



**COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT  
EVALUATION  
RESEARCH**

A community development assessment of strengths, aspirations, needs and opportunities of the community sector of Waitakere

**FRAMING OUR SECTOR**

**Community Waitakere**

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Community Waitakere has a vision for a sustainable Waitakere with thriving, connected communities.

Community Waitakere is a community development organisation committed to achieving strong, dynamic, sustainable community and voluntary sectors in Waitakere. Community Waitakere strengthens the links between community groups, organisations, businesses, government and individuals by promoting and modelling collaboration and partnering, enhancing networking and communication, developing projects and helping to foster collective visions of positive change in Waitakere.

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To all the respondents who contributed their time, their voices and their energy in the providing of information for this research, a huge thank you. Without your input this stage of the project would have lacked depth and breadth and would have been impossible. My hope is that this final document contributes in some way to the fulfilment of the aspirations that you all hold for the communities with which you work.

## SUMMARY

This report is based on the findings from a Waitakere community strengths, aspirations needs, and opportunities assessment conducted by Community Waitakere between October 2012 and March 2013. The research was funded by the Lottery Community Sector Research Committee and represented the third stage of a wider research and evaluation project. This research was initiated by Community Waitakere and received guided by a Research Advisory Group comprised of experienced community researchers and an academic from Unitec.

In total 162 individuals provided input to this research. These individuals represented the perspectives of over 74 distinct organisations and the communities with which they engage. This assessment began with the premise that community organisation have knowledge about what works and what does not work within their specific communities and that they are uniquely placed to give voice to the aspirations latent within.

A reworked Appreciative Inquiry 4 D cycle provided the guiding framework, and philosophical underpinnings, to this community assessment.<sup>1</sup> This approach begins with a focus on strengths and current enablers to successful community development interventions. It seeks to build upon these strengths as participant articulate a vision of future directions and emergent aspirations. This approach was mindful and respectful of the way that language constructs and shapes possibilities. Allowing organisation involved within the community sector to use their own language allowed for authentic perspectives to be articulated and often quiet voices to be amplified and released.

A number of **strengths** were expressed by the various organisations that contributed to this assessment. Central was an articulation of the significant contribution made by the people involved in working (both paid and unpaid) within this space. Weight was also given to the strengths of the existing networks with the community sector of Waitakere.

A number of respondents spoke of the support (both formal and informal) that organisation give to each other. This relates to the often mentioned strength of what is termed “the Waitakere way”, an approach to relationships based on reciprocity, inclusivity and collaboration. Support as a strength was also mentioned in relation to local government, and the way it has provided guidance and leadership within this sector.

When given the space to express **aspirations** a number of organisations expressed the desire to have stability within this sector through security of funding (indeed few respondents did not speak of adequate funding as a goal). While this can also be framed as a need, it was interesting to note that many organisation positioned financial independence, or a more partnered interdependence, as not only a requirement, but also as a goal to work towards. A number of respondents also spoke of better inter-sectorial collaboration as a hoped for future goal.

Other aspirations of significance included a growth in recognition (for those external to the sector) of the significance of community development as a method of community engagement. Related to this was the aspiration that organisations within this sector become better at describing what they do. Importantly, becoming more inclusive and having greater “grass roots” connection was described as an aspiration.

Missing elements that were reported included adequate representation of and by the diverse population groupings within Waitakere. A common language to describe community development ideas, practices and principles was positioned as missing and necessary within the sector. Leadership (including specific individuals to lead) was also articulated by a number of respondents as in **need** of

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<sup>1</sup> For a good summary of this approach to assessment and evaluation see, Community Waitakere. (2012). *A literature review of evaluation methods and methodologies*. Waitakere: Community Waitakere.

further development. This was described by respondents as a lack of leadership within the sector as a whole, within specific organisations, and as having insufficient mechanisms for the identification of leadership within communities (i.e. at the neighbourhood level).

**Opportunities** identified by participants and respondents to this assessment were myriad and diverse. Opportunities including specific roles (e.g. to address perceived current gaps) such as strategic broker(s) and connectors. Opportunities were also positioned more broadly as ones relating to skills development, funding and evaluation support. Unarticulated opportunities can be inferred from the previous discussions of strengths, aspirations and need. It is hoped that this document provides the necessary information for subsequent analysis to occur by the reader.

## WHY WE DID THIS RESEARCH: Aims and significance

This is stage 3 of a wider project focused on community development evaluation and research.<sup>2</sup> This project emerged from an on-going conversation about the importance of robust evaluation processes that capture and report on the work within the community sector.

This stage represents the outward and forward looking component of this research project. It seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of the Waitakere community sector's perceptions on what currently supports its work, what the sector aspires to achieve, what the sector needs to implement these objectives and subsequently the current opportunities to either capitalise on existing strengths or to minimise/ remove barriers to successful community development.

This research has the dual intention of providing advice and guidance to Community Waitakere's own strategic direction and of providing a valuable community resource for the Waitakere community sector. This first purpose aligns with Community Waitakere's focus area of maintaining operational strength and the second with an on-going commitment to provide leadership within the community sector.

The goal of the research and subsequent analysis was to collectively identify **with** community sector organisations, the strengths, aspirations, needs and opportunities within the community sector.

Aims included:

- To investigate the strengths (enablers and enabling factors) within the work of the community sector.
- To explore the aspirations of the community sector within Waitakere.
- To identified missing elements and needs (disenablers and disabling factors) within the community sector.
- To identify tasks, roles and functions that Community Waitakere, or others, could further provide, to support the mahi (work) of this sector.
- To identify areas of focus for future work, in particular highly aspirational ideas that focused on improvements in community and social wellbeing.
- To share this information as a community resource.

Communities are dynamic and consistently evolving; and there have recently been many changes to Waitakere's social, economic, and political environment. It is timely therefore to (re)explore with the community what work needs to be done in the future and what support people need to do it.

This research is intended to help inform Community Waitakere's mahi and future strategy and will also be **available as a resource for the community sector**.

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<sup>2</sup> Research findings from Stage 1 and Stage 2 may be found here, <http://www.communitywaitakere.org.nz/ourwork/community-development/research-project>

## WHAT GUIDED THIS RESEARCH: Methodology

Community development assessments can take many forms and can focus on a number of factors within any given community. Factors such as strengths, needs and aspirations are often interrelated and have influence on each other.<sup>i</sup> It was, therefore, a conscious decision to choose an approach to this assessment that took into account the inter-weaving of these elements, accepting their mutuality, and designing an approach that did not attempt a permanent division.

Often a distinction is made between conventional needs-based community development and the alternative asset-based approach<sup>ii</sup>.<sup>3</sup> Assessment, under this typology, would privilege one lens of assessment over the other. In the current literature this second focus, 'asset based' is the lens of choice for many<sup>4</sup>. Within this perspective, it is argued, by focusing on 'assets' the community as a whole will see its own positive aspects and be better able to develop these assets further.<sup>iii</sup>

Asset Based Community Development with the context of Aotearoa New Zealand has recently been subject to robust critique. Loomis, for example, has highlighted what he terms a "false dichotomy between the deficits and strengths approaches".<sup>iv</sup> This is a dichotomy that has "...misled many community development practitioners and community leaders into avoiding any serious consideration of community needs and or problem".<sup>v</sup>

Communities (and community organisations) do have needs. This however should not be confused with 'neediness', but rather as an opportunity to discuss, investigate and examine the missing elements within community development work and within the community development space.<sup>5</sup> By beginning with a clear description of current strengths, permission is given to collectively identify the obstacles to further success.

Community development assessment requires the input of as many groups as possible. A central function of a community assessment (needs, aspiration or otherwise) is to allow the community concerned to feed into this process. Toward this end multiple methods and collaborative approaches need to be considered and made available to the communities with which we engage.

A reworked Appreciative Inquiry (AI) 4 D cycle provided the guiding framework, and much of the philosophical underpinnings, to this community assessment.<sup>vi</sup> The 4 Ds of AI; Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny, were merged with a traditional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. This created a new model of discovery SANO (Strengths, Aspirations, Needs and Opportunities).

The SANO<sup>6</sup> model we begins with a recognition of the strengths that currently support the mahi of community sector organisations. From this foundation organisations were asked to dream and imagine future areas of work, (free from any present constraints). The next step was to collectively identify barriers to greater impact and/or barriers (including needs) to actioning the organisation's aspirations.

The sequence of this model asserts that an identification of what works, where organisations hope to be, and what stands in the way, leads to the consideration of multiple, diverse and innovative

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<sup>3</sup> Also known as deficit versus strengths based.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Block & McKnight.

<sup>5</sup> Community development literature confirms that communities are often drawn together by crisis, problems and needs. The research position taken by this researcher is that it continues to be necessary for us to research and explore both the internal and external processes that contribute to the persistence of social issues. This however should not be thought of as the destination of an assessment but rather as the starting point for an on-going conversation about possible innovative solutions. Solutions that may indeed reside outside of issue saturated narratives.

<sup>6</sup> Sano in Latin translates to health. As in the saying *Mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body). The use of SANO as acronym aligns with a perspective that is interested in extending wellbeing across the micro to macro divide and a perspective that seeks an exploration of holistic contexts.

opportunities. These are opportunities to capitalise on what works, minimise challenges and work with greater clarity towards the operationalization of aspirational areas of work.

The work of this sector does not occur in a vacuum. As such, issues pertaining to the current socio-political context need to be understood as inextricably interwoven with and within the responses to this assessment. This 'in context' perspective acknowledges that social "realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts".<sup>vii</sup>

## HOW WE DID THIS RESEARCH: Data collection methods

In total 162 individuals spoke to this research representing the perspectives of over 74 distinct organisations and the communities with which they engage. This research started with the belief that community organisation have knowledge about what works and what does not work within their specific communities (of interest, of location, of service provision etc.) and that they are uniquely placed to give voice to the aspirations latent within.

Quantitative data (including demographic analysis) was utilised to understand the diverse make up of this sectors population base. In the main, this research has primarily utilised qualitative methods.

This included data collected at two community Hui, 6 focus groups, and 5 targeted individual semi-structured interviews. For methodological integrity a common framework was utilised to guide each different process.

Questions were guided by the SANO framework, exploring strengths, aspirations, needs and opportunities. Typically, each element was explored in sequence with responses clarified and then recorded verbatim.

As the researcher acted as an intermediary between the spoken word and the recorded information, reflective questioning was a key component of this process.<sup>7</sup> This is a collaborative approach to information generation, one that is interested in capturing rich information, and one that seeks to reflect the language of participants.

With large groups ideas and conversation fragments were recorded on a whiteboard, and then photographed, other groups utilised large pieces of paper, and individual interviews were hand recorded. All information was later transcribed for further analysis.

The information generated from this assessment was analysed in 3 main stages.<sup>viii</sup> First **data reduction** was employed, both in-situ (i.e. as it was generated) and through a process of summarisation. Second, **data organisation** occurred, utilising emergent themes from within the various responses. Finally **data interpretation** utilised the resulting patterned data in order to further explore links and relationships between various thematic groupings. The SANO framework was again employed to (re)organise responses into the appropriate sections of inquiry.

In recognition of this multi layered approach to analysis the findings section is divided into **two main parts**. The justification and intention of this is to reflect as greater transparency of process as possible and the understanding that readers will be interested in different levels of analysis.

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<sup>7</sup> Reflective questioning, following Lee & Barnet, "...is a technique in which one person prepares and asks questions that are designed to provide opportunities for the respondent to explore his or her knowledge, skill, experience, attitudes, beliefs and values...reflective questioning encourages the respondent to explore his or her own thinking; it is not intended to direct the respondent to a conclusion pre-determined by the questioner" (1994, p.17).

## LIMITATIONS

The process to complete this strengths, aspirations, needs and opportunity assessment was a robust one. This said, it should also be acknowledged that any such assessment has inherent limitations. First and foremost are issues concerning the generalisations that may be inferred from such an assessment. It is important to recognise that this assessment occurred in a particular place, at a particular time, under particular conditions and circumstances. To generalise from this context to another would therefore be problematic and is not recommended.

Arguably of equal importance is that this assessment captured the views and perspectives of a particular section of Waitakere's community sector. While every attempt was made to engage with as diverse and as representative cohort as possible (i.e. one that reflected the diverse demographic characteristics found within the research area) the input of certain sections of this population group was underdeveloped. The voice of tangata whenua is one area that was not sufficiently represented. This assessment should therefore not be viewed as representing the whole of Waitakere's community sector.

Limitations concerning methods are also important to note. In this assessment an initial attempt was made to broaden the input mechanisms through the utilisation of quick response generation devices. One such method was a 3 question postcard, designed to be returned, at respondent's conveyance, for subsequent analysis. This method generated minimal responses (i.e. in numbers of returned postcards) and minimal data (i.e. in terms of richness of information).

Steps to mitigate limitations were an important component of the design and method of this assessment. Some of these evolved and developed as the process of data capture continued. For example, open forums, where attendees were invited, were an initial way of enrolling responses to this assessment. While these provided much rich information, it became obvious that this mechanism of engagement needed to be supported and strengthened by a process of 'going to' potential respondents. This increased the response to the assessment and also increased the diversity of responders. 'Shoulder tapping' was also used to increase the input of specific groups.

## DATA ORGANISATION: thematic analysis.

*The data collected from all sources was merged into a single document sub-headed by the broad categories of strengths, aspirations, needs, and opportunities. Each section was then analysed for possible thematic groupings of words, ideas and concepts. From this analysis (data organisation) the themes of **Brokerage, Evaluation, Funding, Community Development, Leadership, and Diversity** emerged. While these themes are mainly intended to provide a guiding<sup>8</sup> framework for subsequent analysis, they are included here for any potential utility they may provide.*

### Theme one: Brokerage

#### *Facilitating connection*

#### **Strengths**

- The existing networks within Waitakere (including networking meetings) were positioned by a number of respondents as a particular strength of this area. Being able to “meet with other organisations” and the “information sharing” that were facilitated by these networks was seen as an important mechanism that supports the work of community sector organisations.
- Relationships were mentioned multiple times as key enablers to successful community development work. The centrality of “good” relationships, “sustained” relationships “trusting” relationships was clearly indicated by the repeated use of this concept and through the expressed levels of agreement (e.g. within focus groups) when this term was articulated as an enabler.
- Coordination, in particular having someone fulfil this function was seen by many as an important part of enabling projects, initiatives, and other types of community and social service work. A number of examples were provided of how “good” coordination equated to successful outcomes. The particular qualities of a “good” coordinator or good coordination included facilitation skills, passion and inclusivity.

#### **Aspirations**

- In some areas of work coordination was positioned as a “becoming” element of current activities. In these areas better coordination was seen as something to work towards, as a stepping stone to future collaboration.
- Coordination between sectors (including local and national government, and the business sectors) was highlighted by some respondents as a particular aspiration. One suggestion put forward was a dedicated department (and associated brokers) within government to respond to and action this aspiration.
- Moving to a place of “genuine” relationship (i.e. high trust relationships) with stakeholders such as regional government was a goal that was articulated from some respondents.

#### **Needs**

- Communication, coordination and cohesion were all expressed as areas that would benefit from more focused attention (i.e. more communication, more coordination and more cohesion). These rather broad categories were often positioned as interrelated components of community development practice, with more of one category facilitating a strengthening of the other(s) (e.g. more communication equalling more cohesion). Coordination was the most often used term and can be seen as a central need with the community sector.

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<sup>8</sup> Following Davidson & Tollich (1999), the term guiding is used here rather than structuring, “the word guide... implies flexibility and indicates that a qualitative researcher is always open to a changing emergent research problem” (1999, p.158).

- The absence of a “commonality of language” within this sector was positioned by a number of respondents as a disabling aspect of current practice. This was seen both within and between organisations and groups that operate within this sector, and between community sector organisations and certain parts of government (both local and national). A common language was seen as potentially allowing for a common understanding of a number of various aspects of practice; including a shared understanding of the principles that inform community development mahi (work), and a shared understanding of the proposed benefits of taking a “community development focus”.
- “Relationship” was a recurrent concept articulated by many respondents. Within this concept terms such as “genuine partnerships” “genuine relationships, were posited as missing elements of current activities. Most often the need was positioned as being one that would see increased partnerships between community organisation and local and central government. The idea that “relationships take time” was also voiced as a necessary consideration.

### **Opportunities**

- Coordinated approaches were clearly described as being necessary for future successful community initiatives and engagements. As a key enabler of these types of approaches certain roles and functions were also described. These included; “strategic broker”, “someone to hold the space between business and community organisations”, “connectors” and “catalysts”. These roles were suggested as being relatable to both individuals and, more broadly, as roles for specific organisations.
- The role(s)/function(s) of leaders and leadership were positioned as an opportunity, again for both individual practitioners and for organisations to provide. These “identifiers of opportunities”, “facilitators of opportunities” were suggested as currently “conspicuous by their absence” and therefore a vacuum to be filled.

## **Theme two: Evaluation**

### ***Measuring and demonstrating success.***

#### **Strengths**

- Evaluation within the community sector was not positioned as a particular strength. Current measurement methods and processes for demonstrating initiatives/projects/services and other community interventions are succeeding while viewed as necessary raised a number of points of contention; in particular in regards to whom organisations were accountable to and the most appropriate measures.
- Previous strengths and needs analysis that had occurred within some areas of work was seen as providing a stable foundation for future activities.

#### **Aspirations**

- Aspirations that can be themed under the heading of evaluation were diverse. Many of these aspirations, however, shared the similarity that in differing ways they all called for a paradigmatic shift in current approaches to evaluation. A primary focus on outcomes was highlighted as being the current requirement of many external stakeholders (including central government). While there was an acknowledgement this was a necessary component of evaluation, many respondents spoke of the need to also capture the process of community development activities. Here the importance of both process and product was clearly articulated as being interwoven within community development mahi; inseparable and of equal value.
- The desire to become “better at describing what we do” was also positioned as an aspiration. Common ways of measuring success were seen as an important goal to work toward and as enabling a more comprehensive understanding (both internally and externally) of the sectors activities.

- That support was available (both financially and as capacity building) was a wish expressed by some respondents.

### **Needs**

- Needs of community sector organisations in regards to evaluation reflected certain elements of the expressed aspirations. Again a shift in understanding how community development work is best measured (in particular by those external to the sector) was viewed as necessary. Respondents suggested this attitudinal adjustment would mean less emphasis being placed on quantitative outcome measures and more emphasis placed on qualitative methods of “data” capture at a process level. As one respondent framed this “when the journey is seen as more important than the destination”.
- “Better data capture” was also mentioned as needed, as was increased “risk analysis” and a “connection between needs identification and actual results”.

### **Opportunities**

- Profiling both the successes of various initiatives and more broadly profiling the organisations that are doing this mahi was positioned by a number of respondents as a current opportunity. The value of doing so was stated as highlighting hitherto unrecognised achievements and also in making visible much of the unpaid labour that contributes to and make possible this sectors work.
- Assistance with evaluation was articulated as an opportunity for either an individual role or as part of the function of a specific organisation. Capacity in the domain of evaluation was positioned by many as in need of building, and as such external support was a necessary and valuable role to be provided.

## **Theme three: Funding**

### ***Securing the necessary resources.***

#### **Strengths**

- The availability of financial resources, when sufficient, was positioned as a central enabler of community development activities. When funds were available for a known period of time (e.g. secured/assured funding for a 5 year period) many organisations reported having more certainty that success (in any given initiative) was more probable. Secure and adequate funding was positioned by respondents as enabling subsequent strengtheners to be possible (i.e. as a prerequisite for a more integrated process). For example secure funding was suggested as allowing for more robust strategic planning and quality staff retention.

#### **Aspirations**

- Funding (both adequate and secure) was the number one wish for the majority of organisations who responded to this assessment. This is memorably captured in one organisations wish, “it would be great if we had a money tree”. Other related aspirations included “[a] stop [to] unpredictable funding”, “long term funding”, “solid funder relationships” and “high trust relationships within funding contexts”.
- Arguably more pragmatic, some respondents spoke of the desire to see organisations “working with what we have got”, that “money was not a barrier to the imagination”, and a greater “sharing of resources (between organisations)”. These responses reflect some peoples acceptance of current constraints.
- Social enterprise was seen as a goal for a number of organisations and potentially as a way of ameliorating/working within the current funding context. One vision of the future saw the potential of having “social venture capital” available for new and innovative ways of responding to the generation of independent income streams.

## Needs

- Access to financial resources was a clearly stated need by many of the respondents to this assessment. There was, in many ways, a seemingly fatalistic acceptance of the current funding context with its manifest challenges.
- The equation of funding as more allowing time for better engagement was a recurrent feature of many organisations koreo. Respondents suggested, “realistic time frames from funders” were needed. That “relationships [with all stakeholders] take time”, and that “time is given; time to be comfortable with uncertainty” is necessary. This need for more time in which to enact specific programmes of work speaks to the often slow process(es) of community development activities, a feature many also suggested is necessary for successful outcome.

## Opportunities

- A number of organisations spoke of “self-funding” as an opportunity to be further explored (e.g. through more engagement with social enterprise and other non-grant dependant revenue streams).
- In relation to the current context of funding most respondents who mentioned funding (when asked about opportunities) suggested support, both as a specific role, and as an activity, would allow for better access to available funding.

## Theme four: Community development processes

### *Principles and practice*

*Community development as a theme is the broadest of themes generated within this assessment. It encapsulates respondents’ koreo about the importance of people and place. As well as the value of community development ways of working.*

## Strengths

- The existing networks and the support organisations give each other was positioned by many as a key enabler to successful community engagements. The variety of community sector organisations that work within the community development space was suggested as bringing together multiple knowledges and perspectives and allowing for creative solutions to emerge.
- The value of the “passionate people” that make this work occur was also noted as was the huge contribution made by the “hidden labour” of volunteers.
- When asked what was currently working well within the sector many spoke of the fantastic work that was occurring in communities of place. This focus on geographical area was seen as enabling multiple areas of concern to be addressed simultaneously.
- The principles that underpin community development approaches, including notions of “reciprocity”, “inclusivity”, “partnership”, and “collaboration” were strongly identified as strengthening elements of practice. The distinct way of working that has formed over time in west Auckland, the “Waitakere Way”<sup>9</sup> was also highlighted as a strong foundation of contemporary practice.

## Aspirations

- Closely linked to the identified strength of community development ways of working was the aspiration that others understand the significance and reality of this method of community engagement. The idea that others did not “get” community development was articulated in numerous ways and was seen as an on-going challenge. Central government in particular

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the Waitakere way see Community Waitakere (2013). *Retrospective impact analysis: Looking back to move forward*. Waitakere: Community Waitakere.

was identified as needing to understand the importance of community development as an approach and the hope for the future was that this would occur.

- Aspirations for communities included ones pertaining to individual members such as; more employment opportunities, access to health and a more equitable distribution of resources (e.g. housing, food). On the other end of this continuum respondents also spoke of the need to create society wide changes, including the creation of a more caring society and a society that was environmentally sustainable.
- Creating further, stronger, better links between community groups and residents was a clear goal for many organisations future activities. The statements, “that we get better at engaging with residents”, and “we need a grass roots focus” capture this sentiment well.
- Empowered people was a recurring aspiration interwoven within much of the respondents korero. The activation of empowerment (or the mechanisms from which activation would occur) was only minimally addressed by respondents. Links however could be made to the associated aspiration that decisions (and decision making processes) should be made “as close to the ground as possible” and that community groups work alongside residents.

#### **Needs**

- Decision making needing to happen “on the ground” or from a “bottom up” approach parallels some of the afore mentioned aspirations. Specifically “more ground work”, “more residents involved”, “more community representation” were all positioned as necessary for this to occur.
- Greater community representation was view by a number of respondents as negating the current lack of community input into the processes and outcome determination of some activities. “Releasing the voice of residents” was stated as needed to grow engagement, grow resident confidence, and grow future local leaders.

#### **Opportunities**

- The construction of more geographical hubs was seen by some respondents as an opportunity for the sector and as a way of further engaging with residents. This was stated as “creating more bumping places”, “with less formal settings” and thus “creating spaces for trust to emerge”. Linked to this was the opportunity to better utilise existing resources (e.g. local schools, local marae).
- Greater engagement between the community and business was voiced as a current opportunity for further development.
- Community economic developed was positioned as an emergent field of practice and as an opportunity for great organisational independence.
- Community development skills development was suggested by some as an opportunity area for growth. Equipping people with necessary technical skill and utilising technology better were both mentioned as areas that had opportunity for development.

## **Theme five: Leadership**

### ***Guiding the mahi of the sector***

#### **Strengths**

- Having the support of local government was positioned by a number of organisations as a key enabler of their current activities. “Guidance” and “leadership” were often used terms to describe the type of support that emanated from local council (including local boards).
- Strategic direction and clarity of vision was also viewed by respondents as an important component of successful community engagement. These features were described as currently being provided by a multiplicity of actors within the sector, including specific community development organisations (e.g. Community Waitakere and Lifewise).

### **Aspirations**

- A clearly articulated aspiration concerned having the capacity within the community sector for an organisation to emerge that could hold and grow ideas. This “seed bed” organisation would nurture leadership and focused on encouraging different forms of leadership.

### **Needs**

- Leadership was positioned by some respondents as a missing element within the community sector. This was described as a leadership lack both within organisations and having insufficient mechanisms for the identification of leadership within communities (at the neighbourhood level). At an organisational level this was, in part, linked to different and differing understanding of community development.
- Clarity and consistency of vision was also mentioned as sometimes missing within certain aspects of work. Again a stronger more directed approach was considered necessary.

### **Opportunities**

- More strategic approaches were suggested as a potential way to enhance and encourage leadership to emerge. Specific roles to facilitate greater strategy were not suggested but can be seen as a viable option.
- Many organisations spoke of the current “siloes” approach to social issues. A “de-silo-isation” (or a breaking down of existing divisions) of the wider community development space was suggested as necessary in order for cross sectorial leadership to emerge. At present, it was suggested, leadership occurs within isolated blocks and, for greater impact, needs a broadened focus.
- Increased clarity on roles and associated functions was suggested as one mechanism to allow clarity on who was responsible for specific elements of project progression.

## **Theme six: Diversity**

### ***The people in our neighbourhoods.***

### **Strengths**

- Demographic diversity within communities was positioned as a strength by many respondents. Successful initiatives were considered those that had attracted and retained engagement with diverse ethnicities, with youth and with peoples from divergent backgrounds. Cultural diversity, in particular was viewed by many as an unqualified positive and a goal for future engagements.

### **Aspirations**

- Greater connection with the diverse population groupings within Waitakere was an aspiration for a number of organisations. Greater understanding (cultural competence) from within organisations was articulated as a hoped for beginning within the suggestion that greater understanding leads to more inclusivity.

### **Needs**

- A greater connection between “mainstream” and Maori providers was suggested as needed within the sector.
- More multi-lingual practitioners were suggested as a way of further connecting with the diverse population base of Waitakere.
- Culturally responsive (and culturally appropriate) mechanisms of engagement were seen as lacking and in need of further development.
- A greater connection with youth was seen as an important focus for future activities.

## Opportunities

- A number of respondents spoke of the opportunities that exists to become more cultural competent. This included creating a space for education (community based) to occur, and more broadly that people are encouraged to recognise the diversity of the populations with which the sector engages.
- The centrality of the *Treaty of Waitangi*, as foundational to Aotearoa's bicultural society, was positioned by some respondents as providing an opportunity that needed further attention.



## PART TWO.

### DATA INTERPRETATION: Findings, explanations, and an exploration of emergent opportunities.

*The findings below utilise the SANO framework to regroup patterned information within a utility focused report. Presenting findings grouped under the headings of strengths, aspirations, needs and opportunities is intended to allow a quick and useful exploration of the main and central ideas captured within each section. This format is also intended to provide a guiding framework for subsequent and further interpretation.*

#### Strengths

*The reported enablers and enabling elements of current activities were myriad and diverse. These strengths demonstrate and can be interpreted as providing a solid foundation to on-going successful community engagements and future initiatives.*

The involvement of **“passionate people”** (both paid and unpaid) was identified as a key enabler for successful initiatives. Respondents commented on the huge contribution made by the “hidden labour” of volunteers, noting that often this support is voluntary in nature and can be seen as an unacknowledged cost of the work of this sector. Paid social practitioners were positioned, often, as the catalysts of/for action and for providing the stability and drive that was necessary to maintain forward momentum. They were also seen as providing the coordination component needed for a concentrated focus.

**Quality coordination** was seen by many as an important part of enabling projects, initiatives, and other types of community and social service work to succeed. A number of examples were provided of how “good” coordination equated to successful outcomes. The particular qualities of a “good” coordinator or good coordination included facilitation skills, inclusivity and the maintenance of strong relationships.

These relationships are supported by **the existing networks** within Waitakere (including networking meetings). These networks were positioned by a number of respondents as a particular strength of the sector, where being able to “meet with other organisations” and the “information sharing” that were facilitated by these networks provided an important mechanism of support.

The **support that organisations give each other** was positioned by many as a key enabler to successful community engagements. The variety of community sector organisations that work within the community development space was suggested as bring together multiple knowledges and perspectives and allowing for creative solutions to emerge.

The distinct way of working that has formed over time in West Auckland, referred to as **“the Waitakere way”** was highlighted as a strong foundation of contemporary practice. This concept includes certain practice principles such as “reciprocity”, “inclusivity”, “collaboration” and “partnership”, and also speaks to established and cherished supportive relationships.

**Existing relationships** were mentioned multiple times as key enablers to successful community development work. The centrality of “good” relationships, “sustained” relationships “trusting” relationships was clearly indicated by the repeated use of this concept and through the expressed levels of agreement (e.g. within focus groups) when this term was articulated as an enabler.

**The support of local government** (formerly Waitakere City Council, currently Auckland City Council) was positioned by a number of organisations as a key enabler of their current activities. This relationship included “guidance” and “leadership” as terms used to describe the type of support that emanated from council (including local boards).

**Specific community development organisations** (e.g. Community Waitakere and LifeWise) were positioned as strengthens of the sectors activities. Strategic direction and clarity of vision were elements that were suggested as emanating from such organisations.

**Demographic diversity** within communities was positioned as strength by many respondents. Successful initiatives were considered those that had attracted and retained engagement with diverse ethnicities, with youth and with peoples from divergent backgrounds. **Cultural diversity**, in particular was viewed by many as an unqualified positive and a goal for future engagements.

## Aspirations

*The hopes and dreams of community sector organisations are captured within this section of aspirations. The aspirations were diverse and ranged from “blue sky” thinking to the pragmatic. Funding (i.e. the sector aspires to have sufficient) dominated immediate responses to the posed “if you had one wish for your work” question used in data collection. With comments of funding aside individuals and organisations were asked to focus on aspirations independent of financial constraint. Here aspirations spanned the micro to macro divide and included aspirations for and on behalf of communities and aspirations that pertained more to the operation of organisational activity.*

**Funding** (both adequate and secure) was the number one wish for the majority of organisations who responded. This is memorably captured in one organisation’s wish, “it would be great if we had a money tree”. Other related aspirations included “[a] stop [to] unpredictable funding”, “long term funding”, “solid funder relationships” and “high trust relationships within funding contexts”.

Arguably more pragmatically, some respondents spoke of the desire to see organisations “working with what we have got”, that “**money was not a barrier to the imagination**”, and a greater “sharing of resources (between organisations)”. These responses reflect aspirations accepting of current constraints.

Aspirations for communities (i.e. individuals within neighbourhoods) included ones pertaining to individual member’s needs, such as, **more employment opportunities, access to health and a more equitable distribution of resources** (e.g. housing, food). On the other end of this continuum respondents also spoke of the need to create society wide changes, including the creation of **a more caring society** and a society that was **environmentally sustainable**.

Participants articulated organisational aspirations of behalf of their respective employers these included the creation of further, stronger, better links between community groups and residents. The statements, “**that we get better at engaging with residents**”, and “we need a grassroots focus” capture this sentiment well.

Greater connection with the diverse population groupings within Waitakere was an aspiration for a number of organisations. Greater understanding (cultural competence) from within organisations was articulated as a hoped for beginning; with the linked suggestion that greater understanding leads to **more inclusivity**.

Sectorial aspirations included the desire “**to become better at describing what we do**”. Common ways of measuring success were seen as an important goal to work toward and as enabling a more compressive understanding (both internally and externally) of the sectors activities. Many of these “evaluation aspirations” shared the similarity that, in differing ways, they all called for a paradigmatic shift in current approaches to the reporting and accounting of various initiatives. A primary focus on outcomes was highlighted as being the current requirement of many external stakeholders (including central government). While there was an acknowledgement this was necessary, many respondents spoke of the need to **capture the process of community development activities** as a goal. This highlights the importance of both process and product within community development mahi; inseparable and of equal value.

This is closely related to the aspiration **that others understand the significance and reality of community development as a method of community engagement**. The idea others did not “get” community development was articulated in numerous ways and was seen as an on-going organisational and sectorial challenge. Central government in particular was identified as needing to understand the importance of community development as an approach and the hope for the future was that this would occur.

More consistent **collaboration and coordination between sectors** (including local and national government, and the business sectors) was highlighted by some respondents as a particular aspiration.

**Growing social enterprise** was seen as a goal for a number of organisations and potentially as a way of ameliorating and working within the current funding context. One vision of the future saw the potential of having “social venture capital” available. This would allow for the generation of new and innovative ways of responding to the current funding context and growing independent income streams.

## Needs

*A conversation about the missing elements within the community sector (including the community sectors various activities) generated significant discussion and identified many current gaps. Respondents used the language of obstacles, barriers, challenges, disenablers and missing elements, to speak of the needs of and within the sector.*

**Access to financial resources** was a clearly stated 'need' by many of the respondents to this assessment. Adequate funding was positioned as a necessary component of successful initiatives (e.g. as it allows for greater long-term planning). There was however a seemingly fatalistic acceptance of the current funding context with its manifest challenges.

The need for **stable high trust relationships** were articulated by a number of respondents. Concepts such as "genuine partnerships" "genuine relationships, were posited as missing elements of current activities. In particular **relationships between community organisations and local and central government** were highlighted as currently needing further development.

The absence of a "**commonality of language**" within this sector was positioned by a number of respondents as a disempowering aspect of current practice. This was seen both within and between organisations and groups that operate within this sector, and between community sector organisations and certain parts of government (both local and national). A common language was seen as potentially allowing for a common understanding of a number of various aspects of practice; including a shared understanding of the principles that inform community development mahi, and a shared understanding of the proposed benefits of taking a "community development focus".

**Better data capture** was mentioned as a current challenge in need of redress. This was linked to a wider conversation about **evaluation**, profiling the work of the sector, and appropriate methods and measures of reporting on community based initiatives. In regards to methods, more acknowledgement of the value of qualitative "data" was argued by some respondents as necessary. Evaluation was also acknowledged as needing to be utility focused, rather than as solely a mechanism of accountability.

**Communication, coordination and cohesion** were all expressed as areas that would benefit from more focused attention (i.e. more communication, more coordination and more cohesion). These rather broad categories were often positioned as interrelated components of community development practice, with more of one category facilitating a strengthening of the other(s) (e.g. more communication equalling more cohesion). In most instances respondents spoke of these elements of practice in relation to the processes that occur between community organisations.

**Leadership** was positioned by some respondents as a missing element within the community sector. This was described as a lack of leadership both within organisations as well as having insufficient mechanisms for the identification of leadership within communities (at the neighbourhood level). At an organisational level this was, in part, linked to different and differing understanding of community development.

"**More community representation**" and a focus on "**bottom up**" processes was equated with greater community engagement, and best practice. "More residents involved", and "more ground work" were all positioned as enablers that were currently missing.

"**Representation**", specifically as related to the existing diversity within the communities that organisations engage with, was positioned by a number of respondents as currently inadequate. Culturally responsive (and culturally appropriate) mechanisms of engagement were seen as lacking and in need of further development. More multi-lingual practitioners were identified as needed as

was a greater engagement with youth. A greater connection between “mainstream” and Maori providers was suggested as required within the sector.

## Opportunities

*As a method of investigation SANO draws a logical, staged or stageable link between its component categories of inquiry. With a focus on what currently supports practice, an exploration of where organisations aspire to further engage, and with an investigation of current barriers, it illuminates a raft of emergent opportunities. In this assessment participants generated their own suggested opportunities based on their involvement with this process and inclusive of their own working knowledge of the sector. Opportunities detailed below should be seen as providing one interpretation of areas for further engagement; with the previous discussion(s) as providing the material for subsequent opportunity inference.*

More **strategic approaches** were suggested as a potential way to enhance and encourage leadership to emerge. Specific roles to facilitate greater strategy were not suggested but can be seen as an area for subsequent development.

**Coordinated approaches** were clearly described as being necessary for future successful community initiatives and engagements. As a key enabler of these types of approaches certain roles and functions were also described. These included; “strategic broker”, “connectors” and “catalysts”. These roles were suggested as being relatable to both individuals and, more broadly, as tasks for specific organisations.

Coordination was also positioned as an opportunity to (re)link specific areas of engagement with wider social issues. Here many respondents spoke of the limits imposed by the current “silo” approach to sectorial engagement. Again leadership was mentioned as occurring within, yet needed across, sectors.

The role(s)/function(s) of **leaders and leadership** were positioned as an opportunity, again for both individual practitioners and for organisations to provide. These “identifiers of opportunities”, “facilitators of opportunities” were suggested as currently “conspicuous by their absence” and therefore a vacuum to be filled. These roles would perhaps help to ameliorate issues of clarity and consistency of vision that was articulated as sometimes missing within certain aspects of work. Leadership would also maintain the stronger “more directed approach” that some considered as necessary. An associated aspiration concerned having the capacity within the community sector for an organisation to emerge that could hold and grow ideas. This “**seed bed**” organisation would be leadership nurturing and focused on encouraging different forms of leadership.

**Funding support** was positioned as an opportunity, both as a specific role, and as an activity that would allow for better access to available funding. For some organisations the process of applying for funding was positioned as a daunting prospect, while other organisations spoke of the need to become more aware of various funding opportunities. A number of organisations spoke of “self-funding” as an opportunity to be further explored (e.g. through more engagement with social enterprise and other non-grant dependant revenue streams).

**Community economic development** was positioned as an emergent field of practice and as an opportunity for great organisational independence. The role of “someone to hold the space between business and community organisations” was positioned as necessary to allow greater engagement between the community and business sectors.

**Evaluation support** (financial and as capacity building) was positioned as a current opportunity for further development. Evaluation within the community sector was not positioned as a particular strength and current measurement methods raised a number of points of contention; in particular in regards to whom organisations were accountable to, and the most appropriate methods of measurement (including what to measure). Assistance with evaluation was articulated as an opportunity for either an individual role or as part of the function of a specific organisation. This was

positioned as a capacity building role. Respondents spoke particularly of “getting better at describing what we do” and as allowing a greater profiling of the successes within the sector.

Community development **skills development** was suggested by some as an opportunity area for growth. Equipping people with necessary technical skill and utilising technology better were both mentioned as areas of opportunity for development.

The construction of **more geographical hubs** was seen by some respondents as an opportunity for the sector and as a way of further engaging with residents. Respondents described this as; “creating more bumping places”, “with less formal settings” and thus “creating spaces for trust to emerge”. Linked to this was the opportunity to better utilise existing resources (e.g. local schools, local marae).

**Engaging with the diverse population groupings within Waitakere** was positioned as a significant opportunity to further represent the interests of all sections of community. Specific roles and functions to address this opportunity were not articulated by respondents. Mechanisms of connection and processes of inclusion can however been seen as representing a current opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

This community strengths, aspirations, needs and opportunity assessment had a dual purpose. Firstly, it sought to provide information for Community Waitakere to utilise in its on-going commitment to achieve strong, dynamic, sustainable community and voluntary sectors in Waitakere.

Second, it is intended to provide a reflection of Waitakere's community organisation's understandings of what currently supports their activities, where they aspire to achieve, and what contextual elements may limit the realisation of these potentials.

This second purpose represents a capturing of local knowledge(s) and an articulation from those 'on the ground' of what works, what does not, and what is necessary to achieve greater impact and more successful community development activity.

The findings detailed above represent the collective responses from 162 individuals representing the perspectives of over 74 distinct organisations and the communities with which they engage. It is therefore a broad representation of the perspectives of the community sector within Waitakere.

The value of capturing a collective understanding of strengths, aspirations, needs and opportunities, reside in the way that each individual voice amplifies those with which it aligns. Community sector organisations engage with their respective "communities" on a day-to-day basis, and in doing so they form an expert understanding of the lived reality of the current practice context(s). The views they have offered to this assessment reflect an understanding generated from engaging with this mahi as it occurs.

In bringing together of the views of Waitakere's community sector organisations substantial weight is gained for future arguments for change. It is hoped that this assessment provides the opportunity for organisations to capitalise on this collection of knowledge as they assert the need for change within the communities with which they engage.

*Nā tō rourou nā taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi*

*With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive*

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