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**Committee** Environment  
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## **Take Care Programme Evaluation**

### **1. Purpose**

To provide a summary of the independent evaluation of the *Take Care* community environmental care programme.

### **2. Strategic Context**

Care group projects contribute to five elements from the Council's ten-year plan "Towards a Sustainable Region". These are - Community, Biodiversity, Water, Land, and Recreation & Parks.

### **3. Background**

The *Take Care* programme has now been running for five years. To date, 38 groups have received funding and other support from the Council. Given this length of time, it is appropriate to review the programme to assess how well it's educational, social and communication goals are being met. The information gained can be used to improve and fine tune the programme and also assist in planning for the future. The evaluation does not consider the ecological effectiveness of the groups' restoration activities. Our intention is to examine this aspect later in the year.

The Council's environmental education strategy "A Better Environment" (1999) gave rise to *Take Care* and it sets out a number of aims and expectations for the programme. In addition to improving the health of ecosystems, it was intended that *Take Care* achieve a number of educational and social outcomes, and that it serve as a mechanism for connecting the Council with the community and communicating our environmental messages.

The major outcomes the education strategy set for *Take Care* are that:

- People have an enhanced awareness of their impact on the environment and a greater sense of responsibility for it.
- People develop the skills and attitudes to play their part in solving environmental problems.
- People are enabled to actively participate in caring for the environment.
- Groups become self supporting so that their environmental activities can continue beyond their period of support from Greater Wellington.
- There is increased community cohesion, pride, and sense of ownership (and/or other related social benefits).
- People's trust in and support for Greater Wellington increases.
- There are greater opportunities for Councillors and Council staff to connect with the community.

This evaluation set out to determine how well these outcomes were being met. We also took the opportunity to question the groups about the programme generally and assess their satisfaction with the level of resources and support we provide.

#### **4. Method**

The evaluation was carried out by an independent consultant. Groups from Kapiti, Porirua, Wellington-Hutt and Wairarapa were randomly selected in proportion to the numbers funded in those areas. Thirty-three key members of new, well established and previously funded care groups were interviewed. The sample interviewed included members from 71% of all groups we have or are still working with.

#### **5. Findings**

The findings are summarised below according to the outcomes to which they relate. Selected responses from participants are included to illustrate the points made.

##### **5.1 Awareness of the environment**

Sixty-eight per cent of respondents reported that their overall environmental awareness had increased because of their participation in the programme. People said they were more aware of the causes of the environmental problem their project addressed (i.e. the impacts of people and vehicles on the environment, problems caused by roads, earthworks, sedimentation, and introduced plants).

## 5.2 Sense of responsibility

When asked whether their involvement had changed the way they felt about the environment, just under half of the respondents said they did feel differently. Many of the comments reflect feelings of a greater sense of responsibility.

*“I now consider myself a guardian of the environment.”*

*“I see the stream as part of Ngaio’s identity.”*

*“[It] has firmed my thoughts that even though these places are the responsibility of [Councils], they require community input. The Councils don’t have enough resource to do it themselves.”*

## 5.3 Skills, attitudes, and behaviour

Ninety three per cent of respondents mentioned gaining new skills and knowledge through their involvement in their projects. Many people described practical restoration skills including plant identification and propagation, or a better understanding of their area of work, e.g., dunes and wetlands. Other skills related to changing people’s way of thinking and working with others. The written resources were also well received.

*“We’ve been put in touch with publications made by Greater Wellington – ‘Mind the Stream’, ‘Restoration planting’ and ‘Controlling problem weeds in riparian zones’ – I have learned the value of this information”.*

Council staff also notice a considerable increase in the skills and knowledge of group, along with growing confidence in how to tackle environmental issues.

Nearly all of the respondents reported talking to their friends and families about their work, and a few had given formal talks on their group’s projects. Most said new people came along as a result. Sixty five per cent said they had seen changes in the attitudes of others toward the environment.

Forty-six per cent said their own behaviour had changed. In order of number of mentions, these changes were: “greening” their gardens (putting in natives and being vigilant about weeds); increased civic involvement (more lobbying and submission writing); more volunteer work (primarily environmental projects); educating children and others; and being careful to prevent stormwater pollution.

## 5.4 Providing the means and opportunity for people to participate in environmental restoration

Most of the groups that have taken up *Take Care* funds were in existence before they did so. *Take Care* was a factor in only 17% of groups starting up. However, around half of the members of the groups had not been involved in an environmentally focused group before, demonstrating the programme is drawing “new” people into restoration activity.

The data collected on group membership appears to show an overall increase in member numbers between project start up and the current time. Two thirds of groups thought that the Council's funding and support had influenced group membership numbers, saying funds and staff support bring in new members, enable larger planting events to be held, and provide a degree of organisation that attracts additional helpers. It would seem that most groups have a core of active members which remains constant or grows slightly over time but that Council support has enabled more frequent and effective major events.

Respondents found it hard to quantify the extent of their community's participation. Volunteer estimates of their individual time commitment varied between five hours and 100 hours per month. Very few groups have a clear idea of their overall membership (as the numbers attending their activities vary) or of the numbers of hours they give to their restoration activities.

### **5.5 Groups become self-supporting**

Most groups access funds separate from the Council to a greater or lesser extent, but for 40% of them, *Take Care* funds make up less than half of their income. About three quarters of the groups still being funded indicated that they intend continuing with their projects after Greater Wellington funding ceases.

### **5.6 Community pride and sense of ownership**

A very high proportion of respondents (96%) reported seeing changes in their community since their project began, with 83% indicating they felt that their project had affected the sense of community. Community changes cited most frequently were greater awareness, ownership, collaborative action, knowledge of environmental planning processes, and a better appreciation by Councils of community environmental assets.

*"This project has brought the community together. People are meeting and getting to know their neighbours. I saw this especially at the recent planting day."*

*"People are pleased the dune has been saved – they are now more aware of it".*

### **5.7 Trust and support for Greater Wellington**

Eighty six per cent of respondents had changed their impression of Greater Wellington since their involvement with *Take Care*, the vast majority having a better impression of the Council than in the past.

*"I think it's great that they have an interest in conservation – I thought they were only interested in roads and transport, I didn't know they were involved in environmental issues too."*

Many respondents had praise for the staff they worked with. They were seen as approachable, knowledgeable and committed to helping the group.

Councillor involvement was also warmly appreciated. Eighty six per cent believed that their contribution was valued by the Council. People liked the fact that the Council supported their particular community.

*“Giving us funding is a demonstration that they put value on our activities”.*

A large number said their impression was more favourable now they understood what the Council does. A small number of negative comments arose about perceived inconsistency between support for care groups and other parts of the Council managing people’s use of the environment (e.g., consent granting).

## **5.8 Opportunities for Greater Wellington to connect with the community**

Most groups reported having more contact with Greater Wellington since beginning their project. The primary point of contact was usually the staff member who facilitated the group. One quarter of the groups interviewed are or were involved in other activities supported or funded by Greater Wellington.

## **5.9 Satisfaction with resources and support**

The final set of questions sought to find out whether groups were happy with the resources available to them. A significant majority thought the overall level of support for their project was sufficient or very good, while 30% considered it “not quite enough”. Some respondents felt the way we manage their expenditure was not as transparent or flexible as they would like. A few also raised concerns about the “changeover” when their staff co-ordinator changed.

Other recommendations for improvement from the interviewees were to:

- Provide more publicity for group activities;
- Grant additional funds to groups who could use them in any year and for groups wanting another five years of funding;
- Help groups communicate with and support each other;
- Produce a management plan prior to work commencing;
- Do more monitoring of results so that affected or neighbouring landowners can see what’s happening;
- Provide more plants, of a better quality, more cheaply.
- Produce a “how to” guide for new groups.
- Provide an annual spreadsheet so funds can be tracked.

## 6. Conclusion

It is clear from this evaluation that *Take Care* is delivering on its expected educational and social outcomes. It is providing the means for more people to be involved in environmental restoration activities and creating a pool of skilled and confident people. Take Care's money, advice, and expertise provides the bedrock that the committed members of groups can use to leverage greater participation and impact in their local areas. Respondents indicated they are changing the way they live in the environment and their activities are increasing awareness in their communities. People's trust in and support for Greater Wellington has increased and there are many more opportunities for the Council to connect with the community.

While the overall approval for the programme is high, the evaluation has highlighted some concerns and suggestions for improvement. We will do our best to meet these criticisms and improve our service to our customers.

## 7. Communication

This evaluation is essentially an internal document, commissioned to provide information to improve the programme and its delivery. Copies will be made available to current groups and others who require them. The report shows that for most people participation in a care group is an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Given this, it would be appropriate to produce a summary article based on this evaluation to help promote the programme. At present the consultant's report is available only in a draft format. A copy of the final report will be placed in the Councillors' lounge shortly or supplied to Councillors on request.

## 8. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. *Receives the report; and*
2. *Notes the content.*

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