



# POWERING UP COMMUNITIES TO DELIVER LOCAL WELLBEING

Community Case Study: Focus Paihia



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 Manawatū (bottom right), Focus Paihia (bottom left).



## CASE STUDY: CHAMPIONING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ACTION IN PAIHIA

Name	Focus Paihia Community Trust
Location	Paihia, Bay of Islands
Community context	Coastal tourist town of 1800 people that swells to many tens of thousands in the summer. Pākehā comprise around 69% of the population and Māori a further 35%, with the latter a much younger demographic. A significant number of holiday homes in the area.
Legal Structure	Community Trust
Vision	To enable Paihia to reach its potential as an exceptional place to live, work and visit.
Mission	To ensure that the people and community of the Bay of Islands work together in unity and with love, to stand as leaders and as guardians of the environment. “Committed to better together.”
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value and support ‘local’.</li> <li>• Open, transparent and acting with integrity.</li> <li>• Inspirational and aspirational.</li> <li>• Fun, enjoyable and encouraging a healthy sense of wellbeing.</li> <li>• Acting with accountability and responsibility to and on behalf of the community.</li> <li>• Respectful and mindful of the people, the environment and its whakapapa.</li> </ul>
Started	Conversations started in 2009, with the Paihia Community Charitable Trust created in 2012, rebranding to Focus Paihia in 2015.
Annual Turn over	\$525,000 (2022)
Staff (Full time equivalent) and volunteers	0.25 paid coordinator who supports Trustees and key activities. Average 30+ volunteers each week, contributing more than 6000 volunteer hours per year. Some large scale make over projects have involved up to 9000 volunteer hours!
Relationship with local government	Longstanding relationships and connections with both Community Board and Far North District Council (FNDC) and their economic development arm, Far North District Holdings. A current Focus Paihia trustee is currently elected on the Northland Regional Council. A number of formal arrangements in place including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community-managed cleaning contracts (Town Custodians) to maintain the town centre and waterfront area</li> <li>• a targeted town centre rate that provides grants for Focus Paihia activities</li> <li>• negotiated co-funding of public infrastructure upgrades</li> <li>• permission for community markets to be held on Council owned reserve, the Village Green.</li> </ul>
Interviewed for this case study	Peter Robinson

## JOURNEY TO DATE

The start point for Focus Paihia was a realisation that it was time to stop waiting for someone else to fix the town's problems and for the town to work together and 'get their hands dirty' and make positive change happen. In 2009, the community came together to shape a plan of action which included creating an aspirational vision for the Paihia village centre. In the 15 months that followed, this vision was turned into a Council-mandated village master plan that continues to guide activities today.

Place making (community inspired improvements to public places) has provided a key vehicle for the community driven urban design and action that has helped transform Paihia over the last decade. The very first project saw around 100 volunteers renovate an unattractive public space next to the local I-Site, supported by a \$5,000 community board grant. The results were visible, generated a sense of local pride and helped foster next phase interest and momentum for further community - led action in the town. Over the last decade, Focus Paihia initiatives have included:

- Revitalising multiple public spaces, including the town's waterfront area, local reserves, playgrounds, walkways and public toilets.
- New water fountains, a swimming pontoon, and BBQs for community use.
- Painting murals to brighten the town that reflect the Paihia's history, flora and fauna.
- Purchasing and installing CCTV cameras to address safety concerns in the village centre.
- Employing Town Custodians – who, as part of a contract with the Council, are paid to take care of regular tasks to keep the town looking beautiful such as emptying rubbish bins, cleaning toilets and sweeping footpaths.
- Establishing a Village Green market to make the town more vibrant, attract people to stop in the town, and provide an additional activity for cruise ship visitors over the September – May period.
- Creating a new mountain bike park at Waitangi.
- Hosting annual volunteer of the year awards to celebrate outstanding local leaders.
- Establishing annual arts, cultural and sports small grants to support other local organisations doing good in Paihia.
- Making a \$150k donation to support Paihia 200 year heritage celebrations.
- Opening a volunteer-managed Op Shop to financially support Focus Paihia's community change efforts.

In 2015, Focus Paihia's efforts were nationally recognised when they were honoured as NZ Community of the Year. With continuity of strong local leadership and a business-like approach to its activities, Focus Paihia has continued to grow from strength to strength with a strong desire to keep doing things better and celebrate community project successes along the way.

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*“A 10 year track record of doing good things for Paihia means that Focus Paihia has mana both in our community, and in the Far North. We’ve proven the model has benefits for everyone. While we’ve done a lot of successful community infrastructure related mahi, in the next phase ahead I see the need for more social support.”*

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Looking into the future, the mix of Focus Paihia activities is likely to stay the same, with more exploration of social support for the town on the horizon as noted above. There’s also a bubbling interest in environmental sustainability, including community gardens, and local food generation. There’s also recognition of the increasing importance of growing community connections through key national celebrations like Waitangi Day and Matariki.

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*“We invited local Matariki event organisers to come and talk with us after this year’s events to find out about what’s important to them and how Focus Paihia could help support next year.”*

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## **ORGANISATIONAL MODEL**

Rather than a ‘doer’ of projects, Focus Paihia is clear in its role as facilitator, supporter and (often) co-funder of community projects. Focus Paihia projects are volunteer-led and driven by community champions, with local businesses, iwi, community groups (such as Rotary and Lions) and local residents collectively getting in behind to support with their time, equipment and resources. Community working bees are regularly called as needed to help build and/or spruce things up to keep the town looking good.

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*“Many people have literally given years of service to Paihia via working bees, they are the real champions. There’s also lots of important little jobs that people put their hands up to do like tending flowerbeds. People don’t want recognition or accolades, they do it because they love Paihia.”*

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The Focus Paihia Trust Board that oversees Focus Paihia activities includes an intentional mix of local leadership from different parts of the community, with local Māori, business and young people formally represented on the Trust. In this way, Focus Paihia has been able to grow in ways that are cognisant of and connected to a wide range of aspirations, issues and opportunities seen for the town.

The Focus Paihia Trust board meets monthly, with the organisation’s sole paid position a 10 hour a week coordinator role, focused on supporting trustees and their meetings, responding to general enquiries, and supporting communications with the wider town via regular community e-newsletters, and updates to the Focus Paihia Facebook page and website.

An annual community get together is a key mechanism through which the Focus Paihia team share back with the community what's been achieved over the year, this process is a way to celebrate collective success and enable local accountability for outcomes. The event also includes space to talk about community needs and what else would make a positive difference for people and place. Moving from ideas to action is contingent upon people putting their hands up to own and champion causes they care about and are prepared to put time into. Focus Paihia's role is to come alongside and support as needed. This might include approaching Council or other key stakeholders for support, making funding applications, providing resources, putting out the call for volunteers and/or other resources needed to help make things happen.

Invitations for community ideas are also encouraged throughout the year via the Focus Paihia website, with Focus Paihia also hosting community discussions, surveys and workshops as needed. For example a broader community call for ideas came ahead of a two day community design workshop in early 2023 and helped bring locals together to think about what could be done to rejuvenate the southern entrance to town and the waterfront area. Around 35 locals attended the hui which was facilitated by Australian placemaking expert David Enwright, who has supported a number of successful community makeover projects in the town.

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*"Lots of amazing ideas were generated at the workshop. An anonymous donor offered \$100,000 to help make changes happen. This catalysed what became known as the \$100k project, an amazing upgrade of the reserve, playground and pathways at the far end of town, with Council contributing \$112k to upgrade the toilet block - along with time, equipment and expertise of so many local tradies and volunteers. People do it because they care, they love Paihia and want to give back."*

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While Focus Paihia relies significantly on volunteer leadership and contribution, there are limits to a purely volunteer-led model.

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*"To advance community-driven urban design improvements on Kings Road, we need to engage engineers and designers to progress plans. While there will be lots of helping hands to make physical changes to the streetscape down the track, there's specialist project management, fund raising and engineering skills that are needed upfront. Not everything can be left to or expected of volunteers."*

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## **KEY RELATIONSHIPS**

Community engagement and collaboration lies at the heart of Focus Paihia, with the Trust Deed requiring "Focus Pahia to seek and recognise the views and expectations of both local residents and tangata whenua of the Paihia District" in their activities.

From the very early days, considerable effort has gone into building relationships with key

stakeholders such as the Far North District Council (FNDC) and The NZ Transport Agency/Waka Kotahi and local iwi upon whose land and jurisdiction Focus Paihia activities have been very closely connected.

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*“The early leaders of Focus Paihia had to navigate a lot of mahi with Council elected members, staff and the Community Board. There were lots of challenges but they have now truly been worked through. The FNDC accepts that the Focus Paihia model is a good approach that has demonstrated benefits for the community and Council over many years and they remain extremely supportive.”*

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While relationships with hapū and iwi are positive, both sides are committed to respectfully keep working through any issues as forward plans for the town are progressed.

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*“There is a willingness and openness from iwi to acknowledge Focus Paihia intents and they’ve been represented on Focus Paihia from the start. This means that guidance and advice happens in real time, history is shared and pathways are smoothed.”*

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Attention to relationships is important to current Focus Paihia Chair Peter Robinson who meets regularly with the Chairs of the Paihia Business Association and the Bay of Islands - Whangaroa Community Board. He notes the complementary roles each group plays in supporting the town’s development and the value in finding opportunities where the three organisations can work together, whilst also respecting each other’s differences.

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*“Seeing how you can support other’s aims is also important. It’s about everyone doing good for the town and supporting them too.”*

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## **FUNDING AND SUPPORT**

Resourcing of Focus Paihia activities comes from a variety of sources - contracts, grants, donations, enterprise earnings and volunteer contributions of time/resources.

In 2022, Focus Paihia’s flagship op shop generated a \$139k profit that was directed into community-led initiatives in the town. With the op shop entirely volunteer run, this income stream is a key component of Focus Paihia’s sustainable funding model. Being part of the op shop team also provides a valued way for passionate locals to connect and contribute to Focus Paihia efforts, with the dedicated team often working weekends to restock the shop and get ready for the following week’s trade. A TV screen with a rolling Focus Paihia slideshow is displayed at the op shop to help promote the group’s activities and let customers know what their shop purchases are supporting. A

forward thinking, entrepreneurial approach also led to Focus Paihia purchasing the op shop building.

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*“When an opportunity came up a few years ago to buy the op shop building at a good price, we took out a loan and made that happen. If we sold the building today it would generate a huge profit, but owning it gives us other options. We now rent out part of the floor space to another small local business.”*

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While huge community generosity and an enterprising approach have underpinned Focus Paihia’s model from the start, not everything is expected to generate a financial return. Activities such as the markets on the Village Green return relatively little to Focus Paihia, but provide other benefits such as vibrancy, bumping spaces for locals and visitors alike to meet and connect, as well as enabling business development opportunities for creative locals.

As noted earlier, Focus Paihia is also a mechanism through which Paihia passionate locals can direct donations and respond to community support requests. For example in 2019, a local resident donated \$10k to support something that benefited local and visiting children. Focus Paihia facilitated discussions which resulted in the donation supporting completion of shade sails over the local primary school playground which is used by local and visiting children alike.

While Focus Paihia contracts with FNDC annually to support a range of activities such as the Town Custodians, there’s recognition that as time progresses, there may be less financial support at Council’s end due to growing fiscal constraints. FNDC however is keen to see how the Focus Paihia model could be activated more widely in their district and is looking to open up their procurement process next year to increase opportunities for new community-led suppliers to provide services in their part of the rohe.

## **BARRIERS/ENABLERS OF SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH**

### **ENABLERS:**

- Working in business like ways with a clear vision and purpose.
- Finding ways to welcome contributions from everyone – noting that while you need lots of people to champion things, whatever goes ahead has to be what the community wants and needs, not just an individual’s pet project.
- Great communication – with multiple channels to proactively share information so that people know what you’re about, what’s coming up, how to get involved, and what’s being achieved through community collaboration and contribution.
- Partnerships with Council and others so that community accessed grant funds and contributions can be matched with ratepayer funds to achieve so much more in the town.



**BARRIERS:**

- Volunteer time and capacity – impacts of cost of living increases are practically impacting on volunteer time/resource contributions in the town.
- Relationship turnover in key partner agencies such as the FNDC, which then requires time to rebuild trust and knowledge about the collaborative Paihia way of doing things.
- Someone proactively dedicated to fundraising is needed so that new potential sources of funding are known in advance of needing them.
- Contract limits – Focus Paihia would love to be doing maintenance of civic facilities they’re looking after, not just keeping things clean. But that also requires another layer of coordination and skillsets on hand to help fix things.

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

- When there’s a group of people who want to do things for their community, back and support them to get started. It’s good to start small, do things that are visible so everyone can see. Building confidence and local pride as you go means each small success can be leveraged for the next project.
- Pay attention to relationships and collaborate wherever you can – success is about interdependence not independence.
- Ensure the basics are done well - financial systems, transparency and communications so that accountabilities are clear and everyone can see where money is coming in/going out.
- Enabling flexible place-based funding in long term Council plans, with priorities for co-investment determined in conversations with communities in real time to tap into local energy and contribution.

Website	<a href="https://www.focuspaihia.org.nz/">https://www.focuspaihia.org.nz/</a>	
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