



## From Neighbourhood Barbeques to Street Redesign: the role of co-ordination, partnering and holding a space lightly

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**Initiative:** Waitara Community Development Project, Waitara

**Theme:** Community Building

**Having the capacity and skills to create space for locals to bring their thoughts, ideas and aspirations to the decision making table can lead to all sorts of unexpected changes. In Waitara, locals have banded together over the barbie to support victims of burglary and those living in areas plagued by street racers, all with (sometimes unexpected) results.**

Learning from others working in community led development across Aotearoa New Zealand, in Waitara neighbourhood barbeques provide a way of building connections at 'the ground floor' between communities and the Waitara Community Development Project (WCDP), the Community Constable and Neighbourhood Support.

Starting in areas of high numbers of burglaries and crime, neighbourhood barbeques involve fun and games as well as food out on the street. Sausages, chalk drawings, egg and spoon races, rides in police cars and balloons all help to get the kids involved, and coffee tends to quickly bring adults outside too. The street barbeques help to grow connections between neighbours who often don't know each other well, or at all. They also provide a novel and fun space to meet people from community organisations on mutual terms. For some residents, the barbeques have been the first time they have talked with police, for example, outside a time of crisis or stress.

Neighbourhood barbeques are, therefore, a catalyst to growing relationships and this can have very real and tangible impact in the neighbourhoods they are held in. Not only is fear reduced by getting to know neighbours and individuals working with community groups but residents also become more informed about the kinds of support the various organisations involved can offer them, including how they can become involved too, should they wish to. Residents report feeling safer, more in control, and with a greater sense of belonging as a direct result of the street barbeques.

In the case of one area, for example, a family who were burgled right before Christmas lost not only all the Christmas presents but the three kids' birthday presents too. This burglary was one of Waitara's largest ever burglaries. It happened in broad daylight and was witnessed by several neighbours who, not knowing the family, had not thought to investigate. While the family were left scared to be in their own home, the burglary prompted the very first street barbeque in Waitara and helped restore the family's faith and security in those around them.

Organised by Neighbourhood Support and the Waitara Community Development Project, sausages were paid for by ITOHAM, the local meat processor, and the barbeque came from the Police's Blue Light Trust while, hearing about the reason for the barbeque, a local firm offered \$500 towards replacing the children's presents.

On the day, as local teenagers pitched the tent, children drew chalk outlines of the local Senior Sergeant on the footpath then rode in his car while the community constable took charge of the barbeque and neighbours got to know one another. One local resident commented that he hadn't seen so many local people on the street since he was a child, and he has been resident in that street for over 50 years! Adults are now better connected to local organisations through people they know by name and have formed a neighbourhood support group. The local kids now know all the people in the houses on their way to school and because of that they say they feel safer.

Street barbeques are not only about informing residents. Often they provide a space for residents to inform local organisations too. In the second street barbeque in Waitara, for example, residents talked about street racers who were plaguing their street most Thursday nights at around 11pm. The police hadn't known this was an issue in the street but after the barbeque they were able to change their rosters to patrol the area more often, especially during the problem time. The residents now talk about the peaceful street they live in.

Issues are not always so simply resolved, of course. Another street barbeque revealed a 'boy racer' problem where one car had crashed into a power pole, snapping it before ending up upside down in the front yard of a mum with two young children. And this wasn't the first such car crash in the area. Previously the local kindergarten had been turned into a temporary hospital while residents waited for the ambulance to come and collect a drunk driver who had sped through the street and through the kindergarten fence.

In this area, residents had already appealed to New Plymouth District Council for speed humps but to no avail. So, the WCDP convened a meeting between residents and the local police in the local kindly as part of a 'Let's Go! Street Project.' This project offered a chance to win significant Council support for a complete street overhaul.



Twenty-five residents attended the meeting at Orapa Kindergarten and took traffic calming to a whole new level through intense group work. A 16 page submission was co-created focused on a redesign of their street including coloured pedestrian crossings, a personalised bus shelter for the kids in the street and fruit trees. Although the initial submission was declined, those residents are now working with Council and other funders on ways to make their street safer. Orapa Kindergarten have recently completed a Traffic Flow Management Report and Council have agreed to work towards kerb extensions, a blue pedestrian crossing, flower/fruit boxes and parking barriers, bike helmets for adults and kids in the area, 30 high visibility vests for the kindy, several safety signs and a bus shelter! Not a bad outcome at all, and well worth the effort in the end.

Outcomes like these highlight the importance that having the capacity and ability to create space in which local people can bring their thoughts, ideas and aspirations forth is to community-led development. Creating such spaces enables local people to share their personal experiences in a validated way as well as to contribute and consolidate their collective view as a community. As David Chrislip says, if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organisation and community" (in Born, 2008: 54). In Waitara, sometimes these spaces lead to positive collaborative action no-one could have predicted at the beginning. Always they lead to new relationships and understandings.

### **Intent**

Seeing opportunity in challenges and working together to make a difference at the street level.

### **Key Learnings:**

- Have a clear reason of why a barbeque should be located in a particular area and intentionally involve organisations who share that kaupapa to partner in the organisation and delivery of the event in fun ways.
- Face painting, balloons, games and free sausages get kids outside but it's the coffee that brings the parents.
- Be open to what might come out of the barbeque, expect to listen and hear as well as to offer information.
- Make sure you act on any promises you make – so don't make any you can't keep!
- In Waitara, Neighbourhood Support operates an email database of all residents who register at street barbeques and they are sent regular neighbourhood updates.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Stronger connections between residents within neighbourhoods, as well as with participating organisations.
- Ability of residents to clearly influence how organisations do what they do.
- Improved senses of empowerment, safety and belonging amongst residents.
- Happier families and safer streets including sometimes significant investment and physical changes.

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