — particularly among the connected networks represented in this survey.*

70%	~20 hrs	30%	~8 hrs
At least part-time paid	Average paid hours/week	Volunteer only	Average volunteer hrs/week



2.2 Youth Leaders — Experience

Years of experience in youth ministry:



Two-thirds of respondents have fewer than 10 years of experience, with a third in their first four years. One quarter have between 11 and 20 years, and 10% have 20 or more years. Overall stability appears higher than is typically expected in youth leadership contexts, where high turnover is common. As noted at the start of this section, this data reflects the individual survey respondent only, not their full youth leadership team.

Notable regional differences:

North Island: Higher early-career representation (35% with ≤ 4 years), lower long-term (8% with 20+ years)

South Island: Fewer early-career leaders (22%), more long-term leaders (15% with 20+ years)

Towns: more long-term leaders (15% with 20+ years vs 7% in cities)

Cities: more early-career leaders (35% ≤ 4 years vs 26% in towns)

► *If representative, the experience profile reflects a healthy and relatively stable leadership picture across New Zealand youth ministry, even while long-term volunteerism is a stronger pattern in regional towns.*



2.3 Youth Groups — National Estimate

Determining the number of youth groups in New Zealand is one of the most important — and most complex — questions this survey sought to address.

There is no single national register of churches in New Zealand, and in many ways that reflects something positive — the diversity and independence of the Church. However, it does create a genuine counting challenge. Churches define themselves differently: is a church with three locations or campuses one church or three? What about a home church? These are all genuine gatherings of God's people — but they don't all appear in any list from which they could be counted.

From the denomination lists, with non-denominational churches we were able to identify also included, we identified around 2,100 churches. However, the number more commonly referenced across nationally is around 3,000.

Our survey data indicates that approximately 40% of churches have a youth group, though this varies widely between denominations — from around 19% in some to up to 90% in others.

Applying this figure gives us:

- 998 youth groups — based on the 2,100 directly tracked churches
- 1,200 youth groups — based on the broader 3,000 estimate

We have used 1,200 as our working figure throughout this report, as it best accounts for the full breadth of churches nationally. This includes both intermediate and high-school-aged youth (Years 7–13), which is how the majority of respondents defined their ministry, and represents the best national view possible given the responses received.

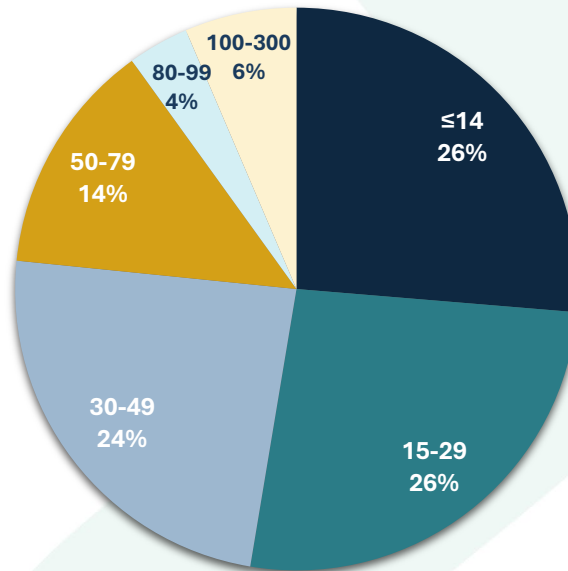
<p>~3,000</p> <p>Estimated churches nationally</p>	<p>~40%</p> <p>Churches with a youth group</p>	<p>~1,200</p> <p>Estimated youth groups NZ</p>	<p>Yrs 7–13</p> <p>Age range covered</p>
---	---	---	---



2.4 Youth Group Size

The average (mean) group size from the 115 full survey responses was 40, and from the aggregated data it was 37. The typical (middle/median) size was 30 across the full survey and 25 from the aggregated data, with a reported range of 5 to 300 young people.

Youth group size breakdown:



When comparing cities and regional areas, there is very little difference in group size. Cities average a mean of 41 and a typical size of 30, compared to a mean of 40 and typical size of 33 in regional areas.

A clearer distinction emerges between islands. South Island groups are notably larger, with a mean of 55 and a typical size of 45, compared to a mean of 36 and typical size of 26 in the North Island.

40	37	30	25	5-300
Mean average size (full survey only)	Mean average size (aggregated data)	Typical (median) size (full survey only)	Typical (median) size (aggregated data)	Reported range



2.5 Young People Nationally

This estimate is based on 1,200 churches with youth groups and a combined typical (median) size of 27.5, giving an estimated 33,000 young people connected to church-based youth groups nationally across the Year 7–13 age range.

Using data from [figure.nz](https://www.figure.nz) (2025), the total Year 7–13 population in New Zealand is around 471,000 — incorporating secondary, intermediate, specialist, composite and correspondence schools, and Year 7–8 students from full primary schools.

Breaking this down by age group:

Age Group	NZ Population	Survey Typical Estimate	Survey Mean Estimate	Participation Range
Years 7–8	147,042	9,360	14,040	6% – 10%
Years 9–13	324,437	24,000	34,800	8% – 11%
Total Years 7–13	471,479	33,360	48,840	7% – 10%

This places the estimated participation rate at approximately 7–10%, or between 1 in 14 and 1 in 10 young people connected to a church youth group nationally.

A number of limitations apply to these figures and should be kept in mind:

- Year 7–8 students are classified differently across churches. In many smaller churches, intermediate-age young people meet together with high school students and are reported as one group. In others they are entirely separate, or may be classified under primary-age ministry. This makes precise separation of the two age groups difficult.
- Where multiple data sources were available, a conservative approach was applied — using the lower estimate to avoid overstating findings, as noted in section 1.5.
- The range presented (typical to mean) reflects genuine uncertainty in the data. The typical (median) figure is the more conservative and preferred estimate; the mean figure represents the upper end of a plausible range.

Given these limitations, the lower end of the range — approximately 33,000 young people, or around 7% of the Year 7–13 population — is the figure used as the working estimate throughout this report.

► *It is worth considering when reading this data: church size does not necessarily correlate with youth group size. A congregation of 80 adults may have a youth group of 40 — most of whom may not attend Sunday services, and may not yet be Christians. The reach of a youth ministry frequently extends well beyond the regular church congregation, making youth groups one of the most significant points of first contact between young people and the Christian faith.*

<p>~471,000</p> <p>NZ Year 7–13 students (Figure.NZ 2025)</p>	<p>~33,000</p> <p>Connected to youth groups and intermediate groups</p>	<p>~7%</p> <p>Participation rate</p>	<p>1 in 14</p> <p>Youth in church youth groups and intermediate groups</p>
--	--	---	---

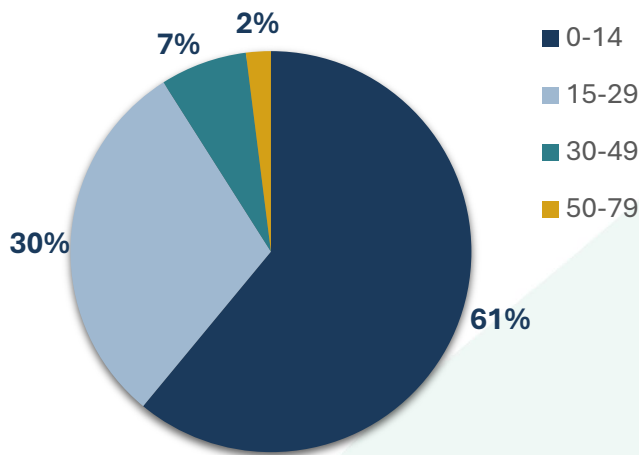


2.6 Intermediate Age Ministry (Years 7–9)

78% of churches with youth groups also run a separate intermediate group, representing approximately 31% of all churches and an estimated 936 intermediate groups nationwide.

With approximately 147,000 intermediate-aged young people nationwide, this survey estimates around 9,360 are connected to a church-based intermediate youth group — representing approximately 6% of this age group.

Intermediate group size breakdown:

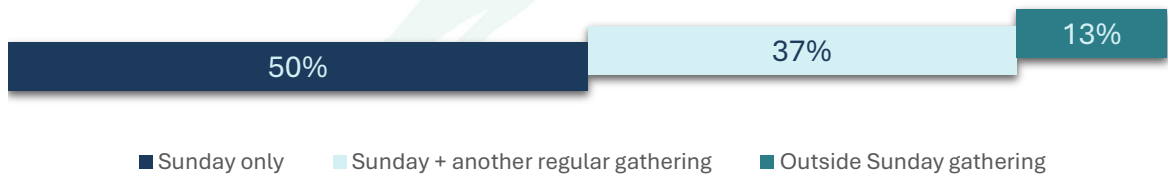


Intermediate groups are smaller by nature than youth groups. The mean size is 15 and the typical (median) size is 10.

For awareness, there were no notable differences between cities vs regions or North vs South Islands.

For some totals, based on a typical size of 10, we estimate approximately 9,360 intermediate-age young people are engaged nationally. This figure is included within the 33,000 Year 7–13 estimate.

How intermediate groups meet:



► 87% of intermediate-age young people attend groups that meet separately from the main church service — meaning the majority are connected to a church-based youth group but are not regularly present in the main congregation. This has implications for how churches think about discipleship pathways for this age group, and how intermediate ministry is resourced within the broader life of the church.

78%	~936	10	~9,360
Of churches with Youth Groups also have an intermediate group	Estimated intermediate groups nationally	Typical (median) group size	Estimated intermediate youth engaged

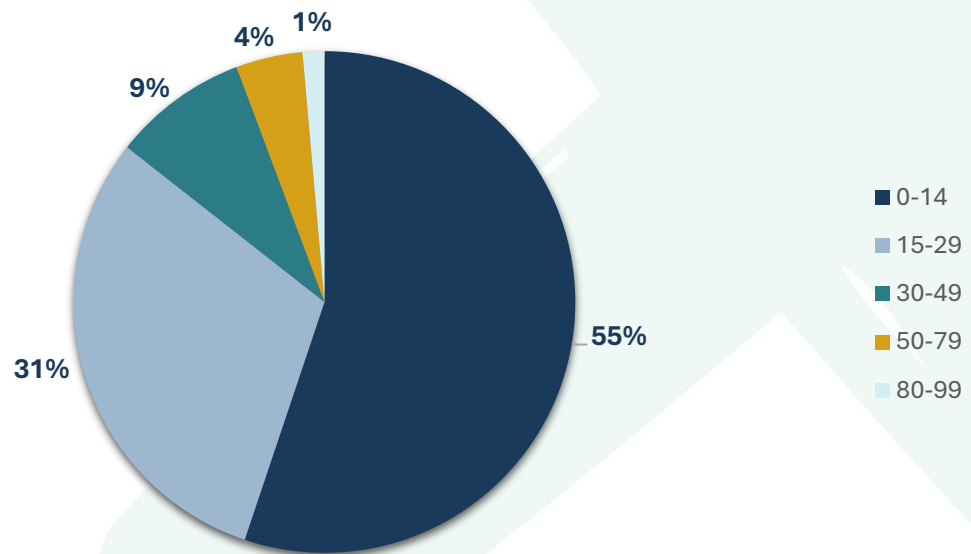


2.7 Young Adults Ministry (Ages 18–25)

61% of churches with youth groups also have a young adults group, representing approximately 24% of all churches and an estimated 732 young adults groups nationwide.

Young adults groups are similar in size to intermediate groups. The mean size is 17 and the typical (median) size is 12.

Young adults group size breakdown:



Based on a typical size of 12, we estimate just over 8,700 young adults connected nationally.

This figure is distinct from and in addition to the estimated 33,000 Year 7–13 youth — giving a combined estimate of approximately 41,700 young people connected to church-based intermediate, youth and young adults ministry nationally.

There are no notable differences between cities and regional areas, or between the North and South Islands.

It should be noted that this question asked specifically about intentional young adults groups for the 18–25 age range. However, definitions of "young adults" vary widely between churches. Some define the category by age, others by life stage such as post-school or pre-marriage, and others would include young marrieds. Responses therefore reflect local interpretations rather than a uniform definition, and figures should be read with this in mind.

61%	~732	12	~8,784
Of churches with youth groups also have young adults group	Estimated young adults groups nationally	Typical (median) group size	Estimated young adult attendees





SECTION 3

Outreach Readiness

3.1 Overview

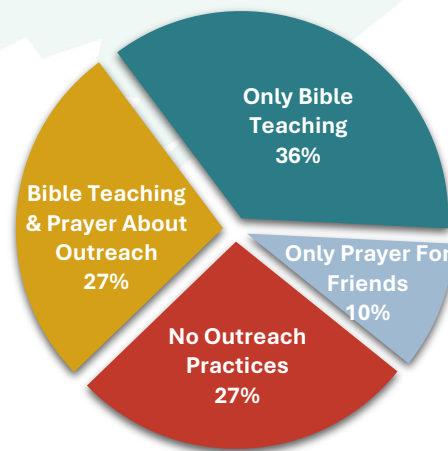
This section examines how intentional youth groups are in equipping young people to share their faith and covers:

- Bible teaching and prayer around outreach
- Outreach equipping and training

The distinction is that Bible teaching and prayer get young people thinking about and aware of outreach, while practical equipping shows them how to do it.

Outreach: Bible Teaching and Prayer

This survey firstly explored two broader outreach practices. These were general Bible teaching about outreach, and prayer for non-Christian friends.



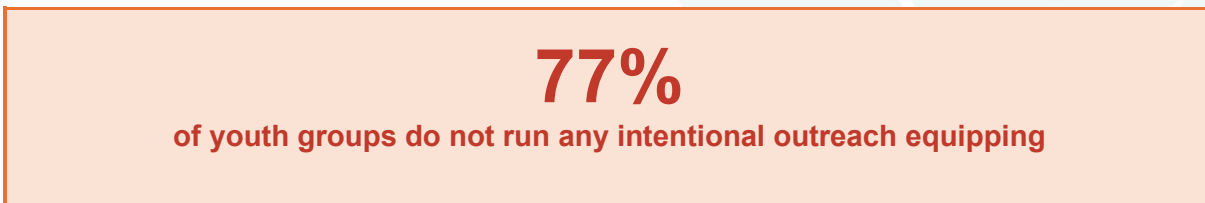
- 27% of groups both taught about outreach using Bible teaching and motivational input and intentionally included regular prayer for non-Christian friends.
- 36% of groups taught about outreach using Bible teaching and motivational input, but did not include regular prayer for non-Christian friends.
- 10% of groups intentionally included regular prayer for non-Christian friends — at least monthly — as a group rhythm, even while having no Bible teaching on outreach.
- 27% had no pattern of Bible teaching about or prayer for outreach.

73% of youth groups have at least some focus on their mission.



Outreach: Equipping and Training

Secondly, the survey explored the extent of actual outreach equipping — defined specifically as planned, structured training purposed to enable action. This training covered areas such as how to share the gospel, start spiritual conversations, tell stories, and invite others. This was defined as distinct from Bible studies that only reference or discuss evangelism; the focus was about measuring intentional, skills-based equipping so that what has been taught might be applied in practice.



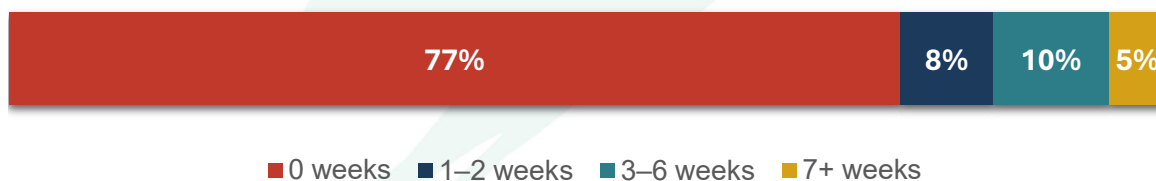
The key finding is that 77% of youth groups do not run any intentional outreach equipping.

Of the 23% that do — approximately 276 groups nationally — leaders both (a) taught about outreach from the Bible and (b) equipped their youth with the practical skills needed to apply it.

It is worth noting that teaching about outreach naturally preceded the practical equipping itself.

For these groups, outreach equipping averaged around five weeks of training per year.

Average weeks per year spent on outreach equipping



The distinction is significant: while **73% of all youth groups either discussed outreach or prayed** for non-Christian friends, or both, **only 23% have a practice of equipping** their youth with the practical skills to apply what was taught. This reduces to 15% when measured by three or more weeks of equipping annually.

With approximately 24,000 high school-aged young people in youth groups, this equates to around 3,600 being equipped at a basic level for outreach — against a mission field of 324,000 high school students.

It is worth remembering that the best people to reach young people are young people themselves. On the whole, these findings show practical outreach training to be neither a regular topic nor an embedded cultural practice in the majority of youth groups. Most young people in church youth groups are not being intentionally equipped to share their faith with their friends and peers.

► *This is both a significant finding and a clear opportunity. Making disciples is the core mission of the Church — and if that is true, then equipping young people to share their faith should not be the exception. It should be the norm for every youth group in New Zealand.*



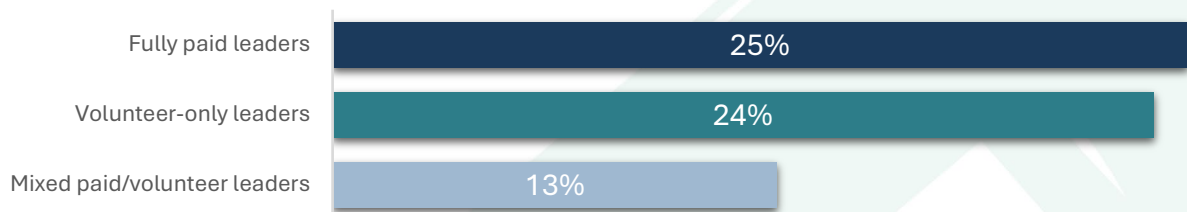
3.2 Variation by Context

For awareness, there are no notable differences in outreach equipping rates between cities and regional towns, or between the North and South Islands.

Outreach Equipping By Denomination

Not all denominations were represented by enough survey responses to provide meaningful denomination-specific data. Among those with six or more survey responses, outreach training rates range from 0% to 42% — indicating that denominational culture is a significant driver of whether outreach equipping happens.

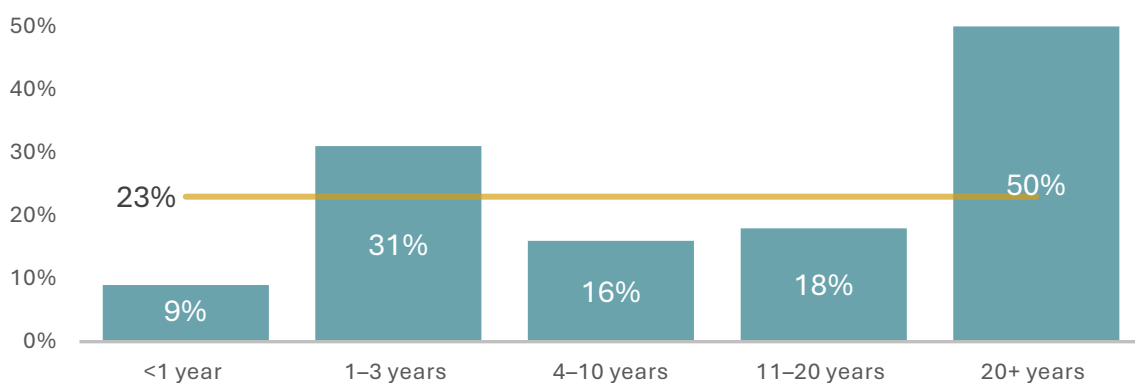
Outreach Equipping By Employment Type



There is no significant difference between fully paid and fully volunteer leaders in their rates of outreach equipping — suggesting that time availability alone does not determine how diligently leaders pursue this area of ministry. It is worth noting that those in mixed paid/volunteer roles show notably lower engagement at 13%. The data offers no clear explanation for this finding.

Outreach Equipping By Years of Experience

In contrast to employment type, there is some evidence that experience does play a role — with the most experienced youth leaders showing greater intentionality in their missional focus.



With the overall average for outreach equipping at 23%, newer leaders (1–3 years) and the most experienced leaders (20+ years) both sit above this, while leaders in the 4–20 year range are lower than average. This may reflect differences in energy, resources, and established ministry culture across career stages.



3.3 Evidence That Outreach Equipping Matters

Youth groups that run outreach equipping show stronger outcomes across other areas:

53 → 65%	56 → 88%	76 → 94%	~22
More likely to value local unity with other leaders	More likely to have a young adults group	More likely to have an intermediate group	More young people per group

- They are more likely to value local unity with other leaders: 53% → 65%
- They are more likely to have a young adults group: 56% → 88%
- They are more likely to also have an intermediate group: 76% → 94%
- Their combined events are more likely to include an outreach focus: 31% → 44%
- They have a higher average number of spiritually interested young people present and are larger on average (~22 more young people per group)

► *Young people most often engage with faith through relationships and conversation. Outreach equipping directly supports that pathway. Groups that prioritise it show stronger outcomes across multiple dimensions.*

Training Resources in Use

Resources mentioned by respondents included the following:

- Online resources: Godtalk.nz, Word of Life, Alpha, G7 App (Gospel in 7), The BLESS App
- In-person training: Catalyst, denominational training, EE (Evangelism Explosion), OAC, UNASHAMED.

🔍 *77% of youth groups are not yet equipping young people to confidently discuss their faith with their non-Christian peers. It is equally fair to say that 100% should. A fundamental has somehow been dropped. What could national and local youth leaders do to establish a new culture of outreach equipping across New Zealand?*



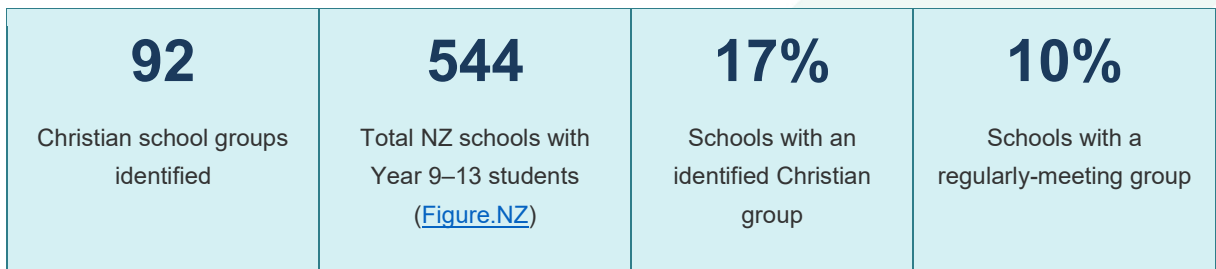


SECTION 4

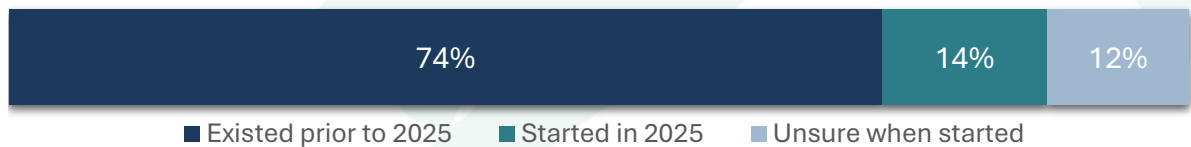
School Presence

4.1 Overview

This section examines the extent and nature of Christian groups in schools with Year 9–13 students across New Zealand.



When Were Groups Established?



The 14% that started in 2025 is notable. Several respondents linked this to Catalyst's recent activity in supporting and catalysing new school groups.

4.2 How Often Do Groups Meet?

The survey asked that those with Christian School groups categorised the frequency of their meetings (occasionally = 1–4 times per term; regularly = 5 or more times per term):

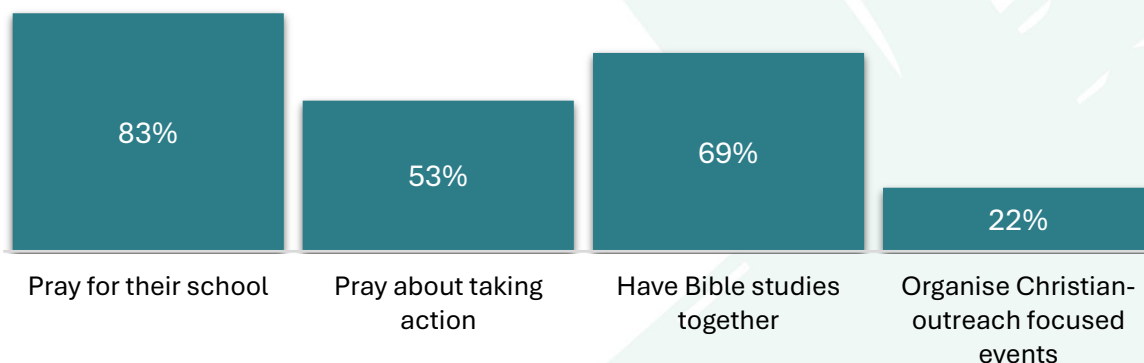


While 17% of schools had an identified Christian group, only 10% met regularly enough to build meaningful vision or momentum. The lack of regularity among the remaining groups is a significant limitation on their long-term effectiveness.



4.3 What Do School Groups Do?

Groups were asked about their purpose and activities. What is most notable is how few of the 17% of schools with a Christian group have reached a point of sufficient strength and focus to engage in intentional outreach together.



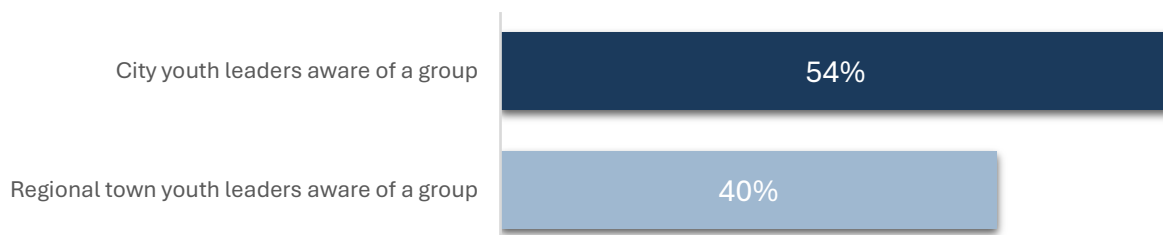
► *Formation and individual encouragement are the primary focus: prayer and Bible study are foundational. Organised outreach action is less common, with only 22% of groups organising Christian-focused outreach events. Applied to the 17% of schools with an identified group, this means approximately 4% of all schools with Year 9–13 students have a group of Christians with a practical outreach focus.*

4.4 Youth Leader Awareness of School Groups

In surveying youth leaders regarding school groups their youth might be involved in, 49% were aware of a Christian school group in their area. The significance is that awareness will be connected to encouragement, support and involvement in the starting and sustaining of these groups.

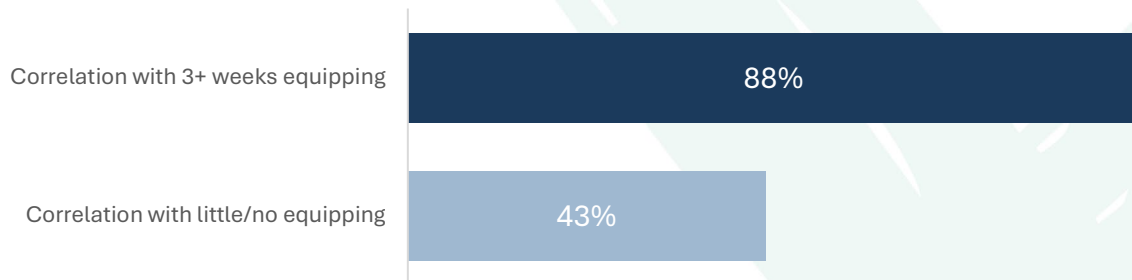
Awareness varied by employment type and location. 57% of paid youth leaders were aware of a school group, compared to 32% of volunteer leaders. It is possible that those with more time for their ministry work are more aware of school groups. However, they might equally be more proactive in catalysing their existence. It is possible that leaders with more time for their ministry are better positioned to perceive the importance of their young people having a Christian presence among their peers — therefore encouraging it, and in doing so catalysing the formation of more groups.

(Interestingly, 54% of city-based leaders were aware of a Christian group in their local schools, compared to 40% in regional towns. No clear reason for this disparity emerged from the data.)



The Link Between Outreach Equipping and School Group Awareness

An intriguing finding was in the relationship between outreach equipping and school group awareness.



Outreach equipping correlates with the existence of Christian groups in schools. It appears that outreach equipping does more than train young people — it shifts the orientation of the leader toward more strategic action. This in turn results in young people taking greater initiative and growing in confidence in their witness among their non-Christian peers.

When leaders prioritise equipping, they naturally begin to see the wider harvest field Jesus called them to serve — taking an active interest in casting vision and encouraging students in how they might live out and share their faith in the school environment.

► *Investing in outreach equipping catalyses wider reaching vision, with implications beyond the youth group itself.*

🔍 *51% of youth leaders are unaware of a local school group. Might the significance of Christian young people gathering confidently in their schools, and the role this plays in catalysing spiritual conversations and new interest, be underappreciated? What could be done to strengthen vision for school groups, and to better equip Christian youth to find their voice among their peers?*



SECTION 5

Leader Connection

5.1 Types of Youth Leader Gatherings

Youth leaders sometimes connect together in two distinct types of gatherings, which serve different but complementary purposes:

- **Denominational gatherings** — focused on strengthening the individual leader and their youth group
- **Geographic (multi-denominational) gatherings** — focused likewise on the leader and their youth group, but also on their wider-reaching shared mission together in their city or town.

Geographic groups are significant in that, if time is given to relationship and prayer together, they will naturally turn to consider gaps that might exist in their missional efforts to their city or town. This kind of thinking is foundational to the catalysing of wider outreaching efforts.

5.2 Connection Rates

<p>55%</p> <p>Youth leaders connected to at least one gathering</p>	<p>45%</p> <p>Not connected to any gathering</p>	<p>32%</p> <p>Aware of a group but not involved</p>
		<p>13%</p> <p>Unsure whether a group exists</p>

55% of youth leaders are involved in at least one type of youth leader gathering. The remaining 45% are not connected to any. However, within that second group there is an important distinction:

- 13% are unsure whether a gathering exists in their area — reflecting an awareness gap
- 32% are aware but not involved — reflecting an engagement gap

Giving greater visibility to gatherings that exist, while also presenting a compelling case for why the unity of youth leaders matters, could make a difference.

Among youth leaders who gather, the type of group they belong to:



Surprisingly, of these who gather with other youth leaders, 78% were involved in both types — meaning the majority of connected leaders participated in both denominational gatherings and geographic gatherings with other local youth leaders across their city or town.

So it is noted, there were no notable differences in these patterns between cities and regional towns, or between the North and South Islands.

5.3 Meeting Frequency

Among youth leaders in geographic gatherings – which is our area of interest, meeting frequency breaks down as follows:

Frequency	Overall	Cities	Towns
6 times per year	42%	49%	28%
4 times per year (once per term)	34%	27%	50%
Twice per year	24%	24%	22%

A difference that can be noted is between cities and regional towns in that city-based geographic groups skew toward more frequent connection, with nearly half meeting six times per year. Regional town groups, by contrast, were more likely to meet once per term (50%). Twice-yearly meetings are consistent across both contexts.

There are no notable differences between the North and South Islands.

The significance of this lies in the depth of relationships that develop — relationships that are foundational to perceiving gaps, generating fresh thinking, and finding shared solutions. The data that follows reveals this connection.

5.4 Connection Frequency and Shared Mission

The frequency of leaders’ connections had a measurable correlation to outreaching efforts in two key areas:

Key indicator	No gatherings	2–4 times per year	6 times per year
Aware of regular Christian school groups	22%	25%	48%
Running 3+ combined youth events	37%	50%	74%

There is a clear pattern in which youth leaders who gather more regularly in their cities or towns — six times per year — are twice as connected to school groups as the rest, and nearly twice as likely to be running three or more combined youth events.



The strength of their unity appears connected to the scope of their vision to pursue the mission of Jesus in a wider way in their city or town. This results in more intentional encouragement for their youth to unite with others in their schools.

The frequency of local youth leader gatherings also correlates with a greater frequency of combined events, further strengthening the scope and impact of outreach across a city or town."

► *Unity among leaders tends to produce unity among young people — increasing the pace, scope, and momentum of city-focused outreach.*

🔍 *45% of youth leaders are not connected to any gathering. How could national and local youth leaders create a new culture of unity in every city and town to enhance their collaboration, outreach and overall impact?*



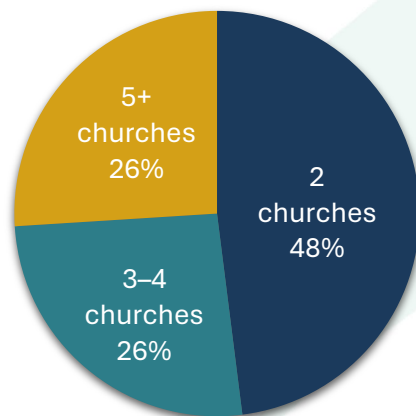


SECTION 6 Shared Events

6.1 Participation in Combined Events

85%
of youth groups are involved in at least one combined, cross-church youth event

Collaboration ranged from two churches to five or more involved together in their noted event. Here is how those events broke down:



Small-scale collaboration is common; wide-reaching collaboration is rare. However, these figures need to be read in their local context.

In a regional town with only two youth groups, a two-church gathering represents 100% of local youth ministry participation. This is full collaboration by any measure.

In a city with significantly more youth groups, the same two-church event represents a much smaller united dynamic and vision.

Across both cities and towns, the willingness to collaborate is clearly present.

The opportunity is to build on that foundation toward broader and more intentional partnership.

6.2 Frequency of Combined Events

Number of combined events run each year:



Nearly half of all youth groups run one to two combined events per year, with 16% running five or more. Framed against the four school terms, around half of all youth groups are running approximately one combined event per term – a healthy pattern.

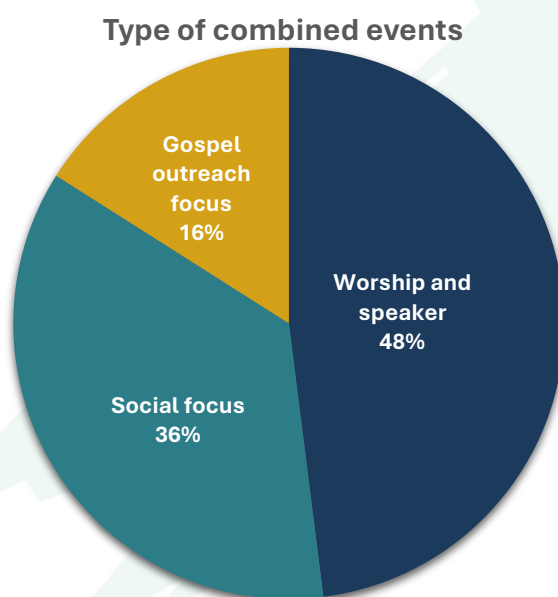


6.3 Types of Combined Events

Combined events were categorised into three types, each serving a distinct purpose.

- Worship-and-speaker events build the culture of togetherness among Christian young people.
- Social events build relationships across church communities.
- Gospel outreach events extend that culture outward toward those not yet connected to faith.

It should be noted that camps were not specifically captured in this survey. (Depending on their purpose and format, camps could legitimately sit across all three categories, and their absence as a distinct data point is a limitation we acknowledge in this survey.)



It could be summarised that unity is strong around ‘gathering’, and weaker around ‘outreach’.

84% of combined events are primarily inward-facing, while only 16% are intentionally outreach-focused. The value of worship and social gatherings is affirmed — while a weakness in collective outreach effort is evident.

Because a crowd attracts a crowd, a stronger culture of togetherness in outreach could bring significant benefit. An opportunity exists to discover how united efforts might increasingly serve as platforms for Christian witness among the wider community.

► *Unity is strong around gathering and weaker around outreach. 84% of combined events are primarily inward-facing, while only 16% are intentionally outreach-focused*

🔍 *How could a proactive culture of combined events be encouraged and resourced — to see greater multiplication of the number of young people broadly connected to Christian youth ministry in New Zealand?*





SECTION 7

Reflections

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

Focus Area	Key Finding	Key Opportunity
Scale & Reach	~1,200 youth groups; ~33,000 young people – 24,000 of high school age and 9,000 of intermediate age — connected to a church youth group, in contrast to 471,000 young people in NZ high schools and intermediate schools, of whom 324,000 are high school aged. In summary: 1 in 14 across both age groups are connected to a youth group.	How might we see every young person in our nation again having an opportunity to hear of Jesus through a conversation with or invitation from a friend? How might we shift from 1 in 14 youth being in a youth group, to 1 in 7?
Outreach Readiness	While 73% of youth groups discuss outreach or pray for non-Christian friends, only 23% provide practical equipping — or 15% when measured by 3+ weeks annually. Among these, 88% are aware of a local school group, compared to 43% of those with little or no equipping — demonstrating the catalytic potential of intentional outreach equipping.	How might we establish new patterns of behaviour, to see 100% of groups discussing and equipping their youth for their mission?
School Presence	17% of schools have a Christian group; 51% of leaders are unaware of one; only 22% of existing groups make outreach a planned part of what they do — only around 25 of 544 high schools.	How might a vision for Christian youth 'unity for mission' in schools be released and supported, so that important conversations that generate the seeds of new spiritual interest might be catalysed?
Leader Connection	48% of youth leaders connect with other local youth leaders. Those meeting six times per year are twice as aware of regular school groups, and twice as likely to be involved with regular (3+) combined youth events annually.	How might a sustainable culture and healthy rhythm of youth leader unity be catalysed in every city and town, so that wider youth ministry and outreach might be strengthened?
Shared Events	While 85% of youth groups participate in combined events, only 16% of all combined events are gospel-focused. However, 33% of youth groups were involved in at least one outreach event during the year.	How might a vision for united outreach be rekindled, leading to a fresh discovery of outreach possibilities that a current generation of leaders may never have seen modelled?



7.2 Turning Insight into Action

Here are some application suggestions.

Sometimes we must identify and admit a problem before we can fix it. Despite many honourable efforts, might we have been neglecting the centrality of the gospel? If so, what could we do?

For meaningful change to be catalysed across each of these five areas, vision would need to be both cast and sustained at three levels of church life. This ongoing casting of vision is the core leadership practice required for grassroots change to be achieved.

<p>National & Regional Leaders</p> <p>Cast the vision, provide resources, champion the culture</p>	<p>Local Youth Leaders</p> <p>Gather, connect, equip, collaborate, lead by example</p>	<p>Young People</p> <p>Equipped, empowered, and mobilised in schools, communities, and events</p>
---	---	--

✦ *The data points to genuine strengths within youth ministry — and clear, compelling opportunities. The greatest days of youth ministry in New Zealand may well be ahead.*

Scale and Reach – the data in context

Data: About 33,000 Year 7–13 young people are connected to a church youth group, while there are 471,000 in our nation's schools.

- High school only (Years 9–13): approximately 24,000 out of 324,000
- Intermediate age only (Years 7–8): approximately 9,300 out of 147,000

Comment:

The scale of our operation as churches is not insignificant. The Faith in Action Report from 2023 (faithinaction.org.nz) noted 3,213 church entities, with 11,989 church staff (5,678 full time), and \$1.9 billion in annual revenue, \$717.6 million of which came from donations.

With our scale as a united body noted, and much good work already being done — what united strategies exist for a vision as straightforward as gospel outreach to our young people nationwide? While our efforts remain constrained to what we can control through individual churches, denominations and organisations, no such national vision will come about.

This is precisely why the national youth leaders behind this survey have united. This is what they want to see changed. This is why this survey was undertaken — to create a benchmark. Only about 1 in 14 students are currently connected to a church youth group. How could we get this back to something like 1 in 7?



A known decline

Relational research by the Shining Lights Trust in 2016 and 2017 engaged conversations with long-standing pastors in approximately 60 cities and towns across the nation. Each was asked to estimate the total number of youth groups and potential attendance in the mid-1990s, and to contrast that with the present time. The conclusion was that New Zealand youth ministry attendance had fallen to as low as one quarter of what it was 20 years prior — or at minimum, a two-thirds decline.

As one example, consider a town with 1,000 students in its high school — with an estimated 180 in a youth group in 1990 and 120 in 2005, despite a known low of just 25 in that location around 2016. At the current national average of 1 in 14, there should be approximately 71 of those 1,000 students attending a youth group in that community today.

Denominational data has evidenced further decline since that time — one example showing a 40% drop across the recent decade.

While there is no hard data, few would question that New Zealand Christian youth ministry is attending at around 25% of what it was 25 years ago — though the extent of this decline will vary by location.

A possible cause

What if this decline was not only the result of changing culture, but also of our failure in some of the fundamentals of Christian discipleship and ministry related to the gospel?

- **Equipping** — Might we have become too weak in equipping believers for ministry? In contrast to the 1990s, gospel equipping was considerably more common — even if sometimes narrow in scope. Involvement in Beach Missions was widespread among youth ministries nationwide, giving young people hands-on experience in outreach to their peers. Larger united gospel youth outreach events were common, with clear and creative gospel communication modelled.
- **Events** — In the 1990s, Youth For Christ centres in nearly every region ran large outreach events at least quarterly. Youth Alive did similar. YFC Touring Teams (Certain Sounds to high schools and Y1 to intermediates) performed in most schools annually, with weekend concerts at which the gospel was clearly articulated. Regional gospel talent competitions existed, feeding into the Capital Teen Convention held annually in venues like the Michael Fowler Centre in Wellington. The creative arts had been wisely claimed for the gospel, with thousands of young people involved and their peers turning out to watch performances at local youth outreach events. Most youth leaders today have never seen these kinds of events modelled.
- **Schools** — In the 1990s, school groups existed in most high schools across the nation and were networked at a national level. As culture changed, the "adult-led, student-supported" model faded. A new approach — "student-led, adult-supported" — was needed, but adapting proved difficult. Today, no such national network exists




A question worth asking

The gathered national Christian youth leaders behind this survey are asking: what might happen if we decided to restore a focus on:

- Geographic youth leader unity
- Equipping 100% of young people for outreach conversations
- Christian youth unity in schools
- Wider-reaching united gospel events in every location

This group recognises that no individual denomination has enough influence to make this happen alone. No individual national youth outreach organisation does either. But together — along with local churches in every location — we could.

For more: ChristianYouthUnity.nz

 *What would it take to go from 1 in 14 to 1 in 7 young people connected to a church youth group? What could pastors, and also national and local youth leaders now do to position Christian youth ministry to have greater presence and reach in our communities?*



Outreach Readiness


Data: 77% of youth groups are not yet intentionally equipping young people to share their faith.

Comment: This is a startling gap in what might be considered a most basic part of discipleship — the equipping of the saints not only for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4), but for their God-given mission (Matthew 28). Furthermore, the best people to reach young people are young people themselves.

- As a reminder: 44% of full survey responses came from two denominations with a strong evangelistic focus. The reality of the situation is likely worse than is reflected here.
- An encouraging pattern: The 23% who do provide outreach equipping averaged five weeks of focus annually — a healthy pattern that exists to be learned from and replicated across all other groups. However, considering only those equipping for three or more weeks annually, just 15% are providing a minimal 'adequate' level of equipping. The significance of this distinction was evidenced by the difference in awareness of school groups — 88% among those equipping three or more weeks, compared to just 43% among those equipping less. This difference, and its correlation with increased combined events, are both explored further in this report. If 15% are meaningfully equipped, this equates to approximately 3,600 of the 24,000 young people in our nation's youth groups — against a mission field of 324,000 high school students.
- Regarding our hearts: Knowing the equipping of the saints is fundamental to achieving the mission Jesus gave us of making disciples, what if we were to humbly acknowledge a possible failure — and choose to change
- As an idea: What if church leaders nationwide were to unite around a vision of seeing 100% of youth groups equipping their young people (3+ weeks of focus) with conversational, storytelling and gospel skills every year?
- As a process: What if denominational conferences — for both adult leaders and youth leaders — made the equipping of young people for outreach a primary session focus, not merely a seminar topic? This could generate a culture of intentional equipping, with awareness of the wider array of church and para-church ministry personnel and resources available to assist.

A goal: Conversational outreach equipping in every youth group, every year.

For more: ChristianYouthUnity.nz/equipping

 *What could pastors, and national and local youth leaders do to establish a new culture of outreach equipping across youth ministry in New Zealand?*



Leader Connection

Data: 45% of youth leaders are not connected to any local united youth leaders' gathering in their city or town. 48% are connected to a local geographic youth leaders group. Of these, only 42% of these groups meet six or more times annually — thereby bringing a regularity and momentum to their relationships. This is to say, only around 20% of all youth leaders are in a geographic unity group that meets regularly enough to have the potential of momentum – in contrast to youth leaders who might just have a coffee together twice a year.


The significance of this is that those who meet regularly, connecting six or more times per year, are twice as likely to be aware of or connected to a regular local school group, and twice as likely to be involved in regular combined events (four or more per year). This is to say, the unity of youth leaders does correlate to the scope and momentum of youth outreach in a city or town.

Comment:

- A clear correlation: If we want outreach equipping, school groups and united outreach events strengthened, supporting the regular gathering of youth leaders in our nation's cities and towns — meeting with the shared purpose of achieving the mission Jesus has given them — is an obvious and needed action point.
- A bonus: Beyond what is captured in this data, it is also likely that youth leaders who gather regularly are more encouraged and supported in their ministry lives as a result.
- How change might be achieved: Pastors and other mature Christians who recognise the missional significance of youth leader unity could catalyse this by offering to host and cater a gathering, if a local youth leader is willing to invite peers from across their city or town.
- A vision for a catering pattern to help deliver the desired result: A home-cooked bacon and egg breakfast in a church lounge or home near the start of each school term, or pizzas for an evening gathering, is easy. The point here to establish from the outset a pattern of meeting in a private location — rather than a café — with good food that creates space to pause together, enabling strengthened relationships and uninterrupted time.
- The agenda is simple: (a) They unite, (b) to pray (c) about what could be done together to reach the young people of their city or town that could not be done apart.

A goal: Youth leaders intentionally connecting at least six times annually — or maybe twice per school term as a model — in every New Zealand city and town that has a high school.

For more: ChristianYouthUnity.nz/unity. This includes a handbook for facilitating a local youth leaders' network, and other support.

 *How could pastors, and also both national and local youth leaders, create a new culture of unity in every city and town — knowing this will enhance collaboration and the scope of outreach as a result?*



School Presence

Data: 17% of schools with Year 9–13 students have an identified Christian group — yet 51% of youth leaders are unaware of and therefore unconnected to a local school group, while only 22% of existing school groups engage in intentional outreach efforts.

Of the 544 high schools with Year 9–13 students, this survey identified 92 school groups. Of these only around 25 have any intent to engage in outreach. While there will be school groups not identified through this process (we estimate that a closer study might reveal about 130 school groups), the numbers and patterns revealed point to a significant gap.

Comment:

- A significant connection to note: Youth leaders are typically the ones who cast vision for school groups and support them. Youth leaders who are aware of groups are likely — knowingly or not — catalytic to both the existence and health of those groups.
- An important detail: The regularity of meetings is a notable factor in the data. Nearly half of all school groups that exist do not meet weekly. Groups that meet irregularly are unlikely to develop clear goals, momentum or meaningful outcomes.
- A strong correlation to outreach equipping: 88% of youth leaders giving three or more weeks annually to outreach equipping were aware of local school groups — more than double the 43% awareness among those giving none or 1-2 weeks, and well above the 49% overall average. Where young people are equipped with basic gospel and conversational skills, they naturally perceive the spiritual need of their peers — motivating unity in schools to do something about it. National youth leaders, local pastors and local youth leaders all have a role to play in casting this vision.
- The significance of youth unity to youth outreach: Where spiritual conversations are being initiated in schools, non-church young people are caused to think about spiritual things. This naturally generates increased interest in Christianity, increased openness to invitations to youth group events, and increased receptivity to the gospel when it is communicated. As the saying goes, 'conversations that start in school continue in youth group.' Youth unity in schools is catalytic.
- A need for support: Case studies demonstrate that a small amount of support and encouragement can make a meaningful difference. While this study did not focus on this point, the significance of adult support to young people who lead groups in their schools cannot be underestimated. At its core, the vision in supporting youth is that they (a) unite, (b) to pray, (c) about what they might do among their peers to catalyse basic spiritual awareness and interest. God can lead each school group to its own ideas, while stories shared from other locations can inspire.



A goal: Young people intentionally encouraged and helped to unite in every high school — gathering weekly, to pray together, about what they might be able to do together to catalyse spiritual interest and conversation.

*🔗 How significant could the confidence of Christian young people in schools be in catalysing spiritual conversations — and in turn, invitations to youth groups?
What could pastors, and national and local youth leaders do to bring a renewed sense of vision to school groups, concurrent with the needed support for their sustainability?*

For more: ChristianYouthUnity.nz/schools

Shared Events


Data: While 85% of youth groups participate in combined events, only 16% of those events are gospel-focused. However, 33% of all youth groups were involved in at least one outreach event during the year. Youth group unity is therefore primarily oriented around 'gathering', with comparatively little priority given to 'outreach' — even while present in a third of groups.

Comment:


- It is worth noting that many of the current generation of youth leaders have never seen a focused, creative, gospel-preaching youth event modelled — as was common two to three decades ago.
- As noted earlier, data demonstrates a direct correlation between youth leader unity and combined events. Youth leader unity is a starting point.
- While seemingly rare today, creative and gospel-preaching combined youth events can still connect with and speak meaningfully to young people. Current models of this exist.
- It also remains true that a crowd attracts a crowd. Where youth leaders unite and commit to running regular combined events — quarterly or similar — momentum will build and attendances will grow.

A goal: Creative combined youth events at least four times per year — including some with a clear gospel-communication focus — in every city and town with a high school.

For more: ChristianYouthUnity.nz/events

 *How could a proactive culture of combined events be encouraged and resourced — to see multiplication of the number of young people connected to Christian youth ministry in New Zealand?*





What if we united around a vision to see every young person in Aotearoa-New Zealand encountering the love, hope and teaching of Jesus through a conversation with or invitation from a friend?

- ▶ **Equipping** — Conversational outreach equipping in every youth ministry, every year.
- ▶ **Unity** — Youth leaders connecting together at least four times annually — once per school term — in every New Zealand city or town with a high school.
- ▶ **Schools** — Young people both encouraged and helped to unite in every high school: to gather weekly, to pray about what they could do together to catalyse spiritual awareness and interest.
- ▶ **Events** — Creative combined youth events at least four times per year — including some with a clear gospel-communication focus — in every city and town with a high school.



ChristianYouthUnity.nz

