



Neighbourhood-led Development in Massey- Ranui: no one size fits all.

Initiative: Back2Back, Massey-Ranui
Theme: Community Building

The Back2Back project emerged out of a joint funding proposal to the Department of Internal Affairs in 2008. During 2010-2011 the Massey Ranui neighbourhood-led approach unfolded in a multitude of ways, many unexpected. While there may not be any one size fits all approach that is effective, having a clear focus has helped reveal a number of common guiding principles and practices.

With a sound foundation, community mandate and an experienced and respected worker in place, 2010 and 2011 saw Back2Back undertake many roles. As broker, supporter, initiator and ally, and always in collaboration with others, Back2Back contributed enabling resources to local events and neighbourhood initiatives. Relationships between residents, local and citywide organisations, government agencies and with Council and the Local Community Board blossomed. And, as residents got to know their neighbours, they took action on local issues of concern and interest, resources were developed and local leadership at the street and neighbourhood level strengthened. In turn, this neighbourhood-led development momentum generated increasing interest and buy-in with a wide range of stakeholders.

Drawing from experiences with the nearby Massey Matters project, on one level, Back2Back piggybacked on other larger initiatives, such as [Neighbours Day](#) to catalyse local interest and action and to focus promotion, engagement and events around. This was complemented by intentional efforts to be very local by focusing on enabling numerous informal conversations in streets and neighbourhoods, holding stalls, undertaking surveys and through shining a light on neighbourhood activity in the Back2Back Newsletters.

Spanning a large geographical area meant that decisions had to be made about which neighbourhoods to work more intensively in. Two factors determined where to go and where to start:

- Going where the energy was and strengthening and working out from there
- Working in neighbourhoods/streets where there was a locally identified issue, such as the locations of high crime rates that had been highlighted through the work of Neighbourhood Support.

This approach meant that street and neighbourhood work was primarily focussed on collaboratively supporting initiatives emerging from neighbourhoods where organisations such as Ranui Action Project, Sustainable Ranui, Tatou West Harbour, Neighbourhood Support, Massey Matters and Project Twin Streams were engaging. These initiatives are also strongly associated with residents and so reflected where energies for change were already mobilising. This meant Back2Back could both benefit from the ground work already being done, as well as add value to those efforts.

Back2Back's initial focus was at the street level – working alongside residents to organise street BBQs and clean up days. From 2010 onwards this changed to organising family whanau fun days and other activities at local reserves and parks. This was found to be a more effective way to engage a larger group of families and also a better use of project resources, plus parks provided a more neutral space for families to gather. Such events were always a collaborative effort, as the Summer Magic Event held at Cecil Beat and Holmes Drive, West Harbour in November 2010, demonstrates:

- Back2Back facilitated the organising group and paid for food;
- Keep Waitakere Beautiful provided the large bin on the day for rubbish;
- The Housing New Zealand officer and manager came and were available to talk with parents;
- The Neighbourhood Support Worker provided help and enthusiasm; and
- A local resident provided the BBQ equipment and local residents both cooked the BBQ and contributed to the food table.

Breaking down key tasks into key aspects helps to bring residents on board as this way there are clear things they can do. Each aspect is in itself relatively small and self contained and so achievable; yet to create the event, working together is a must. With the resource of the Back2Back coordinator these small things were held together and synergised and in that way became something larger than the separate aspects alone.

As well, through these events, residents identified further initiatives such as establishing backyard or community gardens, or neighbourhood support groups. Often these actions linked to the other projects in the area, but sometimes they were completely new initiatives. In these cases Back2Back helped broker connections with similar efforts elsewhere, such as other community gardens in neighbouring suburbs.

Different approaches have been used to strengthen and develop leadership to support neighbourhood-led development in different situations. Most commonly this has been done with a light touch. Providing encouragement, support, mentoring and information is sometimes enough for a local person or group to step forward. At other times, inviting residents to take on roles and walking alongside them, linking them to others who can help too or providing a small amount of resource to get an initiative underway was enough to demonstrate confidence in their abilities to

make something happen. For example, with regard to graffiti Back2Back supported Matt, a local Massey resident, to bring his idea about the best way to fight graffiti to fruition. This was to have the children in the neighbourhood create their own art pictures and place them on a frequently tagged wall. Back2Back supported Matt to gather the interest and support from local residents, other community organisations and Resene Paints so that a mural was created and the wall remains relatively graffiti free.

Sometimes such focused action leads onto other things, such as when Back2Back supported 60 residents to take action over vandalism and graffiti to the playground in their local park. Neighbourhood Support helped these local people develop a petition to Council for an alcohol ban and Back2Back supported this through Council processes. This was successfully presented to Council along with their concerns and residents then went on to plan further actions to develop their neighbourhood, including a community garden. Neighbourhood Support, Safe Waitakere, Sport Waitakere, Tag Out Trust, EcoMatters and the Police have all collaborated to support on-going initiatives in this neighbourhood.

Having a dedicated resource to awahi local people and organisations to work together in these ways is also beginning to build a culture that champions neighbourhood-led development. As the Seattle experience (Diers, 2004) also shows, by identifying local assets in a community, such as a church, and supporting them to build their capacity and capability, community ownership of and responses to the local opportunities and issues can be fostered in ways that grow the whole community. Sometimes this means encouraging organisations to look a little further than their immediate mandate, such as Back2Back's work supporting a church in Massey to take an active leadership role in working with local residents, environmental organisations, Auckland Council and its own parish community in a local environmental restoration project in the Manutewhau. At other times it has been about providing a space to showcase local projects and successes that highlight the value in working in neighbourhood-led ways. Both of these approaches help grow a greater understanding of what is happening locally and also identify increased opportunities for collaboration.

Because of the amalgamation of Waitakere City Council into the unitary Auckland Council, the project worker has also spent significant time educating new Council and Auckland Transport personnel on how to work in ways that support community-led development. Much of this institutional knowledge and understanding of what was known as *The Waitakere Way* had been lost or diminished as a result of the Council amalgamation. Both context and position are critical. In this case, having the project worker situated in Council enabled her to work effectively behind the scenes to bridge the gap in knowledge and understanding and ensure past commitments to communities were honoured.

Each of these examples also illustrates how the often-invisible roles of broker, connector, communicator and advocate have been critical in bringing people and organisations together to build a base from which to sustain the process of neighbourhood change in Massey Ranui. What is perhaps less apparent is how the internal culture of learning and reflective practice has been woven through the implementation of the Back2Back Project. Intentional monthly reflective sessions with an Inspiring Communities mentor on the key successes, opportunities and challenges for community-led development in Ranui and Massey have assisted both sustaining the focus of the work, and ensured that each new initiative or event has built on the learnings from previous events

in a developmental manner. This has also modelled good practice to other collaborators and helped to make clear the underpinning value of working at the street level, with residents in neighbourhood-led development in their communities at this time.

Intent

Working at street and neighbourhood level to create a better sense of 'my place – my neighbours, street, park and playground' and therefore a higher level of local engagement in development.

Learnings

- Residents frequently express their need to live in streets and neighbourhoods where they feel happy, healthy, safe, proud, optimistic, supported and a sense of belonging. Brokering at a neighbourhood level requires many skills as there is a need to take many roles, always with a light touch and in ways that add value, so that residents get to know their own skills, strengths and aspirations and who else they need to work with to bring these to life and to create the environments they want and need.
- Piggybacking on others working in similar ways and areas stretches resources and helps align efforts for a greater reach and impact. Contributing to and utilising resources from national, regional and local efforts AS WELL AS working in the street can generate significant momentum.
- Collaboration means each party's contribution is not huge, and is therefore achievable. Coordination means each relatively small contribution can synergise with those of others and go a lot further than on its own. Having resource and energy for coordination is key.
- Leading comes in many different guises. Sometimes it is very overt and catalytic, other times it is quietly guiding. Learning to lead quietly can mean stepping back so as to create the environment that allows others to step forward.
- One thing can lead to another, especially when you are actively working with neighbours in their neighbourhoods. Organic networking is very powerful in place because it reveals hidden talents and local assets and puts these in contact with other hidden talents and local assets to create previously unimaginable possibilities 😊
- Context can be critical, and it is always changing. Neighbourhood led development helps create local context and can ameliorate the impacts of wider contextual change, such as recession for example. Changing contexts require a change in tack and no one way of working will ever be consistently effective.
- Incorporating reflective practice into ways of working in neighbourhoods allows these ways of working to evolve that consciously incorporate learnings from successes and challenges. Reflective practice also allows different perspectives, thinking and understanding to come together to continue to co-create what comes next.
- Being clear about the intention of the project and having clearly outlined principle-based ways of working underpinned the ability to be hugely flexible at the local level.

Outcomes

- Stronger sense of connectedness with others (both locally and in organisations working in the area) and awareness of caring for their local environment and each other. This leads to locally generated inspiration and leadership.

- Less anti-social behaviours, sense of isolation because neighbourhood led development provides more opportunities to bring about neighbourhood change and the creation of a more resilient community.
- Greater understanding of what is being provided for families locally and how to utilise these in ways that work for them as individuals and as a community.
- Leading by catalysing lead to increased collaboration and partnering in these neighbourhoods between organisations, between residents and between organisations and residents. This has helped to strengthen the local networks through attendance and shared knowledge as well as provide a wider support base for both workers and residents.

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References:

Diers, J (2004). *Neighbor Power: Building community the Seattle Way*. University of Washington Press, Seattle and London.

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