

THEMES FROM CONVERSATIONS ABOUT “NEIGHBOURHOOD”

**Collected Reflections and Ideas from Neighbourhood
Passionate People and Places across Aotearoa, NZ
September 2014**



Background - Even the Queen Said it!

In her 2013 Christmas message to the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth noted three key things that matter – family, friendship and good neighbourliness.

Since our journey began in 2008, Inspiring Communities has noticed a growing groundswell and renewed interest in planning and action focused on connecting neighbours and strengthening neighbourhoods here in Aotearoa. This mirrors trends internationally too.

The concept of neighbourhood focused action isn't new, but in recent decades it has clearly taken a back seat. However global crises and natural disasters such as the Canterbury Earthquakes have triggered a 'remembering'. They've reminded us how important it is to know those living around you, both in tough times and good. As a result, social capital is now coming back onto the public policy agenda, a (re)building of local connections being more proactively encouraged, and the benefits of communities who care being highlighted in new statistics.

Inspiring Communities has been privileged to help document and share many inspiring stories of locally-led change in many Kiwi communities. We've noticed the strong sense of pride, empowerment, ownership and achievement that comes from working collaboratively to change things that 'matter' locally. As noted in Learning by Doing 2013:

Strong Neighbourhoods Means Healthier Hearts

A study into more than 5,000 American adults with no known heart problems found that those with a good support network in their community had a 22% reduced risk of having a heart attack.

**Reported in NZ Herald
August 19 2014**

“Community-led development makes the most immediate tangible difference at the smaller town, suburb or neighbourhood level. These are at the scales at which ‘daily life’ happens and at which people can see their individual contribution to an achievement that could only have come about by working with others in that place.”

Inspiring Communities has identified supporting, celebrating and strengthening neighbourhood-led development as one of its strategic priority areas for 2014-16. We want to support and amplify the inspiring efforts and activities underway. To help inform and clarify the most useful roles and functions for Inspiring Communities, we talked to a range of people and places across the country to learn more about:

- ▶ understandings of neighbourhood;
- ▶ what's working well and why;
- ▶ what else would help strengthen and support those taking very locally-led action; and
- ▶ potential roles for Inspiring Communities in the neighbourhoods space.

People generously shared their time, experiences and thoughtful insights. We were reminded again of the amazing network of New Zealanders who are eager to connect with, and be informed by NZ's own story and emerging practice-based knowledge. As a result we have:

1. Summarised key ideas and conversation themes into this 'neighbourhood thinking' resource.
2. Developed an Inspiring Neighbourhoods Action Plan to guide our own effort, activity and investment in the neighbourhoods space – hopefully alongside many others!



EMERGING IDEAS AND THEMES FROM CONVERSATIONS - CONTENT

What follows are key themes from conversations and discussions held during April-June 2014 with around 50 passionate neighbourhoods focused people in Auckland, the Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, Wairarapa, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin and Southland.

1. About Neighbourhood and Neighbourhood-led Development.
2. About Neighbourhood Strengthening.
3. What's working well now?
4. What are the biggest challenges?
5. The Future: what's needed to support Neighbourhood Strengthening?

1. About Neighbourhood and Neighbourhood-Led Development:

- The language of place is not universal and terms are used interchangeably. For some, notions of place are underpinned by physical or geographic markers such as rivers, roads, marae or valleys, for others they are underpinned by social networks and people.
- Neighbourhood is a very urban construct. In rural communities people talk about their town or community. They don't generally use the term neighbourhood, or see themselves as residents in the same way urban dwellers do.
- In rural Maori communities, and where mana whenua are living close to tribal lands, whānau and/or hapū¹ is the dominant community construct rather than neighbour or neighbourhood.
- Neighbourhood is understood as both a geographic location and scale of activity eg. backyard gardens, local food and craft markets.
- While many people understood neighbourhood-led development and community-led development to be same thing, others saw neighbourhood development as being more focused on a few streets or part of a suburb or town.
- Neighbourhood development was seen to have local residents firmly in the driving/leadership seat – with priorities/actions determined by residents.
- The need to build and strengthen connections between people living close by was universally valued and understood.
- People getting to know each other was seen as the critical first step ie. connected neighbours has to come before neighbourhood-led development.
- Local government awareness about neighbourhood development is growing in many parts of NZ. The importance of local government support was noted more in urban than rural communities – with existing rural community 'self-help' attitudes and stronger natural connections in smaller sized communities perceived as stronger drivers of local action.
- Getting neighbourhoods to lead/take action often needs a catalyst (person, issue, crisis, opportunity) that mobilizes people into doing 'something extra' and doing things together.

Not one size fits all

"In rural areas, cars stop in the middle of the road and people get out to chat. That's bumping places rural style!"

Natural Helpers

"'Ringawera' springs to mind – in Maori it literally translates as 'hot hands' and relates to those who do all the background work on the marae/in the kitchen to make everything happen. These nurturing, caring, hospitality and support roles are critical in local communities too."

It's Up to All of Us

"The quakes have brought the realisation that help is not always going to come from the top. This has resulted in a lot more people become part of Project Lyttelton. We've also noticed a shift in thinking, with a greater understanding that your wellbeing is interconnected with my wellbeing. If you're sad, I'm sad. There's a real culture change underpinning what happening here and how. I sense a deeper spiritual connection - it's about aroha."

¹ Whānau encompasses not just those joined through blood ties (family), but also friends and community members who act like family and undertake family roles. Hapū are groups of extended families who live in close proximity within part of a tribal boundary.

- Neighbourhood development can become very personality dependent – which can help things go/stop. More than 1 pivotal person driving things is needed to enable things to be sustained/grow.
- There are many examples of creative neighbourhood-led projects but these aren't always part of, or don't necessarily lead into, a strategic approach to the development of that neighbourhood or community.
- Growth in neighbourhood level action can be seen to reflect a growing desire for participatory democracy rather than traditional representational democracy approaches.

2. Observations about Neighbourhood Strengthening:

- Underlying neighbourhood strengthening is (re)building a sense of shared human connection.
- Neighbourhoods work is underpinned by relationships which can't be 'scaled up' – they have to be intentionally built, there are no short cuts for doing this.
- Food and fun are at the heart of connecting local people.
- Local food initiatives (community gardens, backyard gardens, local food co-ops, local markets, sharing produce, reducing food waste etc) have become a new key driver of neighbourhood focused action across the country.
- Encouraging, activating and deepening connections between local residents is essential to gain real traction, with relationship building both an outcome (connected residents feel safer, healthier etc), and a means to an end (action is only possible when local residents work together in high trust ways).
- Catalytic leadership (people who are brave, get things started, and put out calls to others to join in) is critical, in fact nothing at neighbourhood-level really happens without it.
- While some kind of neighbourhood entity/group is required to support collaboration and cross community work – it doesn't have to be a formal group or entity.
- There are different drivers/strategies for intervention and support in different socio-economic neighbourhoods:
 - higher capacity neighbourhoods are more likely to 'self strengthen' by using online web based resources, community stories and tools, applying for funding etc.
 - in many higher needs neighbourhoods, online resources are often of more limited use. Similarly, case study stories of what others have done can be a put off – it looks too hard, too organized, not something they could do. Neighbourhood strengthening requires a more relational approach, with 'hands on' help from skilled supporters key to sparking hope, unlocking possibility and supporting resident-led efforts in a longer term.
- Access to skilled neighbourhood helpers is generally needed by ALL communities at some point in their journeys.
- Working at neighbourhood level means engaging/attracting the interests of those not sitting within any organization which is challenging:
 - local organisations can get in the way of neighbourhood-led development because their traditional service focus generally means "doing for" local people.

What it Looks Like

"Growing and sharing food, feeling safe to walk in local streets, knowing everyone is watching out for each other, feeling good about where you live, and knowing your voices counts is what a great neighbourhood means to me."

Making the Case

"The need for connected communities isn't noticed until it's gone. People think social capital/capacity/inclusion magically happens and doesn't require any nurturing or support. Community-led development needs to be taken more seriously as an intellectually robust discipline which can make a massive difference in local outcomes and people's lives."

New Key Players Emerging

"Faith based communities across New Zealand are taking an increasing interest in neighbourhood strengthening. They are providing new energy and people power to support local-change efforts."

- working in neighbourhood-led ways requires an intentional commitment to provide opportunities for local leadership and/or 'stepping back' to enable local ownership.
- Multiple neighbourhood strengthening roles and functions were identified, including:
 - *Individual*: connecting neighbour to neighbour in streets (growing neighbourliness), supporting resident leadership and action.
 - *Institutions/organisations*: building knowledge and capacity across community groups, schools, Councils, local business, funders, social service providers etc so they can be partners in and/or help strengthen neighbourhoods too.
 - *Systems and policies*: influencing the formal rules and guidelines which direct and frame 'how' neighbourhood strengthening is understood and supported (or not). Eg: funding processes (like match funding), engagement strategies and place-based areas plans etc.

Ingredients for a Good Life

"Neighbourliness is hugely important – being aware of who's living round you, who's on the periphery and drawing them into the community. Like Gary Melton says, everyone should know the names of 10 children living round them and have someone else that they can share both sorrow and celebration with."

3. What's Working Well??

- Seed funds/matched funds² (small bits of money) which:
 - target innovation and rapid experimentation of good ideas
 - target locally-led/resident-led responses
 - incentivise simple ideas for action that locals can take up (eg. community garden, neighbourhood clean ups, long lunches, park events, street BBQs,)
 - help encourage new ways of working
- Focusing on small 'doable' projects as entry points – eg. Neighbours Day events in streets which are time bound and bite sized, this helps people act/get started.
- New communication tools like [Neighbourly](#) and Face book are providing new ways for local neighbourhoods to connect, share information and ideas.
- High trust flexible funding – post quakes in Canterbury funders were prepared to fund what local people wanted to do because it was felt that they 'knew best/what was needed'. Trust/power dynamics instantly changed as a result and this assisted local people to 'just do it' which meant:
 - people took creative licence to act.
 - bureaucracies got out of the way.
 - people didn't angst over planning/having to have all the answers before they got started and embraced the 'transitional' (good for now).
 - letting things go and see what got created.
 - people making change through participation rather than through consultation.

Learning by Doing for Funders

"Wellington City Council Housing set up a matched fund to encourage tenant-led projects like BBQs and days out. Our initial learning was that the application forms were too complicated so we decided to help tenants to fill the forms out as we realized it helped them think their projects through. We have 3 tenants sitting on the funding panel and they can be pretty ruthless too. It's now a really good process that's working well."

Transforming Local Landscapes

"The mural paintings have been one of the best things that happened, there's now more than 30! While initially it was our response to stop tagging on exposed walls, the murals quickly became a way for people young and old to express themselves and get creative."

While Renew Brighton talked to land owners, it was locals who got in and painted. What worked was light touch planning and only a few rules so people weren't constrained in what they could do. Change was fast and visible and liberating!"

² Seed funds are small amounts of money. Matched funding usually denotes an equal contribution of effort, resource etc from local neighbourhoods.

- Tapping into the wisdom of leading thinkers like Margaret Wheatley, Jim Diers etc which validates thinking, beliefs and approaches being taken at local levels (eg. embracing chaos and working differently, not just doing more of the same, strengths based).
- Encouraging local people to see what they've got (head, heart, hands) and making the most of it, including:
 - naming and seeing the good things in people's lives and what they are doing already to change things, too easy to focus just on what's wrong.
 - witnessing – hearing people's stories and feeding back to them how amazing they are validates **their** value and shows they are appreciated.
 - listening– taking time to find out what people care about often enables first steps.
 - being there when people want to take action – can't just market the concept, need to make sure you're there to help them turn ideas into action if they need it
- Low cost activities and events – things that are free and held in 'neutral' spaces bring more people together.
- Repetition – doing things more than once helps build community participation and interest over time. Eg. often takes 2 street BBQs before people ready to take on a local project
- The biggest driver of positive change is shifts in the energy of local people –trusting relationships unlock 'creative doing energy' and enable new resources to be found, things just happen.
- [Neighbours Day Aotearoa](#) is providing a catalyst and practical anchor for neighbourhood connecting activities/events across NZ. A number of funders such [local government](#), [churches](#) and [community trusts](#) are assisting this by providing funding to encourage resident-led participation and celebrations.
- Building new ideas/action onto what's already happening and/or working well in local places.
- Running workshops/holding conversations **in** suburbs/neighbourhoods that focus on what local people care about (eg. kids leaving school with a job, a local environment that's not degraded, supported local businesses, a good place to raise kids, feeling safe and happy) are key. These processes:
 - uncover local champions (new and existing)
 - paint pictures about the future and options local people/places can respond to.
 - encourage new ideas and thinking – can be real growth from 'conversations without labels' about how to make this place better for our kids for example.
 - connects local leaders with messages/information/ideas they can then pass on to others in their communities

Locally-led action in Dunedin

"There's definitely more local places getting organised. Communities are also copying off each other when they see good stuff happening that works and sparks for them. For example, Mosgiel has copied post card drops that North East Valley did and lots of places are having community expos."

Catalysing Conversations

"What the Jim Dier's breakfast event did for Te Atatu was bring a really diverse group of people together. People were inspired by Jim's examples of what communities can do. The event also provided a vehicle for people who had been thinking about ideas to put their hands up, share their ideas and ask "who else here wants to help me work on this?" The result was three new projects getting quickly underway."

Turning Waste into a Local Asset

"By working creatively in a multi-dimensional way (training, funding, brokering) and 'going where the energy is', Auckland Council has enabled many local communities to get excited and inspired by waste."

To encourage and engage locally-led action, we went with one image – a rugby field filled goal post high with rubbish. This is the weekly amount of rubbish in Auckland that goes to landfill.

People naturally asked what happens to it, and what could we do to change that? So we took them on trips to rubbish transfer stations and resource recovery centres. People could see for themselves the size of the problem and the opportunities that can also be created when waste is re-used/recycled.

With the help of the [Waste Minimisation Innovation Fund](#) – lots of local action has been initiated from new local enterprises, to local business associations developing their own waste reduction strategies. Council is also hosting a 'Skills Share' network to regularly connect community waste champions across Auckland and has trained locals to be composting tutors in their own communities."

- Intentionally building capacity within local organisations/communities to enable new locally-led approaches. For example:
 - meeting/training together grows new relationships and enables existing relationships and connections to be leveraged.
 - skills training (eg. facilitation) gives confidence and ideas for doing with others/getting started and grows 'natural' helpers in communities.
- Taking people out to other communities to see, feel it and talk to others who have done it and are doing it is usually more effective and empowering than written words.
- Effective neighbourhood 'brokers' and builders working with and in communities who can:
 - bring people together for conversations and work with them to help make things happen.
 - embrace collaboration and be looking out for 'joiners', including:
 - making connections across communities to others who can help.
 - adding value by joining up small efforts and build peer networks so people realize they are part of a bigger movement for change.
 - make it easy for not usual suspects to come together eg. flexible approach to food, transport, koha for some, charge others.
 - think about those who aren't included/participating and find ways to change this.
 - have confidence not to make things happen quickly – be prepared to work to local energies and timeframes, and understand some things just won't happen.
 - build quality relationships based on reciprocity and equality, and not doing for.
- Agency mindsets:
 - those who have resources and working at street/neighbourhood local people and their processes - sometimes this is easy to say and hard to do!
 - prepared to share power and understand they don't know it all.
- Change stories from other communities:
 - inspire optimism in neighbourhood ways of working
 - stories move people - **IF** they identify with a story, it's more likely to learn/inform their next steps actions.
 - gives decision makers/funders confidence, evidence and rationale for supporting
 - hearing your own stories on regional/national stages is empowering and validating – whether it's you or others telling your story, the fact that it's being told matters.
- Local government providing funding AND organisational commitment to work **with** communities to assist locally-led change to happen.

What difference has Neighbourhoods Expert Jim Diers Made in Kiwi Communities He's Visited and Worked With?
Some thoughts from those who have hosted him.....

- *having an event with an international speaker draws a diverse crowd and encourages conversations that might not otherwise happen*
- *his stories/messages help people stop being 'patch protective' and cynical about what local people/places can do*
- *his inspiring ideas and strong sense of hope/possibility and permission giving has fed/fueled people*
- *encouraged/validated local efforts communities have been making*
- *engaged and pushed local govt leaders because of his specialist sector knowledge/experience/evidence base*
- *new language and framing he has presented has 'stuck' – eg. bumping places, have a party not a meeting, don't do for the community what the community can do for itself*
- *neighbourhood matching funds concept/tool has been taken up by a range of places/organisations*

Limits of Jim's visits:

- *hard work starts after he's gone and often there's no one skilled/mandated locally to proactively keep dialogue happening, support people to take next steps action*
- *large generic workshops mean neighbourhood power concepts and thinking reach large audiences but they are 'in abstract'. When Jim is working with a specific place and shaping their community building initiative, tangible change is more likely to happen/ learning can be quickly and directly applied.*

4. The Biggest Challenges

- Behaviour change in local communities is much harder than we think – going beyond catalytic, feel good projects to long term culture and systems change is tough. Requires commitment to keep momentum going, keep evolving and growing what's been done to respond to both local energy and barriers. In higher need communities, people's lives are often chaotic and unpredictable.
- In large organizations, without leadership from the top it can be difficult to get traction for neighbourhood-led approaches:
 - it takes individuals with leadership, authority and mandate within organisations to 'hold the space' for locally-led approaches and culture change.
 - have to change the hearts and minds of individuals before you can change the systems and policies within which they operate.
 - changing business as usual to understand communities as decision makers takes a long time.
 - middle management blockages – while senior leaders may support but things often fall down as they're operationalised
- Time and support to reflect on practice – at both local resident and helper/supporter levels.
- Connecting with/engaging broader neighbourhood – often things fall away because leaders and groups are unable to take good ideas out in way that grows support/involvement.
- Really good facilitation skillsets – takes confidence and skill to work across different viewpoints in neighbourhoods and get people to think big and beyond what's for their individual family/organisation/sector.
- Finding change makers in local places sometimes takes awhile. They're generally there but it sometimes takes awhile to find them, walk alongside and/or support them to lead locally.
- Understanding the barriers to loneliness/isolation/exclusion/participation that exist in a community, which often include:
 - 2 working adults which means many households are time poor
 - lack of resources and energy to be part of community
 - lack of awareness about residents might benefit from the community around them, that knowing and interacting with others could improve their quality of life
 - perceptions that residents have about each other - which may not be reality.
 - safety concerns and fears.
 - urban design issues - high fences, few public/multi use spaces, car dominance, and lack of play/stay opportunities eg. seats, shops, playgrounds, cafés etc.
- Linguaging – jargon, terminology (resilience, CLD, place making etc) can be alienating for local residents. Need to use simple language – not semi-professionalise it!
- Passive/aggressive nature of Kiwis – communities keep handing their power back to institutions like Councils. Citizens need to step into their power more, rather than thinking "they should do this or that".

Getting to the Heart of It

"A lot of the neighbourhood level work happening in Auckland is really under the radar and often happening in spite of the Council systems and structures. If we are to get people at higher levels more fully on board and in behind these approaches – we need to better understand and communicate our 'why'."

Changing Business as Usual

"A neighbourhood-led approach requires a change in power dynamics and ways of working. It's about bureaucrats supporting communities and their ideas rather than consulting communities on what their agency is planning to do."

Gaps in Skills and Knowledge

"Many agencies aren't experts in community development. Many people in policy and administrative jobs are now being asked to do it though. There's a real skills at agency level. Where do you go to get community development training?"

A Fantastic Platform to Build On....

"Neighbourhood Support provides so much potential to anchor neighbourhood-led approaches across NZ communities. The reality is that many coordinators and governance groups are stuck still reading crime reports and providing sessions on making your house secure. There's so much more that could be done if a developmental approach was taken, new training was provided and funding incentives and support put in place."

- Knowing who to go who can support your ideas, who can connect you with others who can help. Large organisations can be a minefield and often when communities get the first ‘no’ they stop...but those within the system know to keep going and who to try next etc.
- Political ownership of community-led ways is never a done and dusted activity:
 - mandates need to be reconfirmed with each electoral cycle.
 - ‘neighbourhood-led’ creates a tension for democratic mandates – devolved decision making to communities not always easily understood/accepted by some elected members.
 - in an Auckland context, Local Boards have first needed to understand their role/how they fit with governing body before they can really effectively work with others, including their local communities.
 - some Resident and Ratepayer groups are gate keepers – often don’t revisit/review mandates or broader community needs. Leaders of these groups are often seen as the ‘moaners’ about what doesn’t work/what Council’s not doing right rather than championing visionary ideas and building local constituency around them.
- Place making/village planning processes have generally focused on town/village centers (shopping areas) – getting thinking/engagement/action to move ‘out’ into broader the neighbourhood is often hard...but need to understand ‘whole village’ not just the ‘town square’.
- Financial years of local and central government difficult in investing in community driven processes and projects
 - it’s okay for capital expenditure to move across financial years but generally not operational expenditure – use it or lose it!
- Some other challenges for local government in the neighbourhoods space:
 - some Councils fear of encouraging neighbourhood-led as it can create expectations that the Council will do/fund everything and have to maintain things that get started when the community has had enough.
 - risk management emphasis means Councils often over prescribe things that can happen in a park/public space – doesn’t help local people take ownership of public places or enable ‘just do it’ action.
 - dominance of functional silos often makes reprioritization/alignment of place based investments within long term Council planning frameworks difficult.
 - bureaucracy barriers: consents required for local events.

Stepping into Power

“As a broker or bridge builder in communities, sometimes you have to lie down and be stomped on. This is about local people stepping into their power, calling things as they see it and letting you know they want to take more control. Being growled at is a good thing and when they ask a big question, that’s when you can get alongside them to encourage their responses rather than have them wait for yours.”

Holding Tensions and Being Brave

“Locally-led approaches are challenging for local government. Giving community permission and allowing communities to take ownership of areas around their places sounds good, but there’s a danger that if it doesn’t work it could cost Councils more. There’s also a tension with asset management planning for the long term vs embracing the temporary nature of doing something for now. Local government needs to understand and hold this tension. If we want to enable locally-led ideas and action to grow, we have to stay open to new ideas – but it’s not easy especially within risk averse systems.”

5. What’s Needed to Support Neighbourhood Strengthening??

The list below is far from exhaustive! What follows are some of the most frequently mentioned ideas and advice that spans local, regional and national levels:

- View ‘neighbourhood’ as a strategic locus for collaborative investment and support.
 - host strategic discussions about strengthening neighbourhoods among key institutional actors in local places (eg. Councils, DIA, MSD, schools, key NGOs, philanthropic funders etc) to build shared understanding about local contexts, needs, roles, priorities and approaches.

- Pilot a regional approach to strengthening neighbourhoods - align key funders, local government, NGOs, to progress intentionally joining up approaches, networks and learning within/across place.
 - place policy thinking enables, safety, youth, health, disability policies etc to all be joined up.
- Intentionally build 'growing neighbourhood connections' as part of service interventions to encourage organizations to think/work in new ways
 - encourage local organizations to 'umbrella' and support resident-led action in places where they're located.
 - include social capital measures in social service outcomes.
- More high level mandates (from PM, Mayors, Chief Executives, public figures etc) encouraging strong neighbourhoods ethos for NZ as this gives credibility and would enable new resources and ways of working to grow.
- Skilled help when it's needed:
 - an 0800 Portal (online/person power) that acts as a first port of call for those wanting more ideas, advice and support with neighbourhood building.
 - access to skilled neighbourhood development mentors when needed.
- Host a New Zealand Neighbourhoods Conference to profile successes, share ideas, build skills and promote new ways of working.
- Encourage/incentivise collective neighbourhood actions eg. Neighbourhood composting, bulk purchase of renewable energy, neighbourhood noticeboards etc.
- Continue/expand Neighbours Day Aotearoa promotion/celebrations.
- Create new Great Neighbours and Neighbourhoods awards and competitions to celebrate and profile success.
- People/Work force development:
 - host "Master Class" opportunities for those already working in and with neighbourhoods to build peer networks, share skills and inspiration training workshops for working at neighbourhood level – brokers, service providers.
 - develop resident leadership and skills training modules that can also be adapted for use by and in local neighbourhoods.
 - link to tertiaries to ensure skillsets for the future are being intentionally grown.
 - develop and share neighbourhood broker/ animator job description (personal qualities, skillsets and practices).
 - create more local/regional networks of neighbourhood passionate people/organizations to share ideas and experience.
 - create dedicated training funds that enable local people/volunteers to participate in learning and training opportunities as cost is often a barrier when you're not part of an organisation.
 - promote job swap placements and secondments to learn and share skills in an 'on the job' way

First Responders on Hand

"How could we create local, regional and national places that are first points of contact? This work is not about lots of money, but support and guidance and people having somewhere to go when they stand up and say "I'm ready to do something, who can help me get started?"

Connecting the Movement

"I'd love to see more opportunities to get together and hear more about what's happening in other parts of New Zealand. There are always ideas that can be picked up and adapted. Often it feels like you're pushing water uphill with a rake, so being able to look up and out is great. One thing I'd like to know more about is how to create neighbourhood in growing smaller towns."

Social Justice Advocacy

"Who's strategically looking out for our poorest neighbourhoods anymore? Housing NZ is just an asset manager now; WINZ only looks at income –who's about building people in these places? What kind of innovative people and place making approaches could be taking if we really thought about things more?"

- Develop a Neighbourhood Summit process that could travel round NZ – full day of activities for grass roots activists that cross pollinates local skills/initiatives and ideas. Infused with some national experience – but focuses on building local level energy and shared support.
- Systems changes – invest in trust based relationships. Keep financial accountabilities robust but ensure outcomes/action and doing processes are flexible rather than prescriptive – need room to adapt and change deliverables depending on what happens locally.
- Resource local people to take on leadership/convening roles locally – doesn't have to be an agency/Council worker. A paid person can make a huge difference to the pace/quality of local response and action.
- More intentional support for local resident leaders when they step up – often a back lash against those with new ideas, need to make sure a level of support is built up around them so they are not isolated.
- An accessible 'one stop shop' resource library for neighbourhood builders – best practice tips, tools, great project ideas from NZ and internationally, case studies, indicators and evidence of why neighbourhoods matter.
- New 'how to' resources focused on:
 - *Libraries as Neighbourhood Lounges* – exploring creative ideas for expanding life-long community learning and connecting opportunities that libraries could offer.
 - *Schools as Neighbourhood Hubs* – what they look like, what works and why, key ingredients for success, what's required to have more of them?
 - *Putting the 'Community' back into Community Centres and Houses* – often now more venues for community hire, some have lost their way as community activators, local leadership builders, places to grow and nurture community based learning/activity.
 - *Neighbourhood Matched Funding* - what it is, how it works, who's doing it, what they're finding, what to do/not to do, what else needs to sit alongside funding to enable success, results from matched funding international/in NZ, links to best examples.
 - *How Local Government can empower and support resident-led action* – successes, pitfalls, examples and learning from local government activity round NZ, different roles that politicians, management and staff can all play.
 - *Reciprocal Business and Neighbourhood Relationships*- how can neighbourhoods engage better with local businesses to build different kinds of reciprocal relationships/work more effectively.
 - *High Impact/Low Budget Ideas for Transforming Neighbourhoods* – including how to methodologies for neighbourhood-led action and change that others can adapt and duplicate in their communities.
 - *Neighbourhood Level Social Capital Indicators* – what are the best indicators of social capital building at neighbourhood level that could be used by local initiatives and/or be incorporated by Councils in their Annual Surveys?
- Communicate and share Maori concepts of neighbourhood wellbeing, including fit with marae development.
- Share good practice community-led plan templates and processes that can be adapted and used in rural communities/contexts – lots out there but few right for NZ context.
- Local government staff who are doorways/windows into Council and specifically tasked with facilitating cross organisational responses to enable and encourage neighbourhood-led action. Also having Councils involved in matched funding means they have a stake in the

Forget about the Money

"Our culture of 'who will fund it' foremost in our minds becomes an immediate block and dissipates energy. Don't make funding the first question...instead think of what the future might look like, why you thought of the idea, what you want to create –if there's a need, everyone needs to take responsibility for some part of it to make it happen. If people don't get excited, don't bother progressing the project. IF people are excited, resourcing will follow."

outcome and can help make local project pathways easier eg. parks and playground upgrades, grass verge gardens.

- Extend MSD investment in social service provider capability development to include neighbourhoods/communities too – need to increase investment and capacity within communities to self organise, collaboratively vision, plan and work differently too.
- “Love your Local” social media campaign to encourage people to think about what they have and how to treasure/grow it:
 - proactively hand out permits for optimism and ideas generation
 - ongoing promotion/communication of good stories/examples
 - seek to normalize “neighbours building great neighbourhoods” ethos
 - throw out “what if we.../who wants to...” seeds and good ideas via face book, newsletters, blogs, community notice boards to get people thinking about both possibilities and next steps action THEY could take.
 - competitions - to encourage people to share what’s good about their place and support friendly rivalry that promotes and celebrates locals taking action.
- More attention on intergenerational community building – older people living longer in their homes, don’t always have ability/confidence to connect with those living round them:
 - need to cross pollinate community groups and participation opportunities to build new connections eg. the bridge club doing something with the new mums walking group.
 - find ways to ‘tap into’ the skills/assets and energy of the ‘young old’ – what have people got to give/share and proactively join it up to create new local culture of self-help.
 - remind older generations to think back to how it was in their street when they grew and encourage them to be bold/take a risk, have fun with those living near them.
- Strengthen links with hauora and wellbeing – seek greater alignment with health promotion/Ottawa Charter and mental health sectors.
- Promote civic engagement in schools/broader community:
 - focus on ‘our neighbourhood’ and active citizenship within school curriculum
 - encourage engagement with children in places to grow space for **their** voice, ideas, creative action.
- Promote and encourage greater use of [Beacon Neighbourhood Sustainability](#) design tool by Councils, developers and communities across NZ.
 - we need to developing the physical and

Growing Communities and Food

“We could make food growing on grass verges and public spaces in NZ easy if all Councils had the same enabling rules. More stories about what you can grow and ‘how to’ do it ideas would also help inspire more neighbourhoods to get in behind these kinds of activities too.”

New Community Building Skills

“It would be great to see new targeted community building training and support for Neighbourhood Support Coordinators and Boards, Neighbourhood Policing and Civil Defence teams. They are all working in the neighbourhood resilience space but often doing the same old thing. They could all benefit from a creative injection of ideas and approaches that build community connectedness, pride, spirit and action.”

A big thank you to everyone who shared their ideas, observations and hopes for further catalysing neighbourhood-led action in Aotearoa, NZ. This distillation has helped Inspiring Communities consolidate our thinking around next steps and we hope it’s useful for you, your organization and community too.

