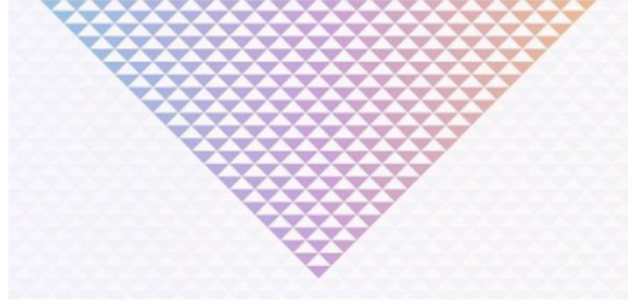




# POWERING UP COMMUNITIES TO DELIVER LOCAL WELLBEING

Community Case Study: Environment Network Manawatū



This case study was curated to spark thinking about local structures and approaches that can enable communities to improve their own wellbeing. It's part of a wider Think Piece commissioned by the Western Bay of Plenty District Council.

See [https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/ic\\_resource/powering-up-communities-to-deliver-local-wellbeing/](https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/ic_resource/powering-up-communities-to-deliver-local-wellbeing/) for the full report.

**Cover image sources:** Paekākāriki Housing Trust (top left), The Community Led Development Trust (top middle), Te Puna Oranga o Ōtaki (top right), McLaren Park Henderson South Community Trust (right middle), Environment Network Manawatu (bottom right), Focus Paihia (bottom left).





## CASE STUDY: ENVIRONMENT NETWORK MANAWATŪ – COLLECTIVE IMPACT, TOGETHER

<b>Name</b>	Environment Network Manawātū (ENM)
<b>Location</b>	Palmerston North.
<b>Community Context</b>	Palmerston North is the largest city in Manawātū-Whanganui region with a population of around 92,000 people. The Manawātū River with its beautiful walkways and cycle ways flows through the city. Spanning 180km in length, the river flows from the Ruahine Ranges through the Manawātū Gorge and across the Manawātū Plains to the Tasman Sea at Foxton.
<b>Legal Structure</b>	Incorporated Society and registered charity with 65+ member groups.
<b>Why ENM Exists</b>	Connecting and inspiring communities for environmental action.
<b>Vision</b>	All life is part of a thriving, self-sustaining ecosystem. ENM’s vision is that the ecological and human communities in the Manawātū River catchment are living in harmony.
<b>What Motivates ENM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our responsibility to care for the earth and each other</li> <li>• Becoming better Te Tiriti partners</li> <li>• Collaboration and inclusivity</li> <li>• A belief that small actions can have a big impact.</li> </ul>
<b>Started</b>	Legally incorporated in 2001.
<b>Annual Turn over</b>	\$800,000.
<b>FTE</b>	Five operational staff members (approx. three FTE) and numerous volunteers (2732 volunteer hours in year end June 30 <sup>th</sup> 2023).
<b>Relationship with local government</b>	Core ENM funding is from Palmerston North City Council (PNCC) with a Sector Lead Partnership agreement with Council now in place. Smaller scale partnering and funding relationship in place with Horizons Regional Council, and evolving relationship with Manawātū District Council.
<b>Interviewed for this case study</b>	Madz BatachEl

## JOURNEY TO DATE

From small beginnings and the passion and drive of a select group of founders, ENM has evolved today into an environmental organisation that is unique for being led by the voices and shared input of its 65+ member groups. A wide range of projects are undertaken by ENM member groups each year with ENM's key purpose focused on facilitating and enabling communication, co-operation and increasing collective action amongst its member groups and the wider community. Leadership is provided by underpinning, fostering, and encouraging environmental initiatives in the region. ENM member groups work across the Manawatū River catchment area and cover a wide range of interests that include:

- Freshwater quality
- Regeneration and biodiversity
- Food security and resilience
- Alternative energies
- Sustainable living
- Active transport

The network is organised into two collectives: *Manawatū Food Action Network* and *Manawatū River Source to Sea*, with both strands caring for and supporting environmental activities and connecting people.

ENM has been strategic in their approach - enabling a collective voice right from the start at a time when smaller groups did not have agency. Coming together to make a collective statement has given the environment a much stronger voice in the Manawatū. Their calculated collective approach has involved finding ways to make collaboration work for everyone.

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*"ENM are like a club, but members are the environmental organisations that have joined rather than individuals."*

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In 2015 workshops were held to consider what was needed to set up a 10-year plan for ENM. Through this process, a decision was made to align ENM goals to Palmerston North City Council's environmental goals, with the ENM plan articulating what ENM was going to do to make the City's goals happen. ENM's strategic plan is reviewed every 2 to 3 years by ENM governance with membership consultation and continues to provide a great platform for maximising potential collaboration.

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*"ENM brings together and makes sense of individual action. It makes individuals feel like part of a whole; working together for environment focused goals. It is great for mental health too."*

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## ORGANISATIONAL MODEL

Governed by its member groups, a management committee of up to 9 people from across the ENM membership is elected at the AGM each year. There is also room to co-opt to fill vacancies if required. ENM are active members of Environment Hubs Aotearoa who provide backbone support and connection to other environmental hubs nationwide.

With a strong sense of responsibility to the region, ENM relies on numerous volunteer hours, communicating an extensive list of opportunities volunteers can contribute to. Volunteers also support ENM via their participation on governance (management committee), some project delivery around public events, and advocacy. The contribution from the volunteers allows the organisation to be more flexible and responsive to the community, with over 2,700 volunteer hours clocked for the 2023 financial year.

Some diverse collaborative projects within the current ENM umbrella include:

- Ruahine Kiwi – partnering with Te Kāuru Eastern Manawatū River Hapū Collective (Te Kāuru) with the vision of returning North Island eastern brown kiwi to the southern Ruahine by 2026.
- Plastic Pollution Challenge – a collaborative initiative with Massey University’s Zero Waste Academy, Rangitāne o Manawatū, Te Kāuru in Dannevirke and RECAP in Ashhurst to deliver a range of initiatives to clean up local waterways.
- Manawatū Food Action Network – a collective of nearly 40 organisations and initiatives collaborating on food security, resilience, and localisation. Two key initiatives focus on the mitigation of food insecurity in the Palmerston North 4412 postcode area and supporting backyard gardens.
- Creative, tailored delivery of The Future Living Skills Programme, a nationwide, local government supported and funded programme encouraging lifestyles that generate less carbon to the air, less waste to landfills and less pollution to rivers.
- Palmerston North Repair Café, spearheaded and supported through ENM as well as helping to develop a repair cafe in Fielding.

ENM Coordinator Madz BatachEl describes their direction as “intentional and strategic as well as flying by the seat of our pants.”

With the ENM staff team experiencing ongoing high demand for connection and support, the stretched team is having to make some tough choices on where to prioritise their time across so many very worthy projects. Feeling pushed and pulled and wanting to deliver at the highest possible level, the team is mindful of looking after themselves and their colleagues’ mental wellbeing.

## KEY RELATIONSHIPS

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*“When we take on projects, it is important for us to ensure they align with our constitutional aim of supporting our membership.”*

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ENM work hard investing in key relationships across the network and with a broad range of environment partners and stakeholders. Their highly skilled team know and understand the regional eco system in which people are central to making change. ENM are not necessarily there to deliver special projects or to develop projects but to understand who is doing what and then co-ordinate across the range of activities happening. Describing themselves as holding the space and doing the boring bits so others can reach their dream, *“it is important to keep doing that, so they don’t have to.”*

ENM are able to provide guidance on strategic approaches to environmental issues and action. Rather than leaping in and finding solutions they pause and constantly consider *“what is our real role here?”* Madz reflects that *“in some ways we are leading and other times, we are participating, but we are always building community and connecting.”* She notes that attracting resources to do this essential back room coordinating and gluing work is challenging.

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*“Co-ordinating, collaborating and communicating is not that sexy, it does not look like you are doing much. Funders are willing to pay for the outputs but it’s more difficult to get funding for the process which enables the outputs, which includes brokering, negotiating and working through ideas and challenges to get better outcomes.”*

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Reporting is largely driven by data, and Madz stresses it is important to tell stories and to inspire as it’s the impact of their work that matters most. Often after workshops, events, trainings, engagements, hui (gatherings) or simple small interactions it is hard to know or see what the immediate impacts are. She notes that outputs focused data does not capture the other flow-on changes that may have occurred such as behaviour change, environmental change and the increase in knowledge and skills, which often has long lasting impacts across neighbourhoods, whānau and friends.

Some of ENM’s own learnings have been to frame and negotiate contracts where they can be non-specific about what they’ll count and build in ways to explore what really matters through impact stories, as projects progress. They are finding that combining data and stories helps paint a broader view.

With a strong track record of working with integrity toward great results which itself helps attract

resources, there's a high level of trust and belief in what ENM does and can do. This leads to lots of approaches for ENM involvement. Rather than simply say "yes we will do that" - the team now pauses to consider things asking:

- Do we have the capacity?
- What are we best to do here?
- Do we co-ordinate, lead, or bring in others?
- Who is missing from this conversation and how can we extend this project by collaborating with others?

At the heart of these decisions is making sure the intent and outcome is solid and viable. For example, an opportunity arose to manage one new garden but having the networks and shared resources to coordinate many more gardens in the area, ENM extended the project which has led to far greater impact. Over 100 backyard gardens have been installed since 2020, supported through volunteer time, resources and donations. This process has enabled much more as a result, with more open doors for the community to connect and learn about gardening. Initial success also led on to finding a project sponsor, and resourcing a local food growing champion, Beth Lew, whose tender approach inspires and empowers whānau. ENM are now able to employ someone for one day per week, build on existing previous strategies around food resilience, and accelerate them with other organisations who are bringing community voices to the food insecurity conversation.

ENM recognises that informal groups have great ideas and want to respond to a local need but they don't want the paperwork or meetings that goes with it. Being the underpinning support for groups is a key role that ENM plays, happily shouldering the backroom infrastructure so good work can get done.

## **FUNDING AND SUPPORT**

Funding is received from a range of grants and some donations. Key projects funding e.g. support for Ruahine Kiwi, has come through Department of Conservation's (DOC) Jobs for Nature programme. Other key kai resilience related programmes have been supported by Lottery Community funds. Core operational funding comes via PNCC's Sector Lead Partnership funding, Horizons Regional Council's Climate response fund, and a partnership with Kāinga Ora, with Environment Hubs Aotearoa resourcing ENM's capacity building activities. A range of smaller grants cover other operational and project expenses.

ENM also acts a fundholder and backbone for some of its 65+ member groups, enabling them to get on with doing and delivery. For example ENM take donations on behalf of one group (Whiowhio hut), sell jam for Timona Park Orchard Trust, sell books/calendars for Ruahine Whio Protectors and Awahuri Kitchener Park Trust, and umbrella the work of Growing Gardens and Communities by securing funding and employing a casual staff member to provide physical labour.

While constantly being drawn into the quest for funding, ENM acknowledge that they are well supported by PNCC. Twenty plus years of respected work means that ENM are now recognised as

PNCC's sector lead partner for the environment, and there is an expectation to deliver on that partnership. Part of the partnership involves providing Environmental Initiatives Grants to the community. For the last three years, an ENM Environmental Initiatives Fund Sub-Committee has made decisions on both small (up to \$1k) and large (up to \$12k) grants to support projects that deliver on PNCC's and ENM's environmental outcomes. In 2023, \$49k was allocated from the large grants to support the mahi of seven different organisations. Small grants are able to be distributed to individuals or informal groups as ENM hold the funds and can reimburse actual project expenses or pay invoices directly if the individual is not able to do so upfront.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH AT ENM**

Given difficulties in knowing what is going to happen during the year that might require pivoting or more funding, ENM would like to see more flexibility in contracts to allow them to do the work but be more able to renegotiate outputs and outcomes as required. Inclusion of support for ENM organisational capacity building would also be timely – with a need their end to develop more skills in business/commercial delivery models so that the organisation can more fully understand the value of their work and the time good work takes, so that this can be better built into contracts.

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*“Collaboration is highly needed and sought after. How this is resourced is key. Do we frame ourselves as community consultants? That is what we are offering right now – our community intelligence and connections.”*

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Like other community groups, Madz says ENM may not believe in themselves enough and while staff come into the organisation with passion and a reason for being here, being a small team without access to a HR manager, recruitment consultants, and adequate capacity for communications support puts constraints on people's time and stretches them across multiple roles. Solutions to these issues that ENM and others face could be secondments from Councils, or access to groups who offer specific project support pro bono. People resources are highly valued and supporting the contributions they are able to make is vitally important.

### **CHALLENGES:**

- Uncertainty and instability brought about by DOC's Jobs for Nature funding cuts, including little discussion with DOC around what this means for the 1800 new traps ENM and its hapū collective partners have put on the ground in the Ruahine Ranges. While Jobs for Nature funding has practically enabled new local skills and jobs and built on the ground knowledge and community connections, there is a real fear these assets could just disappear, which means considerable investments of time, energy and infrastructure might effectively be wasted.
- High volume of ongoing requests for knowledge and support. Currently ENM don't have the resources available to respond to every request.
- With demand and need for ENM services are growing, ENM are mindful of the balancing act required and not taking on too much. The priority is ensuring staff are looking after



themselves and not reaching breaking point.

- Social enterprises are often seen as the answer to funding sustainability. There are some good models such as Beautification Trust in South Auckland, however dedicated, funded time and resources are required to properly explore and test the benefits and viability of a social enterprise model.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Future development – opportunities are coming faster from great relationships that have been built and nurtured. Environment Hubs Aotearoa is working hard to see how ENM can upskill, move beyond project to project and enable greater funding stability to sustain and grow their staff team.
- Recognising and valuing the need for upskilling in community consultancy mechanisms for future contracting with councils and others.

#### **ADVICE FOR COUNCILS AND OTHERS LOOKING TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT DELIVERY OF LOCAL COMMUNITY OUTCOMES:**

- Hubs around the country could recover food waste for councils through local community collection or drop off points for food scraps. At present, most council defaults are to generic household commercial collection models. Community-based solutions and models would provide additional opportunities for community members to bump into each other, and learn more about composting, gardening and more sustainable living.
- Communities provide a wealth of knowledge, local expertise, local relationships, and access to diverse views – tapping into this should be paid for, not expected for free.
- Communities trust community organisations and don't always engage with councils. When they have had positive interactions with local community organisations, they open up to them in different, honest and raw ways. Often, community organisations are the conduit that can advocate, advise, and give a voice for others. Again, value the expertise brought to the table by paying community organisations in the same way you would pay other professional contractors for a specialised skill set.

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