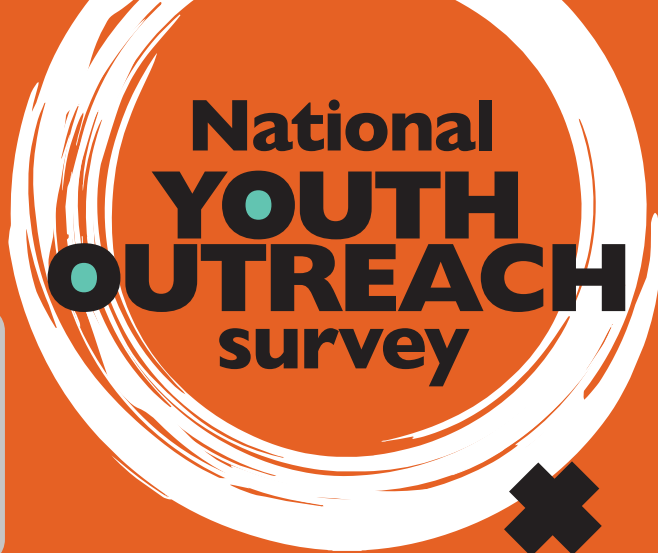


New Zealand Youth Ministry Survey Summary of findings. Published 2026

Undertaken by the Shining Lights Trust on behalf of a national youth leaders roundtable — 15 denominational youth reps and 10 national youth outreach organisation leaders.



CONTEXT

NZ Christian youth ministry is estimated at around 25% of what it was 25 years ago.

CURRENT NUMBERS

~1,200 youth groups • 33,000 young people connected to churches
• 324,000 high school students across 544 high schools nationwide
• 471,000 total across Years 7–13



Outreach Readiness

— How young people are being equipped to share their faith

73% Discuss outreach

23% Equip for outreach

15% Equip 3+ weeks/year

3,600 Total youth equipped to reach their 324,000 peers

While 23% of youth groups equip for outreach, 8% do this only 1–2 weeks per year. Only 15% equip 3+ times annually. This equates to just 3,600 young people equipped to reach 324,000 peers. This is not enough.

The benefits of outreach equipping 3 or more weeks annually are clear. These churches are 57% more likely to have young adult groups, 24% more likely to have intermediate groups, 23% more likely to show commitment to unity, and average 22 more youth in attendance. Most striking is the 100% correlation between this equipping and having school groups.

The data points to something simple: equipping imparts vision and confidence — and equipped youth naturally act on it. Equipped youth believe they can make a difference.

SOLUTION

100% of youth groups equipping for conversational outreach every year.



School Presence

— Christian groups active in local schools

544 High schools nationally

17% With an active Christian group

22% Of existing groups include outreach as a goal

~25 Out of 544 schools nationally have a group planning for outreach

If only 17% of our 544 high schools have an active Christian group, 4 out of 5 do not. Furthermore, 44% of existing groups meet occasionally — leaving only 10% of all schools with a group that meets regularly. Regularity will be vital to momentum and outcomes.

Then consider that, of the groups that exist, only 22% include outreach as an intentional goal. As a result, only about 25 schools have students united with vision to actively catalyse spiritual conversation. This is not enough.

Equipping youth for outreach is a natural starting point — the 100% correlation between 3+ weeks equipping and school group awareness shows that equipped youth take initiative among their peers. The 49% of youth leaders already aware of a local school group are well placed to provide the adult support these groups need to gain traction and sustain meaningful outcomes.

While it is rare that a young person chooses faith while at school, conversations that start in schools often continue in youth groups. This is a vital part of the equation.

SOLUTION

Youth encouraged and helped to UNITE in every high school — gathering weekly, PRAYING about what they might DO together to catalyse spiritual conversations and interest.

Toward a simple and sensible vision:

The below statement was put together by the national youth leaders roundtable who sit behind this study. It states, in simple terms, a goal that none of us could achieve alone, that we could work toward and potentially achieve together.



A shared vision

“Every young person in Aotearoa-New Zealand encountering the love, hope and teaching of Jesus through a conversation with or invitation from a friend?”



Leader Connection

— How youth leaders relate, gather and collaborate

48% Connect with other leaders locally

20% Meet 6+ times per year

2x School group connection vs non-meeting leaders

2x Regular events if leaders meet 6+ times per year

While 48% of youth leaders say they meet with other youth leaders locally, for many this is just an occasional coffee with a friend. There is little intentionality. Only 20% meet 6+ times annually — while these leaders are twice as connected to school groups and twice as likely to have regular combined events. If meeting in a private location over food, their hearts will naturally unite to pray — from which vision, planning and action naturally follow. (Unity – Pray – Do.)

SOLUTION

Youth leaders gathering 2x per school term in every city and town with a high school — over food, in a private location.



Shared events

— Combined youth events across churches

85% Connect with a combined event annually

16% Of those events are gospel-focused

67% Connect to no outreach events per year

2x Regular events if leaders meet 6+ times per year

While 85% participate in combined events, only 16% are gospel-focused. With 33% connected to 1+ outreach event annually, this means two-thirds are connected to none. This is a not good.

Yet youth leaders who met more than once a term were twice as likely to run more than 3 combined events annually. Regular youth leader unity is a clear lever for change.

Focused, creative, gospel-centred events still connect meaningfully with young people. Most youth leaders today have never seen one modelled. This is a hurdle to be overcome. Total youth ministry reach might greatly benefit from a restored culture of combined youth outreach events.

SOLUTION

4+ united events annually in every city and town — at least half with a clear gospel focus.

Conclusion: Four practical ways forward

To achieve the stated vision (giving every youth an opportunity to know Jesus), a culture of outreach would need restoring to Christian youth ministry nationwide.

1. Equip all youth annually for spiritual conversations

3+ weeks of focus annually — imparting conversational, storytelling and gospel skills — so mission impossible becomes mission possible for every young person.

Goal: 100% of youth groups equipping every year.

2. Encourage and support youth unity in schools

3+ weeks of focus on equipping annually has an 100% correlation to school groups. 49% of leaders are connected to school groups, so the giving of needed encouragement and some basic directional support is possible — including conversational, storytelling and gospel skills — so mission impossible becomes mission possible for every young person.

Goal: A group in every high school, meeting weekly – to pray and plan, with the goal of catalysing spiritual conversations and interest.

3. Support youth leader unity in every city and town

Data evidences a correlation between regular meetings and outcomes. Meeting over food, twice per term, in a private location positions leaders to pray about how they might best reach out to all youth. Fresh vision, planning and action will naturally follow.

Goal: A youth leaders gathering, twice per term, in every city and town with a high school.

4. A restored habit of united outreach events

A crowd attracts a crowd. Youth events still work to gather crowds, creating a communication opportunity.

Goal: 4+ combined events annually in every city and town with a high school, at least half of which have a clear gospel focus.

A call to unity: No single church, denomination, youth organisation, church, pastor or youth leader could turn the current state of youth outreach around — while together we could.

A call to priority-action: With about 85% of those who come to faith doing so before age 20, and the majority from non-church homes choosing the faith in their early teen years, a weakness in youth outreach is not merely a youth ministry issue. This is a church issue. Leaders of all ages must take responsibility and act on what are, in fact, simple and achievable solutions.

FULL REPORT
Complete findings PDF

SUMMARY REPORT
Online here

FULL VIDEO
53 minute presentation

VIDEO SUMMARY
11 minute overview