STORIES FROM

KIRIKIRIROA HAMILTON COMMUNITY HOUSES

SEPTEMBER 2019

Mā whero, mā pango ka oti ai te mahi

With red and black the work will be complete. Leaders and workers, different peoples and groups, cooperating and combining efforts to achieve their goals.

He aha te mea nui o te ao?
He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!

What is the most important thing in the world?
It is people! It is people! It is people!

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ABSTRACT

In *Stories from Kirikiriroa Hamilton Community Houses* (2019), members of the Poverty Action Waikato network interviewed seven community houses and community centres asking a series of questions as prompts to begin to unpack the stories of how each community house has developed over time and how their community has changed with them, how their localness is experienced, and identifying some of the unique value that they add to their community and in some cases have done so for generations.

Community houses are holders of incredible local knowledge and expertise that is invaluable in having credibility to speak to the structural issues and challenges that their communities experience. Their local expertise makes them ideal to respond to issues and organise communities around events, activities, and opportunities that present themselves. Community houses are flexible and creative with operational constraints and are constantly thinking ahead to how else they can grow and what gaps they could address. The sense of service to, and the feeling of ownership by the community is evidence of the importance that the community places on their respective community houses.

The stories shared in this report reflect the need for spaces and resources being made available to the community and that doing so has an immense positive impact. Community houses intervene early and build resilience over cups of tea, a phone call, access to a computer, by growing a feeling of belonging and connection, and by offering care-giving and community parenting, all activities that seem small but have huge potential in preventing stress and crisis. There is a need for more services and for greater funding of this work across the board. Community houses are by their nature neighbourhood-based and operate with broad inclusive mandates to be flexible and responsive to support their communities now and into the future.

STORIES FROM KIRIKIRIROA HAMILTON COMMUNITY HOUSES

The quotes featured throughout this report are from a mix of staff and volunteers at the various Kirikiriroa Hamilton community houses / community centres. These quotes are not attributed by name to any specific individual or community house intentionally. We support reading the report and quotes in the spirit of collegiality across the community houses and their unique but common experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Everyday across Kirikiriroa Hamilton a rich diversity of people interact with community houses and centres. These interactions themselves are as varied as the people making them. There are children attending an after school programme, families collecting a fruit and vegetable box of fresh produce at a discount thanks to them being bought in bulk, there are people needing assistance in navigating systems of welfare or budgeting, some people need advocacy services, some are attending a day programme run by one of the many third-party providers who makes use of a community house as a facility for hire, they might be new to the area and want to find out what services and activities are on offer, they might just be stopping in to collect some free food courtesy of Kaivolution (a local food rescue programme), or there to spend some time in conversation with their peers over a scone or cup of tea.

"To me a community needs a supermarket, gardens, it needs say a police station, a library, a courthouse, there is all this infrastructure that is needed, a pool, a playground, a school, but people often forget, it's really easy to forget a community centre. But I think having a community centre plonked down next to a playground, a skatepark, a major hub, really makes sense because it's that third space people have. You get off work and you want to talk to people or I want to help out, I want to meet someone, I want to do something that isn't sitting at home staring at four walls, it's not going to the pub, I might be religious or I might not be, people can bring their children, they can be gender diverse, they can be disabled, they can be anyone for anything for any reason within reason and they are all good to go."

It is difficult to talk about this research project in particular to people not from Kirikiriroa Hamilton. Community houses aren't a particular Hamilton phenomenon, yet when discussing this work with others, often they think a community house is a community accommodation provider, a night shelter, or a model of social housing, rather than as community centres, which seems to be more widely understood description. In this research project the authors have used the term 'community house' to refer to 'community houses', 'neighbourhood houses', and 'community centres' that were included in this research.

Consistent themes emerged from the conversations with the community houses. These were around being centres for connecting and relationship building, service to their communities, being safe welcoming places, being dynamic and flexible in changing with community needs and operational constraints, challenging structural issues, and being a backstop for people who are experiencing isolation, unemployment, poverty, or are in crisis.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

It is our understanding that the original impetus for this research project emerged from a community house network gathering with a desire to have research conducted across the Kirikiriroa Hamilton community houses to highlight the value that they offer their communities, and to the wider city.

Poverty Action Waikato is a regional advocacy and research project. Poverty Action Waikato aims to research and advocate for action to meet immediate social needs and to bring about necessary structural change over time. Since 2010 Poverty Action Waikato have produced reports detailing different aspects of poverty and inequality experienced in the Waikato community. The reports draw together stories of poverty from the social service sector with the relevant statistics, and provide a comprehensive picture of the ways in which poverty is experienced. Poverty Action Waikato is intentional in drawing attention to structural causes of poverty in our communities.

Our vision is: flourishing communities, valuing hauora, social justice, equity, and diversity. Our mission is that we will be bold and courageous in pursuit of our vision. We will engage with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and follow tikanga. We will challenge neoliberalism, connect with individuals and communities, research and inform through stories and statistics, discuss and debate, advocate with community to decision makers and each other, encourage and support participatory democracy, model inclusive language, we will support one another respecting our unity and diversity.

This project has been carried out primarily by Robert Moore with support from the Poverty Action Waikato network, including Dr Anna Casey-Cox, Scotty Cranwell, Joel Gilmore, Alice Denne, and Annabelle Newell.

Interviews were conducted with the following house and centres:

• Te Whare Kokonga Melville Community House
• Glenview Community Centre
• Te Whare o Te Ata Fairfield Community House
• Te Whare Takiwa o Pukete Pukete Neighbourhood House
• Waimarie Hamilton East Community House
• The Western Community Centre
• Enderley Park Community Centre

The interviews were typically with community centre staff. However, in one of the interviews people from the community also participated. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then returned to their respective research participants to allow them to confirm their accuracy and to allow them an opportunity to redact any comments that were made during the initial interview that for any reason they did not want to have appear in the published report.

The questions that guided our interviews were as follows:

- What is the history of your Community House; how was it established, what needs was it responding to, and has this changed over time?
- What do you see as the future needs of your community?
- What is the added value and impact of your Community House to your community?
- What is the added value of Community Houses to the wider city?
- What role do Community Houses play in their neighbourhoods?
- How are you suited to your local community needs?
- What is your relationship with other services/organisations, both locally and city-wide?
- How would you describe your work as contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals? (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/)

The transcription process was our first level of analysis because it required listening and re-listening to the stories that we were told. We noted down themes that became apparent to us as we listened to and typed up the transcripts and read them. The next step of our analysis involved highlighting sections of transcripts that related to the selected themes. These themes became the backbone writing up the first draft of the report.

LOCAL EXPRESSIONS OF GLOBAL GOALS

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of aims for the global community to work towards. These aims comprise of 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators, and cover a wide range of objectives such as poverty elimination, achieving gender equality and supporting economic growth (United Nations, 2015). New Zealand will contribute to and report on success in measuring achievement of the SDGs.

> " *I don't know about some of these big international ones, well I guess, but no, we're not addressing the fundamentals, the fundamentals are work, and housing, and people need work and housing, and if they have those that's a big big step.* "

The Sustainable Development Goals may seem big picture and top down but they can provide an useful framework for considering the bigger picture role of the flax roots work taking place at community houses everyday.

Because of their distinct and wide-ranging role within society, community houses therefore "have the potential to play a unique and important role in the process of implementing and monitoring progress towards meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals" (Thinyane, Goldkind, & Lam, p. 45). Poverty alleviation, food provision and quality education are three goals which form the basis of much of the work undertaken by community houses. The need for partnership is where community houses play a critical role as conduits between actors such as the Ministry of Social Development, Kaivolution providers, and anyone who comes to them needing support.

Poverty (SDG 1 - end poverty in all its forms everywhere) and inequality (SDG 10 - reduce inequality within and among countries) are big overarching structural issues that community houses see daily:

> *Well we look at it every day. It comes past our door every day. And we can only provide short term relief – actually it's structural change, and poverty in this area impacts on Te Tiriti, intergenerational challenges, and housing. Many of the people who live in this area do work, contrary to common belief, but don't earn enough money. So those are broader structural changes that are required to do that, and beyond the capability of our humble abode.*

> *Well can we just loop back to intergenerational change? Yeah, well you go over there. Something like the class system. Something like that, that you have to break. Not us, you. So we're stuck there. And there's this idea that there's a new class system developing. So there's the Western class system, and then there's a class system within the ethnic communities, but then there's a new class system developing, or perception of class developing, within Māori communities. So there's people who are connected to the money and growth and jobs and professionalism, and then the people who have struggled to access education. But the same pull yourself up by your bootstraps kind of unhelpful conversation, going if I can do it you can do it. Which is problematic and also contributes to that sense of hopelessness.*

Food is provided broadly in some form by all community houses (SGD 2 - end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture):

> *It's the same – all we can do is share kai when we receive it. We did investigate the possibility of building a community hāngi pit here, but Council regulations don't permit it. And Housing New Zealand.*

"Often when you are put in front of big goals you think about the enormity of those goals, and the delivery of those goals and for not-for-profit organisations having these goals set by probably people up there and don't take the time to go out and spray the weeds or whatever, they don't understand how you do it. The goals to them are very attainable and sometimes that are actually not that attainable. I think sometimes it is that we can contribute to those goals but not be able to tick it and say we solved hunger. But we have our kai cupboard which is about sharing food, we have our orchard, we have daily food for people, fruit and vege bags._

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Poverty and hunger go very close to each other… I mean to say, if you're in poverty, you're probably going to be hungry.

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It's cool to see cars just stop, somebody gets out grabs a lettuce then gets back in the car. Or all of a sudden we have a compost bin that someone donated, or somebody has left stakes, or sponsorship signage has been offered, so all the stuff about me keeping it clean and tidy and doing all the weeds and all the other benefits have come through having a community garden. Now we can celebrate Neighbour's Day with a community garden. And I get to taste great relishes and chutneys, I was always just worried about how it was going to look.

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There's a demand for accessible fruits and vegetables. Meat's great, but also fruits and vegetables are really popular, and if we could increase what we could supply in that area, then we would be able to have some meaningful change. But what people can afford to buy and what's actually supplied are different. It would be awesome to be able to move – our vision is to move this to food growing and local food autonomy, rather than the provision of, and building skills and knowledge. Because a lot of the old people living in the area have the skills and knowledge. A lot of the people who have resettled here, migrant communities, also have the skills and knowledge because they brought it with them. It's just what they did as well.

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There is a surprising amount of food produced in the area. So there's old fruit trees that still exists in some of the older streets, and they're shared. There's small community gardens – you can talk to those."

Education (SDG 4 - ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning) and gender equality (SDG 5 - achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) have also featured:

> *Education and professional development is about lifelong learning. Learning doesn't just stop once you finish school. We want to continue to learn and it's trying to instill some of those with the children that we have everyday. That they have got the lifelong skills to use a knife and fork. How to peel an apple.*

> *Traditionally we've held events around International Women's Day, although we didn't this year. Well, not traditionally. Over the last three years we've held two gender specific events based at women and girls. And they've been different to other events across the city, because they have had a particularly Māori focus I think, where St Pauls, Fairfield Intermediate leadership group, Fairfield College – the senior boys from those schools came to the breakfast, and prepared the breakfast, and waited on the girls and women who were speaking at the breakfast and participating in the breakfast. I remember being surprised the first time. But it was almost like the roles that were so gender specific, and tend to be really gender specific in this community, just had this big switch for the day. And it was an interesting way, and it highlighted how specified gender roles tend to be in this area.*

Community houses support a range of initiatives to localise and support community enterprises (SDG 12 - ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns) through local craft markets, expos, and fairs. Community houses are also helping people create CVs and assisting them to find employment, hosting information sessions on work-readiness and what things employers will find appealing (SDG 8 - promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all).

> *We lift people up to where we can. The digital divide for example, offering computers, free WIFI etc, if you don't have those but now you do thanks to this place.*

Access to community facilities is another big area of work for community houses, providing direct access at times, and advocating for a greater provision on basics like bathrooms and water (SGD 6- ensure access to water and sanitation for all). One house reported how they have an accessible bathroom and shower that can be accessed by the community.

> *Clean water, people who might need a shower. If you haven't got a home having a clean toilet and shower is good. Helping people with food. Helping people to get CVs. We can help with filling out forms, navigating government systems, getting people a little bit further. Holding people just a little bit until they're ready to go and reach that first bit.*

An awareness of environmental issues is also being reported in the community (SDG 13 - take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; SDG 14 - conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources).

> *We haven't had climate change conversations, not formally. It's there, and if you have the time to sit and listen with our old people, it's being talked about. But we haven't got any formal programs in that.*

> *There is conversation about - so there's heartbreak about the river and the streams. So when you talk to the old people in the area, they can tell you stories about the local streams, fishing in them and watercress, none of which exist any more in the local streams.*

A big role of community houses is building resiliency into the community, people have a place to turn to when things get tough, even if they don't want to have a kōrero or debrief they have a place to not be alone (SDG 11 - make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; SDG 16 - promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies):

> *Goal 11 I think we do that as community houses. We try to make people feel safe in their communities. We just took part in the White Ribbon march city-wide, we took the after school kids, so we had a pretty good number, we had about 110 of us going down the road. The weather didn't help. We got wet... Well you have to get them young, so getting those young people to come on that march and start to understand/ it's sowing the seed, and they'll remember, that's why they walked down the street / do you remember that time that we walked down with the police and we had all those banners and it was raining? What was that about? Oh yeah, that was about this.*

" *Talking to people. Especially older people who might be single or their partners have died, or young people who feel excluded from their current group. Just having a good place, where people come in and have a place.*

Well, we do have a relatively inclusive community I think, and like we touched on before, resilience means something different here. Safe? Yeah, safety means something different here too. How would you describe safety? It does mean something different here. It's getting on with your neighbours, regardless of who your neighbours are, or what they do, how unsafe your neighbours might be. / They did it in Glen Innes in Auckland, that's why. The perfect example. So they shut out all these Pasifikas but they didn't put them together. What they did was they stuck them in a street that had Russian, Chinese. The experience was actually quite successful actually, because it cut down a lot of the gang stuff that was going on in those streets, because they were getting moved out to different parts of Auckland. Instead of one area where they just boxed you in, just do whatever you want to do. Inner city was actually going out into those areas, that's why they had to change it. But yeah, love thy neighbour. / And shared resources. If there's six families in the street and all of them have children, then how do you pool the resources so these parents get a break for a couple of hours? Everyone feeds the kids - regardless of what house you came, from there's the kai there. The older kids are going to walk the younger kids to school. All of those things. So you get on because you can't afford to hire a babysitter. If you want to go to a meeting then you need your neighbour to look after the kids. Whether or not that's always safe is way out, because sometimes safety means making sure your benefit's going to come in, not the party at the neighbour's house. But there's the understanding that someone there is going to look after the kids.

No 16. That's almost just the core of what community houses are about. Picking people up at probably the lowest points in their lives, at risk of traps or a life of goodness knows what, but picking them up and putting them back onto that right track, to continue to contribute positively to our society. "

HISTORY AND BACKGROUNDS

The history of how each community house was established varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Some were developed out of individuals of that neighbourhood coming together with the desire to have a community space available. These community houses effectively started from scratch growing a committee or working group, and working for years to make their case and finally ended up with a facility. Others had similar beginnings with neighbourhood members coming together in response to a community facility being vacated and taking up the opportunity to make use of the space. Some had a more top down approach, with some clear needs being identified for their community which were sought to be addressed by having a community space. City Council, social services and other community organisations have also been instrumental in facilitating the process of bringing together community individuals and supporting them into operational centres.

There is an incredible wealth of knowledge in the staff and volunteers at the community houses. Some volunteers have been in relationship with their community house for over 20 years, some have even journeyed with their community house as it physically moved across the city and as the community house moved from one location to another, to another.

So I know it was established in 1998, a group of people kind of come together, I think they might have been from one of the local churches and stuff, came together and [they had] seen a need in the community for a community house. Council also had come on board as well and said there is a need for a community house.

Prior to it being a community centre it was a Salvation Army hall. So Council then bought it off the Salvation Army and then developed it, turned it into the activity centre, then the community at the time decided to buy the building from council, fundraised, and purchased it from Council for a minimal amount of money.

We came out of a survey undertaken by the University of Waikato that would have been back in 1985 I think from memory. We were considered an isolated community, nobody drove through the community, because it was at the end of Hamilton basically, everyone drove past, so we were isolated and there were no facilities, and schools didn't have halls at that time. In the early 80s we didn't even have phones out here. That was basically how the community house started - there was a group of interested people who got together and created a committee, and basically the journey started.

Haigh (2014) writes about the historic trends during the 1970s and 1980s which influenced understandings of community development. Haigh notes the work of Peter Harwood who in 1969 - while chair of the Auckland branch of social workers association - challenged the centralised and paternalistic nature of social welfare and called instead for "establishing community centres with services like citizens advice bureau (CABs), Plunket rooms (for mother and baby health care services), family guidance, legal services and general social facilities, b) coordination of statutory and voluntary social service agencies, c) improving urban planning to avoid the creation of new suburbs with no services, d) emphasis on meeting the needs of Māori and Pacific Island people who had recently migrated to Auckland" (Haigh, 2014, pp. 84). These centres were often established with the support of council community development staff but would often go on to have their own committees to oversee administration and management.

The Kirikiriroa Hamilton Community Houses occupy the full gambit of spaces, from quite literal houses turned community hubs, suburban halls, to bespoke purpose-built facilities. The space that a community house occupies is a significant determinant of the programmes and services that house can provide. Some community houses were established to respond to general socioeconomic-related issues in their geographic communities, or in response to a deficit in community facilities or services, others were established with broader aims, to serve broadly and respond in kind, and some developed over time by the community gathering to utilise a specific facility or venue that was made available or was being under-utilised at the time.

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> *Community houses don't have a specific agenda when they open, the brief is to serve the needs of your local community.*
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> *We're geographically based, we're not working to a particular brief of each community's needs or anything like that, we're there and we find out.*
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> *When you look at our after school care roll, it's approximately 100 children a day and you try and find a facility and we've looked. It [the roll] was at 140 two years ago. You try and find a facility that can house that many children, and you come up pretty empty unless you want to go for an industrial area, but then you have to go for resource consent and it becomes a very in depth process.*
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The volunteers, staff, and managers are often visible and known. But acknowledgement must be given to the volunteers who fill the governance roles with each community house or centre, the trust boards and committees. These are often extremely crucial roles in establishing and ensuring the longevity of the community houses.

> *It took quite a few years to establish it, there were two separate committees, the first one fell over and the second one got it going. They don't just spring up, there is years of planning and work behind the scenes before they do.*

Assessing what already exists in the community and what the available resources and assets are that can be utilised is a good first step in developing community projects. One community house was recently involved in discussions around establishing a new community house in a nearby neighbourhood, but the end of these discussions was to instead try and identify what projects would have a real point of difference and make an impact in the area and could be delivered effectively using existing community spaces, schools, churches, and halls for example, would be the best first step, instead of jumping into committing significant time and energy into servicing the financial and administrative constraints of building a new structure and managing a stand alone centre.

> *I think it's better than having another building, it's more about building the community rather than building a building. It's got to be community-led.*

There can be a struggle to find and develop a successful programme that works in the long-term and that can be leveraged off to enable capacity to develop other programmes and pieces of work.

> *We managed to secure just some easy funding from City Council, which would pay for the lease to City Council. And then as well won a couple of little things, just small things like an after-school thing three days a week, just a couple of little things. So that was going on for about a year or two, but nothing really kind of got off the ground.*

Some community houses have only existed at their current sites, while other community houses have relocated multiple times due to organisational and social infrastructure changes. For them there has been considerable work in finding and adjusting to new locations and facilities, but some instances of relocating have accommodated capacity increases.

> *We've had a bit of a checkered history of wandering around the neighbourhood. I think it was quite positive, because we shifted for some reasons, but the other reasons were actually growth.*

CUSTODIANS OF THE COMMONS

Community houses aren't just another service provider who happen to occupy a particular geographic location, they have a broader mandate to that geographic location and exercise strong relationships with their neighbourhood, community, and other networks and organisations nearby. Often their relationships and work extends to community facilities, gardens, sports facilities, playgrounds and parks, and community halls or spaces or venues that can be used.

Being custodians for public amenities in their areas, whether this is formal or informal, community houses become the first point of call for the public, both to use facilities and also to advocate when additional facilities are needed. Their work can include things like ensuring or providing access to bathrooms outside of business hours and drinking fountains. Community houses are also advocates for other core community amenities like green space.

One of the things that people have been really keen to do here is actually have access to water in our parks and facilities. A water fountain? There is nothing. All the kids are at the park all evening, but there is nothing. So it's an issue in the area, and one that we're working on. It's problematic.

We struggle for infrastructure, we can't even get a drinking fountain in the park outside.

I am predicting that a lot of the apartment complexes, there is no grass, there are no trees, there is no greenspace, and I think we will see the outcome of that, it's not good for people I believe to just be in concrete buildings like that unless they have access to green space.

When community houses function well and have close connections with community, they can help uphold mana, the obligations and respect that people have for themselves, for one another and for the public amenities and environment that they share.

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> *And the community's responded really well to actually having this really clear set of rules, like this is what we do and this is what you do and this is what we uphold. And that had fallen away over a couple of years, and that was evidenced by the amount of rubbish around the house, the kind of engagement with the house, in that it lacked being constructive...it didn't amplify the voices of the community, it didn't uphold anyone's mana. It was, if someone needed something it was got and that was it. So there was no broader work than that. The graffiti, vandalism, all of those things have dropped right off with the work around actually having a kaupapa and talking to it. It takes a lot of balls to do that. It really does. But sometimes you have to go on just to see what the response is. And normally it doesn't come straight away, but you notice it within a week - oh hell, no one's drawing on the walls anymore.*

Many community houses reported a trend of other services becoming centralised. While services and programmes are able to be centralised, the physical presence of community houses cannot. Centralising services may make services more accessible if they were otherwise constrained to only certain areas. But for people without transport, or for whom a trip to the city centre is too much, community houses offer an alternative. Currently, some services and programmes make themselves available and accessible to local communities by being delivered out of spaces at community houses, whereby community houses themselves are able to bridge the gap between local access and otherwise centralised services. Community houses enable the ongoing provision of localised services. However, despite being a gateway to a diverse array of programmes and services, community houses also face some accessibility challenges for people due to, for example, perceptions of 'being needy' and a desire to be anonymous.

> *We're convenient for many people, we're only just walking distance from their homes. For some people, I guess they feel like a community centre is not just specific. On the flipside, we know a lot of people feel like they don't want to walk into a community centre because they feel like that means you need something, that you're a needy person. I've had people upfront tell me that, but they're here for playgroup or something, but then people say to them, "why do you go to the community centre?" So they tell them they go to playgroup, and that person thinks it is just somewhere that people go to for help. Some people out there don't want to be seen affiliated with community centres because of what other people might think, but actually they are here to bring their kids to martial arts, they're here for zumba, they're here to get their drivers licence, they're here to sign up for a holiday programme.*

> *"What I find really frustrating is that a lot of services have become centralised, into the city, which doesn't make it easy for people who live in the community to make it into the CBD, to access budgeting, foodbanks, shelters, and the police."*

BEING LOCAL

A good example of the work of community houses is their ability to discern what is happening in the community and work with different services that pick up on those needs. Community houses tend to have a deep understanding of their social environment and are aware of local phenomenon invisible to outsiders.

> *"I was told that there was a boundary for the centre line here, for the gangs. But apparently the story is that the line was coming closer and closer to the house, so basically there were gang problems around the boundary of the house - so this is our boundary, no it's ours, no it's ours. But that's all gone now. So the Mob hang in the corner over there, and the Black Power hang in the back here, so they're keeping away from the house which is a good thing. They haven't been here yet. You see the colours, they wear the colours. This house is right in the middle of it. It's right smack in the middle of everything that moves around us. Everything. And I actually like that, because it's coming here. You know, the real truth is out on our streets - when they close the gate, when they close the door, that's when the problems start. But we don't know that."*

Community houses often see and hear the realities of many social issues in their respective communities. Homelessness is one of these issues that presents itself daily to many community houses across Hamilton.

> *"I do think that homelessness is on the rise. There's people walking around the streets here at two, three, four, five in the morning. I used to go through the city every day – the streeties are gone. And then when I came out here, the first week I was working – oh, here they are. They're all here. We'll get tents in there [among bushes in the park], tent city, always people. We've got a school there. If the school wasn't there, I wouldn't mind because there's tamariki there, nah."*

> *I currently sleep in the car outside. I haven't heard one discouraging word or put down from anyone in here [the community house]. Last night I got a feed, I wasn't expecting it, just a knock on the window or door, turn around and there's a guy with a plate of food.*

The role and mandate of community houses to work generally in their respective communities affords them the ability to pick up on other less visible social issues such as the prevalence of social isolation.

> *I've always thought that they [kaumātua] have been the foundation of our community, cos they know the stories, and they won't say so, but a lot of them suffer from loneliness. We need to get them out of the house to bring them in an area where they can talk. This is where we're going with it.*

Community houses also work with community on issues that matter to them, thereby building further relationships and strengthening community participation and voice.

> *I started coming here when I wanted to put on an event, the community helped me to put on an event, it was about family violence, women's refuge, and empowering women, heaps of speakers, telling their own stories. I knew the centre was here but I wasn't coming here before. People that were involved with me came and had a meeting with the manager and it moved on from there. So if you want to put an event on they help put things together.*

Community houses can enable the expansion of what might be on offer locally, providing office space, room hire, and facilities. They help keep life local by reducing distances between home, work, and services. With more on offer locally the more community capital grows.

HOSPITALITY DURING CRISIS

Community houses play a significant role in addressing the immediate needs of people in crisis. Staff are good at working with people, picking up on what is needed and providing or directing support. Front-line staff like volunteers and receptionists are not necessarily trained as social workers, yet they are the first point of interaction for whole families turning up with significant problems.

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One thing we try and focus on here is to focus on good things, fun things, joyful things, we don't do stop smoking, there are plenty of people out there doing that, we just do stuff that is joyful. People have enough misery in their lives.

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A lot of the people that come are in crisis, so it's that first line stuff. I called the CAT time once, I had a person who was completely psychotic, and it took them 24 hours to get here. So mostly it's crisis stuff. Occasionally someone might say they want a social worker and I will try to find an agency that I think will fit them, but that doesn't happen very often and people have to be ready to do that too.

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People have underlying issues and it's complicated. I think of one case of this lovely young guy who didn't have a house and it was so sad, and it was tragic, he needed help. We knew another young couple who were in love, they were homeless trying to find a place to live, there were young, like 16/17, but they wanted to be together, and they clearly wanted to stay together, so I foolishly rang a government social service and got a social worker who said, "Ring the police they're underage, ring the police." And I thought that wasn't helpful. So I've done that a couple of times and I would never do it again. Government social services would be the last place I would ever call. That kind of attitude, "It's like oh you're really helpful", these young people clearly wanted some help, and what would the police do? They wouldn't do anything.

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I have spent a whole day on the phone trying to find someone somewhere to stay or live, and I don't want to bother anymore because there isn't anywhere, except the shelters. And we do refer people to the shelters and to the People's Project but I don't know how much they help, it's hard because you don't know.

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We've already had a lady walk in here and she goes, I sleep in my car, I'm too scared to go over to my house because they're breaking in, I actually can see them breaking in.

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Sometimes however, when the health and safety of staff and volunteers is at risk, staff have to manage their hospitality, such as when a staff member is alone or when an individual or group are in such a state that there is a risk. Managing this risk is a necessity for places with a reputation for being able to assist with front line needs.

> *And we don't really want to close the doors on community. We like our doors to be open. But sometimes you have to do it. We have that here, because they have nowhere else to run. They said this house was a safe house of refuge. As long as you have the door locked before the other person comes in!*

It is sometimes difficult to know how effective and important a community house has been in the lives of people they serve, because there is a high level of transience among people who are in crisis.

> *It's often hard to know because often people will come once and they might unburden themselves and then you don't see them again, so you don't know and it's too hard to judge impact.*

> *They may come in for something else, but I'm pretty good at picking up signals. So I'll make them a cup of tea and then I'll hear all about it. It's really interesting you get a whole range.*

Part of the role of a community house is simply being present, offering hospitality, being someone to listen and provide manaakitanga. Community houses will go out of their way to accommodate people in their time of need.

> *It's when somebody comes in and they look a bit down and I'll take them out the back and give them a cup of tea and have a chat, it's just having somebody to listen to sometimes.*

> *When you walk through those doors, it doesn't matter who you are, you aren't judged.*

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It takes the stress off people. I suffer from depression and anxiety, I know how hard it is, and when you get a letter from WINZ, it can be hard to understand it.

We get kids who come in and they've just gotten high outside and people are like 'You can't let those kids in there they're high', and it's better to have them sitting in here having a drink of water rather than being somewhere else, and it sounds bad. Or people say those kids around there were using a bong, and it's like, well do we want them in the justice system or do we want to be able to say hey guys, if you ever find that you're having trouble or anything and then that way we build up a relationship with them and they can say hey I don't want to be doing this anymore you know, and that's why we take all comers, you'd have to be pretty bad. And if we need to we can contact social work, or counselling, but we don't judge people just for how they are.

There was a homeless guy coming around and he was always drunk and people were like 'Man you have to get rid of that guy', he became helpful, he became a volunteer and we managed to shift him off spirits in the mornings and down to drinking beer in the morning to just beer in the afternoon. We tried to phase him out of vodka at 9am in the morning to drink a cup of tea or a beer. Because when you're on the spirits you're worse and people can't deal with you, but when you're just on the beers and the coffees it's easier. I guess we can be flexible like that with our approach. We have a lot of freedom and leeway in the realms of how people might be helped. It's also a healing place for our staff as well. We try to help people, we don't like to send people away to other services and for them to come back and say nothing happened. We can help people to the best of our ability unless it really is beyond our skills.

We try not to let them walk away unhappy - we've got to give them something. Something, just a little bit of hope.

I mean, you see how far we're going for our community. Those who want to try bro, we give it 101% plus. And then they go, oh thank you Matua. And then I go, that's the House brother that you've got to thank – that's the service of the House.

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> *So if you're really poor, struggling to find food, need help with accommodation, or WINZ, this is the place. You've decided you want to undertake some anger management, whatever, this is the place. You're looking for your kids? This is the place.*

> *Without physical spaces where would these people go to feel included? The Hamilton Gardens or the city libraries? These relationships are fostered over years, for some people who can otherwise be very isolated.*

RAISED BY THE VILLAGE

Community houses provide a large amount of informal care. Demographic changes in many neighbourhoods through infill housing developments, changes with state housing provision, and rent increases all lead to increased housing insecurity and higher levels of transience. Transience can make continuity of health care and education difficult, and it can also make it more challenging to develop and sustain long term neighbourhood relationships that come in handy acting as support networks when issues arise. The relationships that community houses foster over long periods of time, especially with young people who maintain some connection with staff or volunteers over many years, grow community-level resilience. The value of pro-social systems of relationships and networks, and investing in centres and activities was identified in Youth Homes: Building the Village as being of great importance in preventing homelessness for young people (Casey-Cox, 2018).

> *There are lots of kids and many parents would be aghast to know, but there are kids that once school finishes are just wandering around until like 9pm, so we open up the space to have somewhere safe for them, keeping them safe from predatory activity, safe from drug use, and building the relationships so that if something does ever happen they can talk to us, it gives them more people than just their Mum and Dad to talk to.*

> *A lot of the rangatahi around here are from all walks of life, and when we have events, they will be here from morning to night, the kids help heaps. We make sure as adults that we take them home, that they aren't walking home. A lot of respect and giving them [rangatahi] responsibilities.*

> *The conversations that we've had with the kids that used to call in, is there's a mixture of social problems - so some children they don't really go home until pretty much after dark; others don't want to go home because there is no-one home yet; others didn't want to go home because their friends were here... others were struggling to find space and time around study and homework. So it's not supported at school after hours and it's not supported at home. So then where is another space where that can happen? Or it's not necessarily that it's not supported at home, it may be more difficult to undertake at home because there's so many other things to do, and that can range from childcare to preparing kai to whatever.*

Community houses often provide that extra assistance to families. Sharing the load and going beyond what would be expected of them, or what they are funded to provide, in order to help families get by.

> *He's 12, we've had him since he was 5. His learning needs are quite high, he came to us pretty speechless, he didn't get much from school, he broke his collarbone at school, he couldn't go to the toilet by himself, he didn't have those skills, so he'd come here during the day and we'd look after him because the school couldn't. I think the school put him in the too hard basket. He had an aide for I think half the day, so at lunchtime he would come over and we'd look after him.*

> *A child with a bone deficiency and had to have his legs operated on, so he couldn't do anything and his mum had to go to work, so he was with us for like 6 months on and off because he couldn't go to school because he had all these plates and screws in his legs, and she had nobody else, so we just had him here. - The true value there is that it allows parents to continue working and continue providing for their family and to contribute to society, and for the children to have somewhere to go.*

There is an immense value in the relationships that people have with community houses. This is especially so for children, who as they grow up can continue those relationships:

> *We have 15 staff everyday coming to after school, and they are learning skills. Those people coming to us at 17, or 16, don't necessarily know how to find their tax code, they don't know about signing in or out, or kiwisaver. We have a lot of children who finish their primary schooling and go off to high school then about 14 or 15 they come back knocking on the door, and we can use them in the kitchen, build them up. Then most of them from 16 we can employ them and use them in the afterschool. They count towards our ratio, so we try to bring them out on the floor and progress them to working with the children. And they have the history of being here. We have one young lady who is in the process of transitioning over. She used to come, her sister used to come, she lives just on the other side of the park, now she is working with the children. She is only 16. This is her first ever job. But now she has something on her CV, she has a reference. They usually come with absolutely no references, maybe a bit of babysitting. So you do look at those goals and think they are some big goals, but when you look at them and you break them down, you think well we do contribute in a way to this and that.*

SPACES FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Community houses are the physical spaces where the community comes together. Programmes, services, ideas for projects and adventures can tap into networks of giving, sharing, and reciprocity, and develop lasting connections with volunteers from the neighbourhood who are looking for connections and activities.

> *I guess particularly with our elderly community, it's really good to get them out and about and especially from the local rest home, the staff tell us it's really hard to get them out, and we've opened the doors to them, they come to our cooking classes, our Smart Living Expo, and they get to have a night out, a social outing. That has been really cool for the staff up there, they don't have to feel like they always have to run programmes up there, they can come out and get into the community, they flourish coming here. They have their own netball team and they train here. I hear from the staff that they really love coming here.*

Scones started back in the day at Bryant Village. They made scones and one afternoon someone came by and had a scone and a cup of tea and it just became this thing, and now we are getting 40, 50 people a week or every second week. 15 years, maybe 20 years.

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There is one guy. I mean, I'm not going to take credit for him changing, but I've seen him come through from the community house, so he was straight from jail, violent offence, and he came to do some voluntary work, to gain some work experience, so I can be a reference for him. So he came every day, every day for about a good two months. I've seen him recently, studying for social work... But it's just a difference from what he used to be before, to him now studying full time. I think it's a massive change.

I found the place because I was made redundant and just popped down here to see if they had any exercise classes going, then I discovered they had a little craft group, and I started there and I've made a lot of friends. I was at a real loose end as to what to do. I didn't want to sit at home doing nothing. And they're just so welcoming, absolutely, it doesn't matter who you are, what you look like, or anything, you know. It's just lovely to come down here and feel part of the family. I've actually moved since, out of town to Matangi, but I still come back a couple of days a week. It's great, a lot of support. I just love to help out where I can.

I remember going around all the businesses by foot, asking if we could get funding. Back then, it was done all face to face, and asking if we could get advertising and fundraising. A lot of those businesses have kept going, especially the local MPs have kept in touch. You feel you get a lot more of the personal touch. To have a place like this in the community gives a space where people who otherwise wouldn't get to meet, many of us don't know our neighbours. I find this especially with Kiwis, people don't like to intrude and knock on doors, but here it is a communal meeting place, you're not knocking on someone else's door, it's okay to knock on this door. But when you meet people here you can make some really good friends and find out what their interests are and if it is similar to yours, some of the subjects and courses they run.

By and large, it's about building relationships up, whatever relationship it is it's usually a good one, and then we swap over. For example, there are people who came here for the first six months of Kaivolution bread and now they no longer come, why, because they have jobs or have other things, they've got the computer suites where they can look for homes. It's about networking with the things we have here and based around us.

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"We sort of develop relationships over time with people that come for a class, or for a vege box, or whatever they come for we develop relationships with those people, and then there are all the one-offs. I can remember one individual, and she was living in her car, and she was beautiful, and she was a singer, and an actress, and I don't know what had happened, but she was a very highly talented person and she came in and just sat and we talked with her, and just gave her a safe space to be and make phone calls, make plans, and do stuff, and I was really moved by her. She was on her way to Nelson and I remember everyday I gave her a hug. So people come with all kinds of issues, housing, domestic violence. Sometimes people just want to tell their story, to unburden themselves, just want to share it, to share the load. Or some people are looking for something specifically.

We're a meeting place, especially with classes and activities, and people can experience, and volunteer, a place where people can come and feel safe and interact with people. Some people come wanting a specific thing, like the legal advice, budgeting advice, or food, and these are quite different groups of people. Some of them are homeless. Mostly single men, but not all. So there are different groups of people doing different things. We have a yoga class. We have a parenting course, about 12 with their young babies. The activity, or the 'thing', kind of in a way determines the different people. Some people are just new to the area and want to see if we can offer them anything, as a way to get to know your community.

I think what we do see quite a lot of is people who might come into the House with a particular need and they've done a little bit of searching, or asking around and hear that oh yeah the house can fix this, and they come in with this one need and they realise there is all this other stuff going on. And you get people who will come for a need, now come for a want, they want to come, they want to come to this group, they want to come to that group. We've got people, individuals who have been like that, and they're almost here everyday, they become part of the furniture. They're at craft, at Wednesday night craft, they're at scones, they're at walking group, they're at everything you do, which is really cool, because they come for that need and now they come for a want, they want to do this, they want to contribute, they want to volunteer."

Community houses are often playing a pro-social support role to people in the community who have things going on in their lives, but who are wanting to contribute, to be a part of something, and to feel welcomed and valued.

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A guy comes here for the coffee club and next thing he's volunteering with our board games group, but actually he's in a mental health recovery group that I didn't even know about. Those sorts of things, and initially they don't tell you, and we can't see them, we just take them because we want them to be a part of us, because they are enthusiastic, they are passionate about something, they're going to volunteer which is helpful. All the groups that use our facilities; programmes, or groups, or others, and they'll be trying to capture the people they know in the community and to get others involved from other programmes. I feel as the centre manager, I think we have started getting involved with people who we don't have the expertise to work with, I have no background in working with mental health, and for them this a place they like, feel comfortable, and happy, and it's away from their usual business, and they want to join with whatever we do. Some of those clients are connected with groups that use our facilities or they are just Joe Bloggs walking in off the road. We wear lots of hats, but are not necessarily the experts, but rely on our networks, we rely on what we learn, we rely on what we know, and just deal with it, get on with it.

Lots of people that we physically can't see what is wrong with them until after we have built a relationship with them, then we learn they do struggle with things, have disabilities, or illness, and can't meet deadlines and things, but we find ways to keep them involved. They have ideas to run programmes or clubs, and we'll keep them, we'll work alongside them. "I've just had a bad breakup with my husband, but I want be be involved", and next minute they're out there in the garden pulling the weeds out. Those kind of things have been really cool for us.

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Community houses are public spaces that the community can look after and help to flourish in a variety of ways. People can build themselves up as well as their communities by engaging in the diverse community work involved in the day to day operation of a community house. Programme or service attendees can form good relationships and end up volunteering back their time and in turn foster positive relationships for others who may come needing services or a hand-up with one issue or another.

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I started here because I used to volunteer at another programme. I came on and helped looking after the second hand store. The gist of the work is that whatever the needs of the people who come through the doors, or that you meet on the street, volunteering or working as part of the place, if you're able to tap into it and help them with what they need at the time, not only do you become their friend but then they come back again, and they bring others back who need things. That's what happens, you end up multi-tasking. People will walk in here with things they know that need fixing in order to sustain themselves in whatever situation that they live in, and we're a 'go to place' or a quick fix type of entity here. It's just all of us who know the when, where and how.

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Everyone who comes here contributes something. It's about nurturing that and finding what to do with them.

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To be a volunteer - it makes you feel worthwhile feeling wanted and needed. Whether you get paid, or not, doesn't matter. Just having a place to be able to say yeah I'm helping out, I'm needed. It's a two-way thing, you don't feel like a slave to it, it's good.

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When I came to this community, I didn't know what I was going to do with myself. Then I met up with the staff here, and I asked if they had volunteer work. I came down and helped with the bread, the vegetables, the vacuuming. I help sometimes at the front desk.

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One of our volunteers still gets our vege boxes. That's what she started out doing, then she started volunteering, picking up the food from the bakery and from Kaivolution. She still does actually, she has done it for years, and I think just being useful, and she seemed happier, and she got a job. And that has helped improve her confidence enormously. So we see that sort of thing with the volunteers, or sometimes community service workers.

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Community houses provide a space to meet, connect and belong. Sometimes it is as simple as opening the door and offering a free or low-cost venue for the community to gather.

> *We get a lot of people who need a hall to hire, for a private meeting or event. The Fijian netball team are coming and the local Fijian community wants to put on food for them, or the Cook Island community wants to do something, or students from overseas and they want to welcome them.*

> *A group we've only started this year, we had a lady who came to us who said she was into craft, and we had a Tuesday craft group and she had an operation on her hand so she had time and could come during the day, and she said that when she was in Auckland and working she had a crafting group in the evenings, would you be interested in doing it? And true to community form, no problem. Here's the key, open up. So what these ladies do is, we get a lot of donated craft materials, donations, we rely on donations to keep our arts and crafts resources, off-cuts of material, all sorts of things, donated. They spend 7-9:30 and turn it into products then donate it back to groups, so the newborn unit at the hospital, the teen parent unit, a number of community groups. And they do this all off their own backs. They don't want to sell anything, just get together and do it. They're all like-minded. It's the little things that might seem small, but they're not small for a mother who has just had a newborn, a premature baby to get this beautiful handmade blanket. It's waste minimisation too. Turning something that would be thrown in and turned into something great and they don't want to sell it or want anything back, just to give back. And we don't charge them or want anything back from them.*

> *People who come to work here are passionate about giving back, that's why they work here for so long, that's the only reason I've been here so long. Put it this way, I didn't come back from Sydney for the pay packet.*

Volunteers play a huge role across the community houses. People volunteer in a variety of ways including in the garden, reception and administration work and some help with cleaning. A diversity of people volunteer at community houses, including people who are new to Aotearoa New Zealand, people who are struggling with a mental illness and retired professionals who want to give back. One community house has a former dental nurse turned lawyer who offers free weekly legal advice.

Hosting volunteers can have a high organisational cost with training, and sometimes retaining volunteers can be a challenge. People can be busy and life, including the need for income, often takes priority over community activities.

> " *I was actually talking to my board about volunteering as well, how that is becoming hard, volunteers are becoming harder to retain, because their lives have become busy. They've had to go out, work, because, you know, the financial pressure. Their family, they're finding that they don't have anyone on the PTA anymore, so they have the teachers to do the fundraising now. People are just becoming too busy. It's the same with our programmes I feel. Our programmes are the same - anything to do with adult education. This morning, about some of the programmes, we want to run some evening classes for people who may be at work who can't come during the day. But that means that I'll have to open nine till nine at night, you know, where's the balance of it?* "

However, many volunteers remain for years and have a lasting relationship with their community house. For some volunteers, community houses are significant in offering a safe place to belong.

> " *That's the most challenging but the most rewarding of what we do, and being a safe space. I remember we had a guy who used to do the gardening and he lived just up the road with a mental health service, and every now and then he would run away, and he would come here and sit in the garden, and one of our staff at the time was here and developed a bond with him, he would come here because it was a safe space for him.*

> *We had another guy that used to do that, from the local rest home, he was South African and had been a farmer, and I think he was really restless, and he did some volunteer work here for a while, and he used to run away too and come here, and the staff would come here to look for him. He just needed to get out and he needed to do something physical, so sometimes we have this kind of thing, that people feel safe to come here.* "

Volunteers, particularly those with mental illness or other challenges to employment, often benefit from having responsibilities. Responsibility can improve their self-esteem, builds their confidence, and they enjoy having a place to come and be. Community houses can offer people an opportunity to build up their skills in a safe and accepting environment.

" *A lot of volunteers -not all of them, but a lot -have personal issues and that is why they are volunteering rather than in employment. They come with issues, they come with anxiety, or depression, or a whole range of things. Sometimes they do make friends with other people and that's great. Sometimes they come with minders as well. Some don't have work VISAs, some do. Some aim to get into paid employment and that's where we offer a transition time to do some volunteering, improve their English and move on. But it's quite hard for them to find work.* "

There is an often unacknowledged longevity to some of the community houses, spanning decades of offering their spaces and delivering programmes for their communities. It is a tribute to the staff and volunteers for their years of commitment and service, but also stands as a testament to their ability to keep their organisation resourced and relevant. One community house manager even reported the anger in their community upon the announcement of their moving on from their role.

" *A lot of the groups, three of the groups that are here and use the hall on a weekly basis have been here for 20 years. And it's good to see playgroups that come here on a Friday morning, and they are mums or parents now and they used to come here when they were kids, or kids on the holiday programme that used to come here for playgroup, or people from the rest home coming here to get photocopying done and they remember coming here, bringing their children to playgroup here, even before we were the community house.*

Relationships drive the opportunities. It took 6 months to begin to get people engaged and supportive of the new manager, but after helping in one case, word of mouth quickly spread about how helpful they were. "

CONDUITS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Community houses described themselves as being a one stop shop for the community, or a place where they can find out about and connect to a variety of services, activities and programmes. When people come to a community house with needs, ideas and dreams, the staff have the opportunity to be responsive and creative, enabling a diversity of action to happen in a relatively unrestricted and timely way.

> *So now we still do activities, but we do a lot of programmes now. Learner Licence programmes, the holiday programme 19 years since it started, so we've gone away from just running activities to being more of a hub for people. If you're new to the community, you can come and ask what happens in the community, or if they need a JP, and no we don't, but here is a contact number, or we can find one, and connect them with a JP or Citizens Advice. We're kind of like information brokers I feel. Hoping that when people come in we're a one-stop-shop for them, and we're not sending them out on a wild goose chase trying to find speciality water for example.*

> *That's a good example of the community centre. Someone has an idea and then two minutes later it's like sweet done, let's do it. It's not like cool let's setup a meeting and make a group and get some catering in, write a report, and then we'll take it to the board. It's like nah let's just get it done with. That happens a lot around here. It's like one day you have some pumpkins then the next day there is pumpkin soup in a crock-pot.*

> *The challenge I have with our community is that this community is a working community. The need is around activities in the evenings, mainly recreational. I say working community, there are lots of mums who provide childcare in their homes, so playgroup is really big down here, we have four every week. In the evenings we see things like Smart Living Expo, Fright Night, Neighbours Day, community garden, that kind of stuff. Things in the evening is when we get more people. Otherwise during the day it's just what programmes we have running and those people that come in. You will get the odd person who needs a JP, budgeting, new people to the community and want to know programmes there are, where are the food banks.*

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We're a one-stop-shop and we try to provide as much information as possible to people. We're not restricted. We're not just about people with mental health, we're not just about people with benefits, we're not just about the serve. We don't just do advocacy or other stuff. It's a wide variety of things.

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We're kind of like a conduit, a meeting place where people come with different needs, and desire, and we can hopefully help them along the road when we get to know what their agenda is.

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It's a sharing and caring community, you share, you care, and it's always awhi-ing each other.

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It's evolving all the time, it's at the most basic, it is responding to what people are coming to, what do people want, what do they need.

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Community houses coordinate and facilitate the connection of hundreds of individuals and families each year with appropriate services and programmes that will best fit them and their needs. This conduit service is developed and refined over years of collective institutional knowledge and the power of relationships. This is a largely unfunded service that community houses provide every day in Kirikiriroa Hamilton.

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I think I've got a good relationship with most of the other services out there that I work with. I get out a lot, because that is probably just as important as what I do here.

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There are so many different agencies out there and I don't even know all of them. Not really. Obviously some we know better than others. The other thing is that people aren't going to come in and say, "I need a social worker", or, "I need a mental health support worker." But we had a guy with four children and he had no idea what to do with them, but I connected him up with a social worker, but I don't really know how that went. He did come back to see me a few times though.

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Community houses offer points of connection that surpass and transcend the usual networks of relationships. They break down barriers between people and between people and services. Community houses help people to navigate a complex and sometimes incomplete pool of social support services. They walk alongside people, helping to achieve adequate levels of care.

The guy who comes from the chemist to run the laughing yoga is great. If he didn't come to do that, we would probably see him in a different light. He puts a little blurb in the community newspaper and he's the shopkeeper. He's an Indian guy, and the kids and some of the adults in the community would see him as a separate figure, but he's not, he's still one of us. It brings - it doesn't matter what class or culture you're from, or age.

So you've got like these main, not main, these central organisations, national organisations like MSD, ACC, whatever, the police and even local government. You've got all those and so for them to reach the community, the community house is probably the most used conduit - that's the number one door. That's it, you know, that is the doorway to reach those communities apart from going door to door knocking.

But that's one of the values that I see is with the community centres; that they are a conduit for those communities, specific for those communities. And they are you know, community centres really do reflect their communities. It's quite an interesting thing actually. They are all very different, they are very different in their communities, they are very different, so they are very unique to that community, so they offer very unique services for that community. But for me, I don't know if I can just give you one - it would be that they are a conduit. So that means those people in that community are getting the support that they need, and although that they might not always get it, there's always an opportunity for them to receive it. But that's obviously up to that community centre, and how they kind of direct those services to those people. Acting as a conduit, as an advisory, it's pretty helpful. Having a presence in those communities.

But I do get a lot of people coming in with varied needs, like I need help with budgeting, or I need to go to a foodbank, or I need help with school uniforms, or I have bank fees, or I have school fees, all in this month how do I manage. So for us it's just connecting them with people to be able to put their mind at ease hopefully.

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> *There are so many stories, and sometimes quite tragic stories, and often there isn't much you can do, sometimes we can give them food, sometimes we can give them stuff, we can give them referrals, we can give them numbers for the refuge or the shelters, or People's Project, or whatever, but whatever it is I am very careful with referrals. I'll never refer anyone unless I have checked it out first, and that I know they will help them, because there is nothing worse for people. We've had people washed up here and they've already been around the whole town moving from one place to another, and they deserve better than that. So I'm very careful about that, because that must be very distressing for people.*

Community houses are working everyday to build connections between people, to address social isolation and disconnection. While addressing these issues may not alleviate issues of poverty and inequality, building relationships with people who live with those realities can make a difference. Extending and strengthening the web of human relationship and connection appears to be the cornerstone of a community house. Through relationship development, they build resilience that protects and promotes community wellbeing.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Food in some form is available across the community houses. Many provide this by way of fruit and vegetable boxes which are pre-ordered then prepared often by volunteers, and then sold at cost. Often in conjunction with this service, many community houses are also recipients of Kaivolution, food rescued and redistributed across the city to community organisations and charities.

Across the city, access to food assistance from various avenues is mixed. There are issues with accessing some services geographically.

> *We don't always have the gas to go to things in town, to go to The Serve. But if there was one based here with just a gold coin donation.*

Other services due to the notoriety of their food provision, are inundated by their local demand.

> *So with our Kaivolution on the side, we want to know who these families are, so that we can give them more food instead of a set pack that we're doing now. Instead of people coming up to this house, we actually pack it. Cos there is a bit of a squabble going on. So we're just doing that for now until it starts to pick up. People are desperate for resources in this community, and they will fight for them.*

One community house reported having to stop taking Kaivolution food as they ended up storing a surplus faster than it was going out.

> *We don't get a regular stream of people coming in who need food... Our community is very ad hoc, there isn't a consistent pattern. Our governance decided we would make ready meals, we'd make easy meals and keep them in the freezer for if people come in and want something but we're not running a foodbank, but if there's a need we'd be able to help. The local bakery will donate muffins and stuff that we can freeze and give it, and it might be a mum coming in who just needs something to keep her going till payday. She might be paid on a Wednesday and it's Monday today, or someone who just needs something for the kids lunches, and we're like, yip, we've got heaps of muffins.*

Community gardens are popular across the community houses in being a space for volunteers to give their time, to be places of relationship building, but also to produce some food to give back to the community.

> *We have a community garden that started with volunteers. People can help themselves to tomatoes, lettuce. We have fruit trees out there. That started with seeing kids at the dairy buying fizzy drink and pies so we have the fruit trees. I'll see kids come past and pick fruit and I'll ask how they taste and they'll start running thinking I'm going to tell them off. They're like "it's sour Whaea", but I'm just running out there because I think it's exciting.*

Ensuring children are nourished and have food for school lunches is a service offered by one community house who can leverage off their existing infrastructure.

> *The simple day to day things for the after school kids, we pick them up from their sport practices, so the parents don't have to. We've got a cook, we employ a cook, we have a commercial kitchen, so in the school holidays they can come from 7 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock at night and they get breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, snacks, drinks, all included. The shopping bill doesn't have to be so high. Because for these two or four weeks they don't have to buy it. Our before school kids can come and get breakfast, for $4 we even make a packed lunch for school. We have one family that does that everyday. But that child is not going to school hungry.*

Overall food pantries, whether promoted as such or just a discrete cupboard or freezer, can also provide some help when a person comes in and is in need.

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If we have an event and put on a sausage sizzle and at the end there are heaps of leftover sausages, we'll split them into smaller bags and freeze them, and have sausages to give out.

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Our saying with it is, "Give what you can, take what you need." There might be something left over from the food bags, a couple of carrots so we'll put them in there. We have people turn up with all this fruit, all bagged up, individual limes. That's where we do well with our donations, especially our fruit picking and feijoas, and the kids just love them.

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It's planting those seeds for some of those potentially at risk area of life, let's sort this out for you, let's sort that out for you, you know, there was a lady just the other day who just through circumstance from my understanding of it was that she had finished her studies for the year which meant her student allowance had dried up and she was going to start a job coming up in two weeks but there was a gap there where there was a black area and no income, she came down and we were at the kai cupboard and asking her, "What do you like for breakfast? Do you like oats or do you like cornflakes?" And we were just filling up these bags and she is just sitting there-standing there crying, just tears coming down her face. And it's those things like that.

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It was reported that food insecurity, while prevalent across the city, is a good example of a social issue being handled well by the community sector. The provision of food, whether foodbanks, food pantries, lunches, dinners, fruit and vegetable boxes, or other community meals, is well catered for. There seems to be a high degree of informal community connectedness in addressing this issue compared with other social issues. However, although food insecurity is being addressed, the stories shared by the community houses suggest that other related social issues that impact on food security aren't going away.

WORKING WITH COUNCIL

There has been a trend toward a-politicisation and less focus on encouraging civic engagement as there has been in the past. Community houses do at times provide submission templates and advocate alongside the community for their interests. However, some frustration was expressed that there wasn't more support offered to communities in this space.

A couple of City Councillors in particular stood out as having developed good relationships across the community houses over a number of years. There was a concern expressed that the number of Councillors with really good relationship with Community Houses has decreased over the years. Some of the more recently elected Councillors either don't have existing relationships or don't prioritise building them once elected. This trend presents a risk in terms of the continued advocacy for community houses and their issues.

In the past, Hamilton City Council community advisors/community development staff were based in the community working out of community houses.

> *And so they weren't really working for Council - they were indirectly working for that community centre for free. And they were being fully used. And that's what happened because they're based there every day, they go to the meetings, and so they were being used and amalgamated by those community houses, which isn't a bad thing. But there was a bit of disparity between, like okay what about the other community houses? You know, they say, oh I work for City Council but in reality, you know five days of the week you're with that community centre; the main work you do is with that community centre.*

Some community houses did prefer the change of bringing the community staff back in-house with the Council. There was a feeling that they were better connected with what was going on at Council and were better equipped as conduits between the community and Council. They could advise community on what is happening at Council and likewise advise Council on issues from the community.

> *We do have functional relationships with Council, I like to go and listen to a couple of their meetings, to keep us on the radar, so they know who I am. And if I can't get there I like to sit here and catch the live streams because I think it's important to know what is going on.*

THE NEED FOR SERVICES

There was across the board support for more and better access to social services.. The intensification of housing along with greater social issues has led to a need for increased service provision.

> " *In the future, as I said this community has changed a lot, there has been a lot of intensification, there are a lot more people living here, there is a lot more crime here, there are a lot more social issues here, there is a lot of drug addiction, mental health, domestic violence, burglary, etc. We're the second most deprived area in Hamilton now. We're the second more deprived area in Hamilton City. Which I was surprised at. But we're getting hit every month we're getting burgled. There is more crime, more desperation, more homeless people.*

> *No I don't think services are adequate by a long shot, especially addictions, people have to wait for so long, if someone says they need help they need it now, they need it today, they need to be in detox that night before they change their minds. So that's a huge one, and mental health again, and obviously housing.* "

Community Houses are very aware of the challenges of housing in their communities. There was some desire expressed for a greater diversity of housing options that better meet the diverse needs of communities. There was also a desire to be able to work collaboratively to employ a social worker. Community Houses provide a raft of services that are valued by the community, including space and activities for people with disabilities and access to computers.

Financial mentors or budgeting advisors are available at some but not all community houses. There are good examples of collaborations or sharing of these people across community houses, but there was still a reported desire to have a greater access across the city to these services.

> " *So we now have a financial mentor so that's handy. Our receptionist [is our financial mentor], she put her hand up and said "I want to train as a financial mentor." It's a very good collaboration, we've worked out with budgeting services, she's still here on reception but has those skills.* "

Often people have nowhere else to go for assistance with advocacy support and will turn to a community house for advice. This can be advocacy with housing issues, navigating other support systems, and either providing this information and resources themselves or connecting people with the appropriate service or avenue for advocacy to best help their situation. One community house manager became involved in supporting a family who were unsure of their legal rights and options when their child's school insisted that their child be medicated.

Community house staff and volunteers provide this information and support generally but are not necessarily resourced to prioritise advocacy work, particularly when progressing cases can be a lengthy process. One community house however is fortunate to be able to directly employ a family support worker to assist families in advocacy and navigating systems.

> " *In terms of adding value, he does some amazing work working with clients with Work and Income, Housing NZ, ACC, he's a JP, and has some clients who are difficult, very difficult, extremely difficult, situations, high risk, high needs clients, mental health issues, and he navigates all sorts of issues for these individuals and gets them back up on their feet and feeling like they're contributing positively to society realistically... I asked him how many clients he has on his books, he reckons about the 100 mark, that's a lot of people... He navigates the system, he can take cases to review, he sits on quite a few reviews. For those clients who can't get a foot in the door with Work and Income, I don't know if you've tried to get into Work and Income lately, I haven't.* "

Originally this worker was employed through a workbridge programme. The community house is now able to cover his wages and he shares his time across a couple of community houses providing his service. However, the capacity for advocacy work is not adequate to cover the need in the community and resourcing this work is a challenge.

> " *One's [community member] trying to get a house now. He was coming here, actually he was starting to be a bit of a pain. But honestly, he stuck at it, got a job – he stayed across the road, when they rang up, I had to run across the road and get him. So he got a job because he stuck at it, he had his goals set. He's got four kids. But he stayed at it, and because he stayed at it we gave him that back up. Because I could see what he'd been going through in a few weeks, especially once he started and he's come all this way. Hold the line please!* "

Through their day to day interactions, community houses see the impacts of policy changes as well as gaps in service provision. They are well placed to assess the structural changes required to enable a flourishing community. When asked what would help their communities to flourish and prosper these were some of the responses:

> *So in Jobseeker and that, we provide a huge amount of CV assistance. And often the challenge is literacy; literacy and basic grammar. We've always got someone saying, do you know how to spell?*

> *I think that if they wanted to address poverty in this area, they could clean slate the debt that people have. A fresh start would completely be the most awesome thing that you could do for those families.*

One research participant reflected on the challenging interface between wages and benefits and the importance of ensuring that increasing pay rates would actually result in improved living standards for people and not just being absorbed by benefit abatement rates.

COMMUNITY POLICING

> *We were really fortunate to have had a Community Constable who lived in this community forever and had kids that went to these schools*

There is overwhelming support from community houses for community policing. Community Constables were well received by the community, they knew the community, they were based there, they could respond and be available to the community in a timely way. Their reputation over time made the community members feel they were approachable in some instances where otherwise concerns or notifications of crime would have gone unreported.

> *You would get some 111 dispatches or whatever, the ones that come from, say, central, and they transfer to community, and you can just tell the difference between a Community Constable and some other. The Community Constables end up being normal human beings to the people around here, you know. They don't go profile them on the spot, but when you get new constables, you can see that it kind of takes them a while to adjust.*

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> **"** *There's a strong sense of injustice around the courts system here, and a strong distrust of the police.* **"**

When changes occurred that removed the Community Constables from being permanently based in community to more of a drop-in service, Community houses reported noticing the difference.

> **"** *We had a lot of negative feedback when they took community policing out of here and centralised it in the CBD. People would see the cop car here and come in to talk to the police but actually he was here facilitating our learner licence course. If people can't get into town we'd offer to take them.*
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> ———
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> *I'm just lucky I got a young cop who gave me one years compliance on my warrant and I just came straight home, I didn't want to get an older cop who would give me a ticket.*
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> ———
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> *One day a week, sometimes problems happen before or after they come in, so it kind of has it happen either like way before they come in and provide that service. If it happens on a Thursday, no one's going to come back the following Wednesday to come and see a cop about their kid being beaten. It's either been dealt with, or sorted, whatever.* **"**

A big success of the community policing was that it was proactive work.

> **"** *It's good to still have some connection with the NZ Police and our young people. He was just including this work in his work plan until he couldn't do it anymore. It is dumb because it is really positive work, and they would always say how much they liked it because they were doing proactive work not reactive work.* **"**

It worked to stop issues early in the community and developed initiatives alongside community houses to deliver services that the community best saw fit.

> " *The Police would talk about giving kids infringement notices for driving illegally or driving without a licence and it was the young people from our youth leadership programme who said why don't we run a learner licence course? And I'd never thought of it, and I said, "why would we run one?" And they said, "we don't like going to AA, we're intimidated going there." So we said okay and talked to the Community Constable. And it was cool having him run the programme because people he put through the programme when he used to run it at Kirikiriroa Marae years ago were now sending their kids or their mokos to our one to sit their licence. It's nice to have a little bit of history with people.* "

These cuts to community policing are part of a national trend. Since 2009 around 400 police stations and community policing centres have been progressively closed nationally for budgetary reasons including the community policing centres at Nawton, Melville and Enderley in Hamilton. There is now very little community policing available with the occasional information evening or talk provided at community centres, which is a very inadequate replacement for a much valued service.

> " *For this community we definitely need budgeting and the policeman back. The community people know the community, the community policeman knew the community, and knew the people around here. You need someone here who can communicate. He could come and knock on doors and people wouldn't abuse him.* "

STORIES OF COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Most community houses described a desire for greater methods of establishing the level of wellbeing in their neighbourhoods. This could be an opportunity for community houses and other stakeholders to collaborate on establishing a shared framework for measuring the wellbeing of communities across Kirikiriroa and telling the stories of each respective neighbourhood. Making use of their knowledge of existing local services, assets, and other organisations, community houses are well positioned to assess what is being offered in their community, what gaps there might be, and what demands there are.

Communities are aware of their reputation, perceptions, and socioeconomic statuses. These things have different meanings in different communities and any work on these narratives must come from that respective community and how they see these measures in their context.

> *Resilience. Good health and wellbeing. Stats show us at having the highest deprivation area. So when we describe resilience from the social sector / community sector point of view, it's quite middle class – you know, you've had time out, time to treat yourself, time to do these things, access to health and education. But resilience here means that you've survived another day. Nothing beyond that, and that creates pride. So [local pride], that's what that reflects – this sense of resilience. But it also illustrates how different the meaning is here compared to, yeah.*

Some community houses supported greater opportunities for coordinated advocacy, leveraging off other resources and organisations to increase civic participation, making submission templates and submission writing workshops, and presenting a united front in speaking to decision makers and power brokers. This would be an extension of utilising their local knowledge to speak to the wellbeing of the wider city and increase connectedness.

> *The Momentum 2016 research showed community connectedness as one of most important things wanted by people. It's events and activities that pull people together. What are the service gaps if any, what populations/demographics aren't being served? Do they want to be?*

> *I used to do an annual survey, and nobody really answered them, I'd always put up a little prize. I tried that and really it was a waste of my time as well. We basically rely on people telling us, or ringing up saying 'Have you thought of this?'*

CHALLENGES

I have a really good relationship with City Council. I have no problem ringing them up if I need to know something, I'll even push the line in talking to some of them, asking if those who get multi-year grants could also get single-year. Of course I would love more of the pie, but I think there are just more and more of us opening up and we're all in competition. My ideal would be either a big one-stop shop, or we all complement each other, that we all collaborate, we just can't be in competition. I just think that the pool of money for some organizations hasn't changed it's just that there are more of us who need a piece of the pie.

They had more of a board, they had a trust, you know, got set up... I mean twenty years ago, and even fifteen years ago, I had the Prime Minister come down there, they had the police there. It was lifted up as this hallmark - this is community development. But all it was, was heavily funded by local government. And then obviously we had money shortages and whatever happened, you know, change in government, and then they went hmm, you know what, we can't actually keep paying this forever. And then they realised they'd made a mistake, started to pull funding back, pull money back. But by that time they hadn't set anything up right at the beginning to support ongoing, long term sustainability.

Community houses reported concerns about contestable funding and philanthropy as not being dependable long-term, however both work well for new projects and seed funding, after which there is an expectation of being able to manage on their own. In the long-term contract funding was felt to be the best case in terms of dependable funding, and being able to leverage off other pieces of work and share capacity helps cover costs across different work streams.

Social enterprise and creative opportunities for funding are being explored by some of the community houses as a way to supplement their income and cover the costs of unfunded, underfunded, and unfundable work. One community house in particular through one of their pieces of contract work is successful in providing a reliable income.

> "We wanted to look at a sustainable business, we wanted to have some businesses going so we don't have to rely on funders, so we can be financially sustainable ourselves, and you know there is social enterprise and all that and all these buzzwords, we did all the work, and went to all the conferences and all the things, and we looked at it and thought, hang on a minute, we've got one. We have got one, and we as an organisation have been doing it successfully for a number of years. And we thought, okay, we've got one, but we could always have a couple more, we're still open to different things. But yeah when we came to that sort of realisation it was right under our nose the whole time. We've got one, let's invest in this, and let's grow this and do what we can here."

> "Employment is so strong man. Employment it has to be, because employment then again is social enterprise for communities. So community houses need social enterprise themself, but employment is social enterprise for individuals. You have to be able to look after yourself as well. So employment is so big, and that aspect of it is that it allows people. So creating some way. Whether you're creating a place for people to be employed, or whether you're working in partnership with employers. Employment definitely would be a very strong one for me. That'd be huge, because that really is helping to reduce the need and the pressure on those community centres themselves, by providing those families with things. You know employment is so big to me - we would not have the amount of crime, drug use, substance abuse, if people were working or if they started working when they were younger."

There is also a feeling that being located in wealthier parts of Hamilton attracts less funding as there should be a greater capacity in that community to stump up with costs or alternatively, that being a wealthier neighbourhood there would be less demand for services and support.

> "Communities that live with high deprivation don't have funds to do sausage sizzles and fundraisers and all that, so they're thoroughly dependant on philanthropic funding, and the budget to do that work hasn't increased in the last thirty years."

> "There's not much capacity in there to run the operational costs and pay staff. So to prove results in a community that continues to experience structural issues that don't improve."

Many community houses reported the demographic composition of their neighbourhoods changing rapidly. Urban in-fill housing and replacing former state house areas with higher density housing is changing the quality and mix of houses in many neighbourhoods. Community houses are witnessing the social changes of their neighbourhoods. There is a change from intergenerational housing in the form of state houses towards more private market provided accommodation pricing out some of the families who have previously lived in those areas, and this scattered or 'peppering' approach has invisibilised poverty and some social issues and made it more difficult to target services into any particular area, or to do so is uneconomical.

> *The biggest threat to the community here is actually gentrification. So our state homes have been removed, and in a lot of cases that needed to happen because of the state of them, but they're being replaced with units and facilities that either don't meet the size of the families, or are too expensive. You know, they're brand new townhouses with 500 dollars a week rent, or 500 dollars a week rent for two bedrooms. And it would be interesting to look at the average whānau size, but I think it's around five or six - that's children, not adults.*

> *The thing with the old fella this morning was I had to get him on my side, because he was like – you should speak Māori here bro. I said yeah but remember bro, 1800s it was Pākehā and Māori. Look at it now, look out your window – it's all mix. Multi mix. Oh okay, alright, maybe. The House, we can personify it as Māori, the whole House, the carving and everything. But really, it's that community out there. We didn't ask them to shift over there or move over there – they decided to move there. So they decided to be a part of the community, but what part of the community are they? So that really stunned him. I had to stun. I said but I'm here for the community, not just, okay here you are, that bit there is the community. I've done it with the Mob, the Black Power. But have a look - my hands are on the outside, so you are a part of it. But that bit there is the community. And I'm sort of saying that talk all the time now, but I seem to think that it's working. And it does help exemplify what community means, because we're a community, but within our community are a myriad of other communities. Three different gang communities, young people, there's the skateboarding community, there's the ex-Chinese Army community that lives here in Fairfield. Niche market. The Polish group, the Russian group, the Lovebird association. All of these groups actually exist in and around this community. The door is always open.*

On narrow budgets it is challenging to invest into research that demonstrates the positive community outcomes of working everyday in communities. The outcomes achieved by community houses are somewhat undermined by the structural issues, such as inadequate housing, that aren't improving. Community houses are not funded to provide long-term intergenerational projects and as such do report against this. However, part of the value of neighbourhood-based community centres is their longevity and their relationships with individuals and whānau that span decades and generations.

> " *What's needed is a broader structural change, and an acceptance that the changes based in the community are predominantly intergenerational.*

> *I think it's just the perception of making money, you know, that people have a very strange, especially I've seen in community, they have a very strange way of looking at money, like money is bad or something. Oh it's evil, it's bad, you know, like we can't have money. Well if that's how you get money then you're going to stay poor forever. You're organisation is going to be poor, you're going to struggle with money. If you think it's bad, you're going to struggle with it. And so I think lots of it is around that financial perception; the perception of money.* "

To operate a community house physical spaces and facilities are needed. However, in the current environment of competitive funding and accountabilities, community houses also need sufficient social infrastructure; management, governance, volunteers, skills in relationship building and networking, applying for and providing accountabilities for funding, and a sense of needing to be visible to funders.

> " *Say [a community house] closed, but the hall physically, the building is still there, would you imagine then another community group would get together and say oh we could do something, set up a formal trust, and start something again? They would.* "

In some instances this scenario of one community house closing and another opening could be advantageous, with an influx of new energy, new people and new ideas. However, conversely the loss of institutional knowledge, relationships and reputational longevity would provide a challenge.

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Even though the physical infrastructure is very much still there, everything they used to have is there, but there's no community centre. So that's quite an interesting point, around what is the community centre?

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There's a conflict between what the expectations are of the structures that overlay the work here and the cultural expectations of the community. The model that you've got to fit into is one of strict accountability, strategies and goals and objectives, meeting those and counting numbers and having statistics. Whereas that, it doesn't measure the quality of a face to face interaction with a child who has had a rubbish day. It doesn't measure any of that stuff, which in this community is really important.

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Lots of them, even though they are multi-skilled, they are very very much over stretched. And I could give you a number of community houses where the manager is the accountant, and they're also the janitor, and that just is not going to work. That's not going to work in the long run because you are going to end up well over reaching, and there are going to be some big marks and big things. And that's what we've seen, and that's what I've seen with the community houses. Those community houses who are succeeding and are thriving are definitely ones that have the right people with the right skills doing the right job. Not the community houses where they're trying to be the accountant as well, at the same time. See that will never work. Maybe some, there are some superstars out there that can do it. Surely there is obviously. But you're very limited when you're doing things like that.

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Some community houses reported perception issues around what they provide and for whom, with there being a misconception that to use the services of a community house you must be in need. This reflects that at least people have an idea of community houses as being a place to go to if you need to access or get advice about services and assistance.

When asked what the biggest wish-list items were, most community houses responded with a better configured or customised facility to operate from, or additional spaces to operate new initiatives they see would benefit their community. Alongside this was a desire by some to have greater security of tenure or ownership of their sites.

CONCLUSION

There is a sense of service on the part of the community houses, that they work for and are beholden to their community. They work for the wellbeing of their neighbourhoods, directly and indirectly supporting people in immediate need and providing infrastructure for community connectedness to thrive. Community houses provide spaces that are welcoming and inclusive, places for connection, relationship building, and opportunities to participate, give back, and to have a place to call home. The current community houses in Hamilton fit the description James (1996) made to early citizens advice bureaus, "as organisations which are deeply embedded in the culture of local communities and which attract strongly held feelings of community ownership and loyalty" (cited in Haigh, 2014, p. 84).

Community houses are significant placeholders for their neighbourhoods. Every day in Kirikiriroa Hamilton, expecting parents attend programmes hosted in their rooms during the day or evenings, children grow up alongside their community houses, attending events and activities, or just with the house staff and volunteers providing pastoral care over them while they're playing at the park and being another adult to talk to when things get tough. Generations grow up with the community house being a safe space, with helpful people they can turn to when things go wrong or they just need someone to talk to over a cup of tea.

Being dynamic and flexible in responding to community ideas and issues is a key success community houses are known for. There are eternal challenges associated with being in a competitive funding environment with increasing numbers of projects but the same pool of funds. Reputation, brand identity, and a longevity of relationships go a long way to building community-based success.

Structural issues such as inadequate housing provision, inadequate income and other poverty related issues mean that social services, often provided through community houses, are in consistently high demand. Poverty creates abundant work for community houses who provide links to the necessary support and advocacy. Cutbacks in state services, including community policing, undermine the possibilities of community based work and the achievement of thriving community for all. Community houses effectively pick up the pieces of a broken social welfare system and the vagaries of the marketplace that fail to ensure a good life for all. Homelessness is a clear sign of a failing system and all the community houses observe this reality.

Community houses are experts in community connection and relationship. The success of their work depends to some degree on the adequacy of central and local government services and the partnership provided. This research provides some insight into how this partnership may be strengthened and how the work of community houses might be better resourced and recognised. The stories in this report, highlight the value of Community houses in our community - each community house is unique, complementing the other, and responsive to their own community.

"There's a conflict between what the expectations are of the structures that overlay the work here and the cultural expectations of the community. The model that you've got to fit into is one of strict accountability, strategies and goals and objectives, meeting those and counting numbers and having statistics. Whereas that, it doesn't measure the quality of a face to face interaction with a child who has had a rubbish day. It doesn't measure any of that stuff, which in this community is really important.

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STORIES FROM

KIRIKIRIROA HAMILTON COMMUNITY HOUSES

> "
> *To me a community needs a supermarket, gardens, it needs say a police station, a library, a courthouse, there is all this infrastructure that is needed, a pool, a playground, a school, but people often forget, it's really easy to forget a community centre. But I think having a community centre plonked down next to a playground, a skatepark, a major hub, really makes sense because it's that third space people have. You get off work and you want to talk to people or I want to help out, I want to meet someone, I want to do something that isn't sitting at home staring at four walls, it's not going to the pub, I might be religious or I might not be, people can bring their children, they can be gender diverse, they can be disabled, they can be anyone for anything for any reason within reason and they are all good to go.*
> "