

A woman wearing a blue chef's hat and a blue apron over a grey long-sleeved shirt is standing in a kitchen, focused on cooking. She is stirring a large stainless steel pot on a stove. The kitchen has various equipment, including a red pot, a white mixer, and shelves with jars and containers in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on the cooking area.

Community Food Security in  
Te Awa Kairangi

## Evaluation of Common Unity's Food Hub

May 2022

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**COMMON UNITY**  
together we grow



# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>04</b>	Governance needs to be more inclusive and well-connected to community	<b>49</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>	Common Unity needs to reflect on its role and responsibilities as a Pākehā organisation	<b>49</b>
<b>Methods</b>	<b>16</b>	Common Unity staff and volunteers need management support	<b>50</b>
<b>Findings</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>51</b>
How has the Food Hub developed?	<b>18</b>	<b>Appendices</b>	<b>52</b>
How is the Food Hub's theory of change understood by stakeholders?	<b>26</b>		
How well is the Food Hub achieving outcomes for whānau?	<b>32</b>		
How is the Food Hub contributing to systems change?	<b>40</b>		
How well does Common Unity identify strategic learning opportunities to increase the Food Hub's impact?	<b>46</b>		

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We thank everyone who provided useful feedback on the draft report. As always, we acknowledge our families for their support. This evaluation was funded thorough the Department of Internal Affairs Lottery Community Sector Research Fund.



# Executive Summary

Common Unity is a place-based charity which aims to regenerate communities. Common Unity is based in Epuni, a neighbourhood where many households experience high levels of deprivation. Common Unity's Food Hub aims to strengthen local food resilience and access and grow community connection. The Hub includes urban kai farms, a community kitchen, café and co-op, a CSA veggie box and a food pantry/sharing shelf. The Food Hub also extends to key collaborations with Kōkiri Marae, Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective and a local school (Figure 1).

This report shares findings from an in-house evaluation of the Food Hub conducted between September 2021 and April 2022. The evaluation purpose is to assess how well the Food Hub is achieving positive change and learning. Findings will inform Common Unity's operational and strategic

planning and help partner organisations understand the impact of their contributions. Other organisations interested in food system transformation may also find this evaluation useful.

This evaluation draws on systems evaluation and developmental evaluation tools to assess four Food Hub case studies; Urban Kai Farms, the Kitchen, Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective and the CSA veggie box pilots. Evaluation fieldwork involved interviews with 31 stakeholders including Common Unity staff, volunteers, connected community members, partners/ collaborators, funders and Board members. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically to identify patterns and key findings. The evaluators are confident this report accurately represents the views expressed by stakeholders.

## Findings

The evaluation was shaped around five key evaluation questions. We include the summary of findings and recommendations for each question below.

Additional findings related to governance, treaty responsibilities and management emerged during analysis. These are also included.



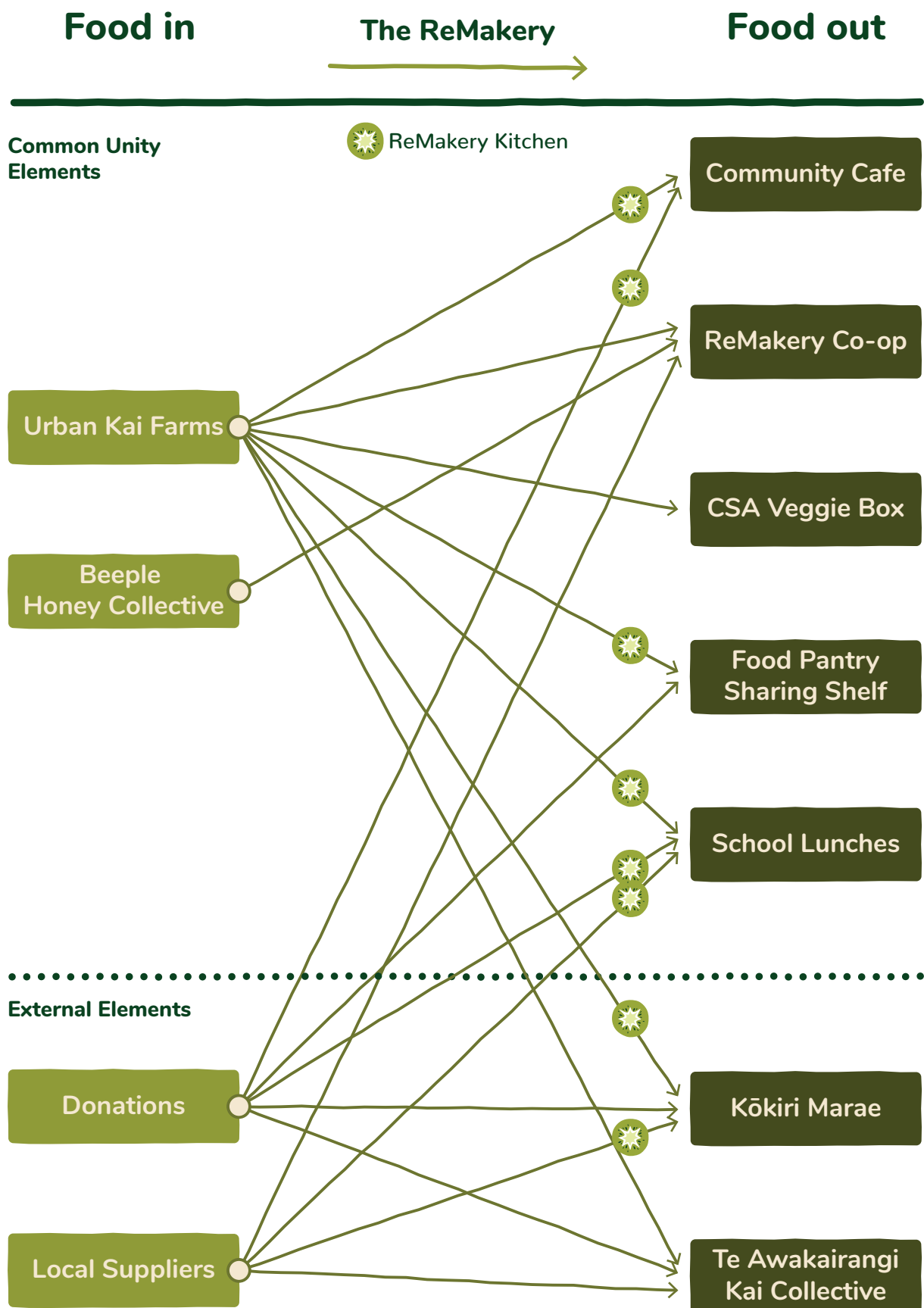


Figure 1. Elements of the food hub

## How has the Food Hub developed?

The Food Hub grew over a decade in response to community needs, but the concept is new. Development enablers include securing premises, collaboration, gifting, volunteer contributions, flexible funders, organisational agility, a growing reputation and visionary leadership. Barriers include the lack of secure growing sites, restrictive funding with high reporting requirements, too much “chopping and changing” with new projects and directions and unresolved relationship breakdowns.

### Recommendations

- Secure long-term tenure of at least one growing site
- Develop conflict resolution capability and processes
- Seek funders who see themselves as learning partners
- Limit the number of new projects, and ensure they have adequate lead-in time and resourcing to execute successfully.

## How is the Food Hub’s theory of change understood by stakeholders?

A theory of change (TOC) explains how activities and strategy are understood to produce results that contribute to intended impacts for a particular audience.

Most stakeholders are aware of most Food Hub activities but there is some confusion about how the system fits together. Stakeholders understand the intended audience to be those in need. Stakeholders consider community food access and food resilience to be the primary intended outcome of the Food Hub. Community connection is an additional intended outcome.

Stakeholders have a clear understanding of the Food Hubs operational principles which align closely with Common Unity’s theory of change. Stakeholders were unaware of the Food Hub’s strategic pathway to achieve its intended outcomes. Stakeholder opinion was mixed and reflected the tension between the need to have a plan while being responsive to changing community needs. Several stakeholders suggested the Food Hub needs a resilience-focused flagship project to replace the Epuni School collaboration, currently on hold.

### Recommendations

- Build on existing opportunities to showcase the Food Hub system to the community through resources, tours, talks or public screenings of the documentary Together We Grow
- Together with stakeholders, develop a formal theory of change for the Food Hub which clearly outlines the intended audience, outcomes and strategic steps to achieving that
- Scope opportunities (including existing projects such as the toolkit) for a flagship project with a food resilience focus.

## Our Theory of Change

**Our Purpose:** Regenerating Communities

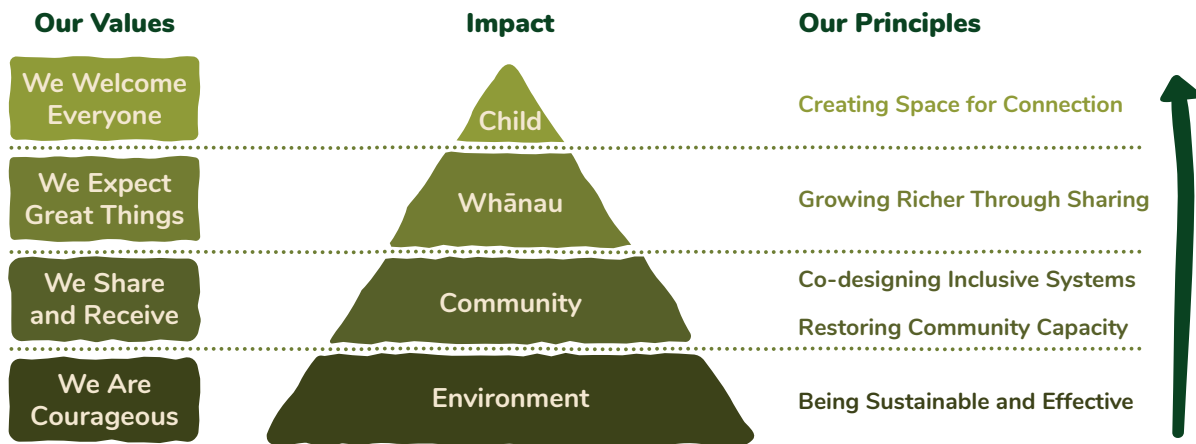
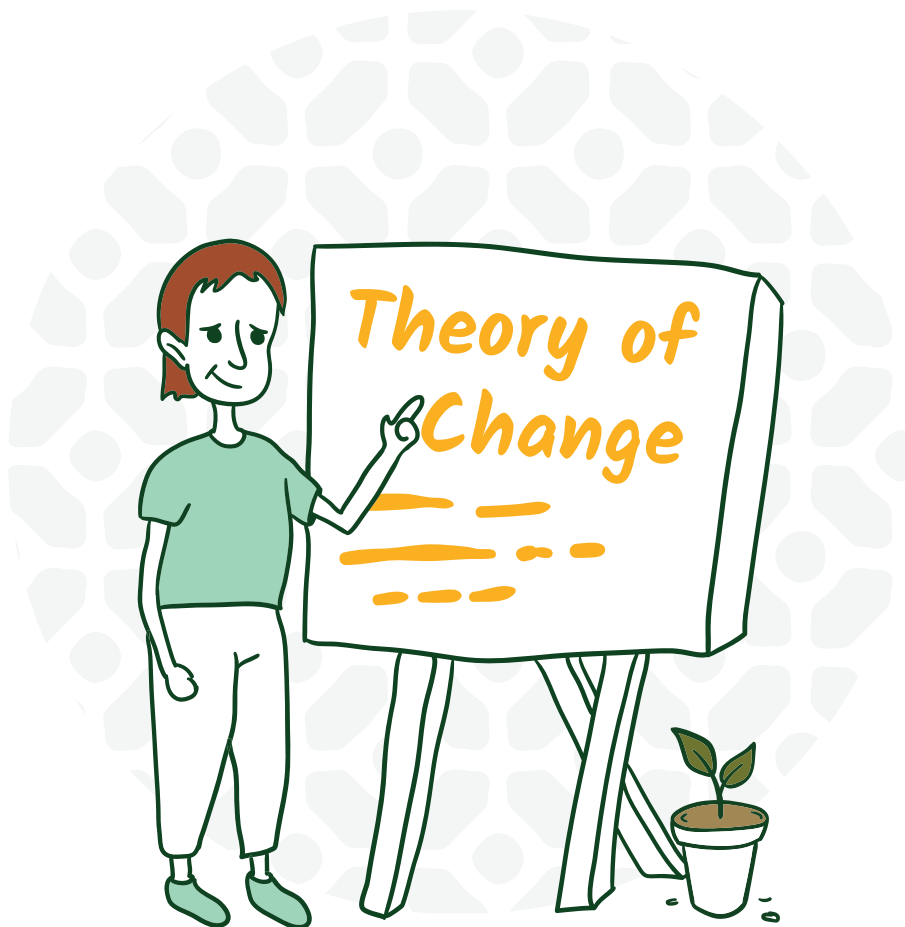


Figure 2. Theory of change



## How well is the Food Hub achieving outcomes for whānau?

Common Unity's Food Hub is achieving positive outcomes for whānau through the provision of nutritious kai, learning opportunities, community connection and capacity building.

The Food Hub is achieving outcomes for whānau Māori through its partnership with Kōkiri Marae. Some Food Hub components are mostly accessed by middle-class Pākehā. At this point in time the Food Hub is mostly achieving outcomes at the scale of individual whānau as opposed to targeted groups or populations.

### Recommendations

- Explore how the Food Hub can achieve positive outcomes for a greater diversity of whānau
- Develop strategies to extend outcomes beyond the individual level to the scale of targeted groups and populations.

---

## How well is the Food Hub contributing to systems change?

The Food Hub is achieving small-scale systems change in an environment of multi-layered systems failure. Structural change has been achieved through collectivist approaches to resourcing and the creation of structural alternatives to supermarkets. The Food Hub is creating relational change by providing a platform for new relationships and connections, and modelling relationships based on reciprocity, trust and power sharing. The Food Hub is shifting the mental models of some individuals and helping create the conditions for transformative change by showcasing what's possible.

### Recommendations

- Continue influencing systems change by supporting community-led food solutions
- Continue strengthening high-trust relationships with government and philanthropic funders to increase impact through scaling and innovation
- Seek greater financial support for infrastructure, core operational roles and learning to increase impact
- Maintain community at the centre of efforts to address food insecurity
- Develop strategy to expand beyond individual mindset shifts to change mental models at the scale of targeted groups and populations.



## How well does Common Unity identify strategic learning opportunities to increase the Food Hub's impact?

Strategic learning related to actions and thinking is evident in the way some Food Hub initiatives are refined in response to feedback and emergencies. Common Unity offers few opportunities for 'triple loop' strategic learning to reflect on organisational identity and perceptions. Opportunities for the participation of the wider community in strategic learning is also limited.

### Recommendations

- Introduce fortnightly or monthly sessions for ongoing strategic learning, planning and accountability, with a focus on single, double and triple loop learning
- Secure more resource in the form of staff hours to increase opportunities for strategic learning without increasing workload
- Create more opportunities for volunteers, partners and wider community to participate in strategic learning and ensure invitations are shared through a variety of channels.



Figure 3. The ReMakery

## Additional findings

Common Unity has grown significantly over the last decade, and last two years in particular, transitioning from a small volunteer project to an established charity with 19 paid staff. It's no surprise that growth of this scale comes with learnings. We share these additional findings to help Common Unity navigate this ambitious transformation and for others who may be on a similar journey.

## Governance needs to be more inclusive and connected to community

Board members, Common Unity staff and volunteers have different understandings of the Board's purpose. Board members believed their purpose is to be a decision-making body with financial oversight, removed from day-to-day operations. Staff and volunteers were unaware of the Board's function, membership or how someone becomes a Board member. Volunteer, staff and Board stakeholders felt the Board should be well-connected to, and representative of, the local community.

### Recommendations

- Explore governance structures and processes with Board members, staff and volunteers to clarify the Board's purpose and ensure governance aligns with organisational principles and purpose.

## Common Unity needs to reflect on its role and treaty responsibilities as a Pākehā organisation

Common Unity is a predominantly Pākehā organisation at the beginning of their Treaty learning journey. Stakeholder examples suggest the organisation has low Māori cultural competency and limited recognition of Pākehā privilege at the volunteer, staff and Board level. As a result, Common Unity has not always felt culturally safe for some Māori stakeholders and has damaged some partnership opportunities.

### Recommendations

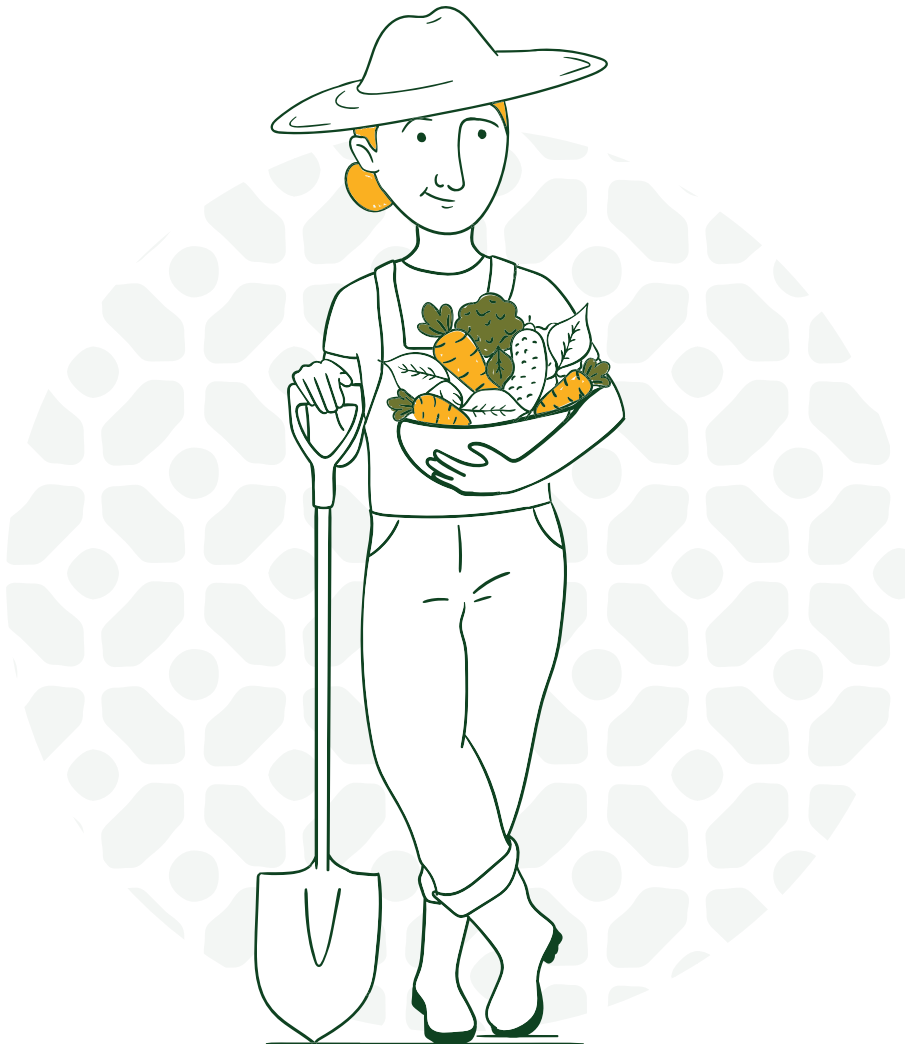
- Formally acknowledge the contributions of Māori individuals and organisations towards building Common Unity's cultural capacity and treaty understanding
- Commit substantial time and resource to treaty education and developing Māori cultural competency at volunteer, staff and Board levels in ways that keeps Māori safe
- Develop a shared understanding across the Board, staff and volunteers of what is and is not Common Unity's role in supporting Māori communities.

## Common Unity staff and volunteers need more management support

Common Unity does not always create a safe and healthy working environment for staff due to the lack of management support and formal dispute resolution processes. Although Common Unity now has paid staff, it continues to rely heavily on volunteers. Some stakeholders felt uncomfortable with the amount of work completed by volunteers at Common Unity without compensation (non-monetary).

### Recommendations

- Employ a full-time manager to help support staff
- Collectively develop a formal, internal dispute resolution pathway for staff
- Review non-monetary compensation strategies for regular volunteers
- Consider employing a full time volunteer coordinator to help support volunteers.



# Introduction

## **Common Unity aims to regenerate communities**

In 2012, Common Unity was founded through a collaboration between a local mother, Julia Milne, and Epuni Primary School. Together they established a school micro-farm, incorporated gardening into the curriculum, and with volunteers prepared school lunches from kai grown by the tamariki. Over the last decade, Common Unity has grown into a well-known place-based organisation with a team of 19 staff delivering development initiatives in Te Awa Kairangi. See Appendix 1 for Common Unity's theory of change.

## **Common Unity is based in Epuni, in Te Awa Kairangi**

Common Unity operates from the ReMakery, a retired plaster factory in Epuni. Epuni sits within Te Awa Kairangi (Hutt Valley) where Te Āti Awa ki te Upoko o Te Ika a Māui are mana whenua. The suburb Epuni is named after a Te Ātiawa rangatira.

Epuni is a neighbourhood facing challenges. Forces and events shaping Epuni and the surrounding neighbourhoods include colonisation by Pākehā settlers from 1840 (Waitangi Tribunal 2003), the displacement of Chinese market gardeners in the 1950s and 60s (Lee & Lam 2012) and the abuse of tamariki and rangatahi in Epuni Boys Home (Stanley 2016), now called Epuni Care and Protection. Other factors include a strong gang presence, gentrification and increasing housing density.

These factors and others have shaped a community of extremes. Some blocks of households in Epuni are rated at the highest level of socioeconomic deprivation under the New Zealand deprivation index. Others are ranked the least deprived (Figure 4)

## **Common Unity's Food Hub aims to grow food resilience**

Food resilience has always been central to Common Unity's purpose. The original focus was feeding the children of Epuni School. With support and resourcing from collaboration partners, this small project has grown into an ecosystem of food initiatives now conceptualised as the Food Hub (Figure 5)

Food is grown on urban kai farms. Alongside donated and purchased supplies, this fresh produce is distributed into the community through a variety of channels. Meals distributed through the café and Kōkiri Marae are prepared by staff and volunteers in the ReMakery kitchen. For a timeline of the emergence of different Food Hub components, see Appendix 2.



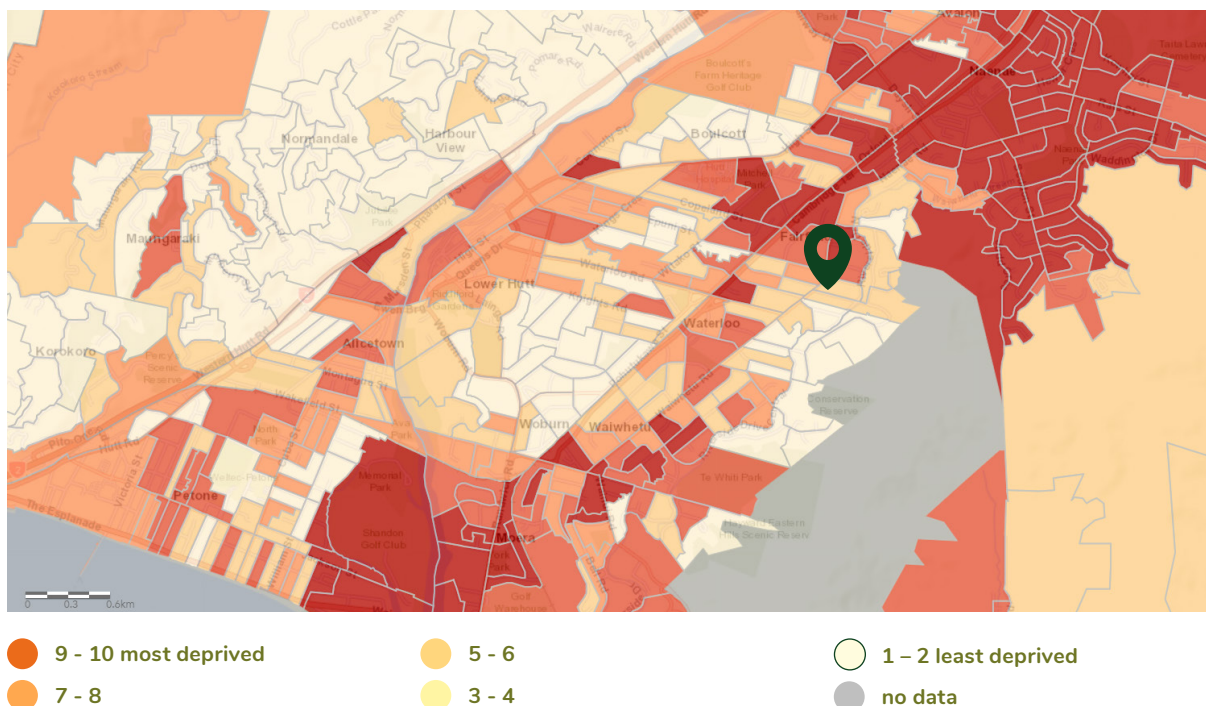


Figure 4. NZ Deprivation index map showing Common Unity (green marker) in Epani and surrounding suburbs (Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand 2018)

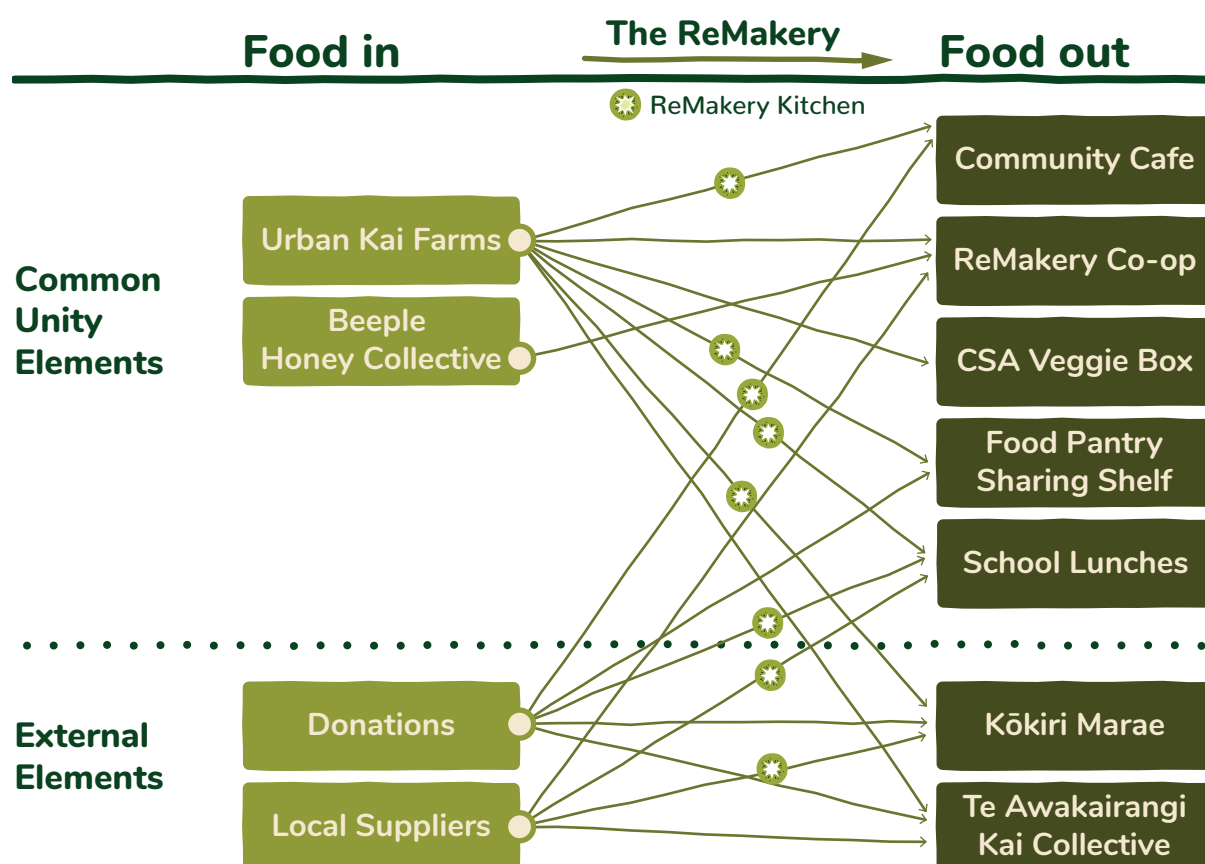


Figure 5. Elements of the food hub

## **In 2021-2022, Common Unity evaluated its Food Hub**

Between September 2021 and April 2022, Common Unity conducted an in-house evaluation of its Food Hub to assess how well the Food Hub is achieving positive change and learning.

The evaluation findings will be used by Common Unity to inform operational and strategic planning. The findings may also be used by funders, local community and government partners wanting to understand the impact of their contributions. Other organisations interested in food system transformation may also find this evaluation useful.

## **The evaluation focused on five key questions**

**How has the Food Hub  
developed?**

**How is the Food  
Hub's theory of  
change understood by  
stakeholders?**

**How well is the Food Hub  
achieving outcomes for  
whānau?**

**How well is the Food Hub  
contributing to systems  
change?**

**How well does Common  
Unity identify strategic  
learning opportunities to  
increase the Food Hub's  
impact?**



# Methods

## We used systems and developmental evaluation tools

Common Unity uses a Community Led Development (CLD) approach<sup>1</sup>. CLD is a strength-based approach that seeks to grow local visions, learning and leadership in collaboration with diverse local people<sup>2</sup>. This approach creates an environment of social complexity, uncertainty and innovation. To capture the Food Hub's dynamic nature and systems change focus, the evaluation draws on techniques from systems evaluation (Cabaj 2019) and place-based evaluation (Dart 2018).

## We focused on four Food Hub case studies

Case studies were selected to capture the diversity of the Food Hub. Each element is at a different stage of development and sits at a different point in the supply chain. We include three elements held within Common Unity (urban kai farms, the kitchen and CSA veggie box) and one collaborative project; Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective (Table 1). For a more detailed description of the method, see appendix 3.

<b>Urban Kai Farms</b>	Common Unity farmers and the community grow food together on the land of partner organisations including Kāinga Ora, Eponi Care and Protection, Remutaka Prison and Eponi School. Urban Kai has existed in some form since Common Unity's inception in 2012 and is one of the main food sources for the Food Hub.
<b>ReMakery Kitchen</b>	Several kitchen staff work alongside volunteers in this off-grid kitchen to prepare food for the café, school lunches and emergency meals. The kitchen is a key transition pathway for food entering the Hub. The Kitchen was opened in September 2017
<b>Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective</b>	A Collective of Pātaka Kai and Food Bank organisations in Te Awa Kairangi, formed in response to the 2021 COVID lockdown.
<b>CSA Veggie Box</b>	Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) veggie box where members subscribe to a month of weekly veggies boxes grown by the urban kai team. Urban Kai staff and interns delivered two month-long pilots in December 2021 and February 2022

Table 1. The four evaluation case studies

1 Common Unity Strategic Plan 2020

2 Inspiring Communities (2021) Ngā Matapono- CLD Principles. Retrieved from [https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/ic\\_resource/nga-matapono-cld-principles/](https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/ic_resource/nga-matapono-cld-principles/)



## We interviewed 31 stakeholders involved with the Food Hub

Stakeholders include Common Unity staff, volunteers, connected community members, partners/collaborators, funders and Board members.<sup>3</sup> Interviews followed an informed consent process and participants were offered a \$50 voucher in acknowledgment of their time. Most Māori stakeholders were interviewed by a Māori evaluator.

3

Participating Community Member

5

Partner/collaborator

2

Board member

7

Common Unity Staff Member

3

Funder

11

Common Unity Volunteer Whānau

31

TOTAL

## We analysed the interviews thematically

Interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai and transcripts tidied by the interviewers. Where requested, we sent people their transcripts to review. The three interviewers attended an analysis session to share insights and identify high-level findings. A thematic analysis process followed to identify patterns and themes.

<sup>3</sup> Stakeholders included people currently involved, and some who are no longer involved. We have not distinguished between those involved in the past or present in the way we label participant quotes.

## We are confident in our results, and some limitations exist

As an in-house evaluation, the evaluators hold existing organisational knowledge, experience and relationships which can be both a strength and limitation. Due to staff absences, we did not receive feedback on the report from all key decision-makers at Common Unity. Due to time constraints, we did not hold a sense-making workshop with the wider organisation as planned. The evaluators are confident this report accurately represents the views expressed by stakeholders.

# Findings

## How has the Food Hub developed?

This section explores barriers and enablers of Food Hub development across the four case studies.

### Summary

The Food Hub grew over a decade in response to community needs, but the concept is new. Development enablers include securing premises, collaboration, gifting, volunteer contributions, flexible funders, organisational agility, a growing reputation and visionary leadership. Barriers include the lack of secure growing sites, restrictive funding with high reporting requirements, too much “chopping and changing” with new projects and directions and unresolved relationship breakdowns.

### Recommendations

- Secure long-term tenure of at least one growing site
- Develop conflict resolution capability and processes
- Seek funders who see themselves as learning partners
- Limit the number of new projects, and ensure they have adequate lead-in time and resourcing to execute successfully.

---

### The Food Hub grew over a decade, but the concept is new

Food has always been central to Common Unity’s mission but the emergence of the concept of a Food Hub is a more recent development. The concept emerged during the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020.

“

The concept of a food hub came about because during COVID lockdown...a lot of the softer peripheral stuff took a backseat. We became very clear and very focused about what our contribution would be going forward.

(Common Unity staff member)

### **The ReMakery premises are a launchpad for developments**

In 2017, Common Unity leased a retired plaster factory to house its operations. Securing 'The ReMakery,' which includes various rooms, workshop spaces, outdoor areas and facilities was essential to the Food Hub's development. Without this "place to be," few if any Food Hub operations would be possible.

### **Food Hub development is driven by community need**

Each Food Hub component has a unique development story, but community need is the seed of most Common Unity initiatives.

“

[The Food Hub] came to be in a sort of unplanned piecemeal fashion in order to solve a need on the day.

(Board member)



Figure 6. Lower Hutt Food Bank

In the case of Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective, the need was more of a crisis. Since the arrival of COVID-19 and associated lockdowns, the number of whānau needing emergency food parcels has risen. This growing need placed intense pressure on food banks across Te Awa Kairangi. These food banks were mostly small, independent outfits dependent on volunteer labour. The Kai Collective emerged in response to the need for greater support and efficiency in emergency food provision in Te Awa Kairangi.

An important development learning is the need for the Food Hub to be agile, to respond to (sometimes sudden) changes in community needs and priorities.

“

It is a continuum, where we've got this crisis down one end and resilience down the other and in the middle is wellbeing....And I think that a good community food response that is deeply embedded in its neighbourhood should have the agility to be able to be responding to both. That you just sometimes need to drop everything and move into what's needed in that crisis space. Always with the idea that you're going to emerge out of it and work in that deeper resilience space. So the agility is really important.

(Common Unity staff member)

### **Collaboration enabled Food Hub developments**

Collaboration was instrumental to the emergence of Urban Kai Farms, which relies on partnerships to access local land for food production. The first collaboration began with Epuni School in 2012 followed by Remutaka Prison and Kāinga Ora in 2017 and Epuni Care and Protection in 2018.

“

We called a really big hui where all of these organisations turned up and said yes, let's network something together, and let's look at all of this land. Kāinga Ora were there. Remutaka Prison turned up. And all of a sudden we had Urban Kai.

*(Common Unity staff member)*

Collaboration in the form of gifted materials was also instrumental in the development of the Kitchen.

“

We watched from there being no café on site to being this amazing container kitchen. We went to the opening. A friend of mine managed to get the corrugate for the outside of it. My husband provided fastenings for the fastening system. So yeah, we were really proud to see that happen.

*(Partner)*

### **But reliance on partners has limitations**

All urban kai farms are located on land owned or overseen by partner organisation. Access to these growing sites depends on the partners maintaining a healthy, mutually beneficial relationship which is not always a guarantee. In the event of a partner organisations wanting to end the collaboration, Common Unity would lose access to the farm site. This lack of land security is a key vulnerability of the Food Hub and makes development and long-term strategic planning difficult.

“

Security of tenure around food growing area would be great...It's been tricky when you're relying on goodwill from a government-owned organisation or a government-controlled organisation that has changing priorities regularly

*(Board member)*

A key learning in the Food Hub's development has been the importance of collaborating with stakeholders at the appropriate level of power and influence. This ensures the leaders of collaborating organisations are invested when things don't go according to plan.



### **Volunteers played a critical role in Food Hub developments**

Volunteers contribute thousands of hours each year to the Food Hub's operations and development. Some volunteers have been instrumental in pushing forward key Food Hub developments. For example, one volunteer was responsible for designing the seedling propagation hub at the ReMakery, sourcing materials and supervising working bees to construct seedling benches.

A key contribution from some of the older volunteers is mentoring Common Unity staff and other volunteers in their areas of expertise.

“

[The Common Unity community] get taught by people that are in the know about growing seedlings, about growing kai on the whenua. And those people are still active in Common Unity today. They are volunteers that have been doing gardening since they were born.

(Common Unity volunteer)

### **A growing reputation and COVID-related funding enabled the Food Hub to become an “explosive outfit”**

Since 2020, Common Unity secured enough funding to more than double the number of paid staff, going from eight employees in 2020 to 19 in 2022 (Figure 7). Although these are mostly part time roles, this exponential growth has created a surge in organisational capacity.

“

Now we're starting to see what happens when you spin all of the plates with lots of love at the same time. It's really quite cool. But we haven't been able to do that because we haven't had the resourcing. But now we actually have got the resourcing around each part of the hub. And that only came about because of COVID and because of funding from government.

(Common Unity staff member)

Participants attribute this funding surge to Common Unity's growing reputation as a trusted, effective organisation and deepening relationships with government and private funders.

“

What I noticed during COVID is that it [Common Unity] was a really important connection point in the community. And I think it had grown enough as an institution to be trusted to distribute food and that kind of thing

(Common Unity volunteer)

“

The changing relationships with government agencies and local government has been huge over the five years that I've been involved. From nothing to now very strong relationships with local government.

(Board member)

The COVID crisis enabled an injection of emergency funding into the food space and increased other organisations appetite for collaboration. Funding enabled the development of key infrastructure including the chiller, compost hub and two seedling greenhouses. This infrastructure has further increased the Food Hub's capacity.

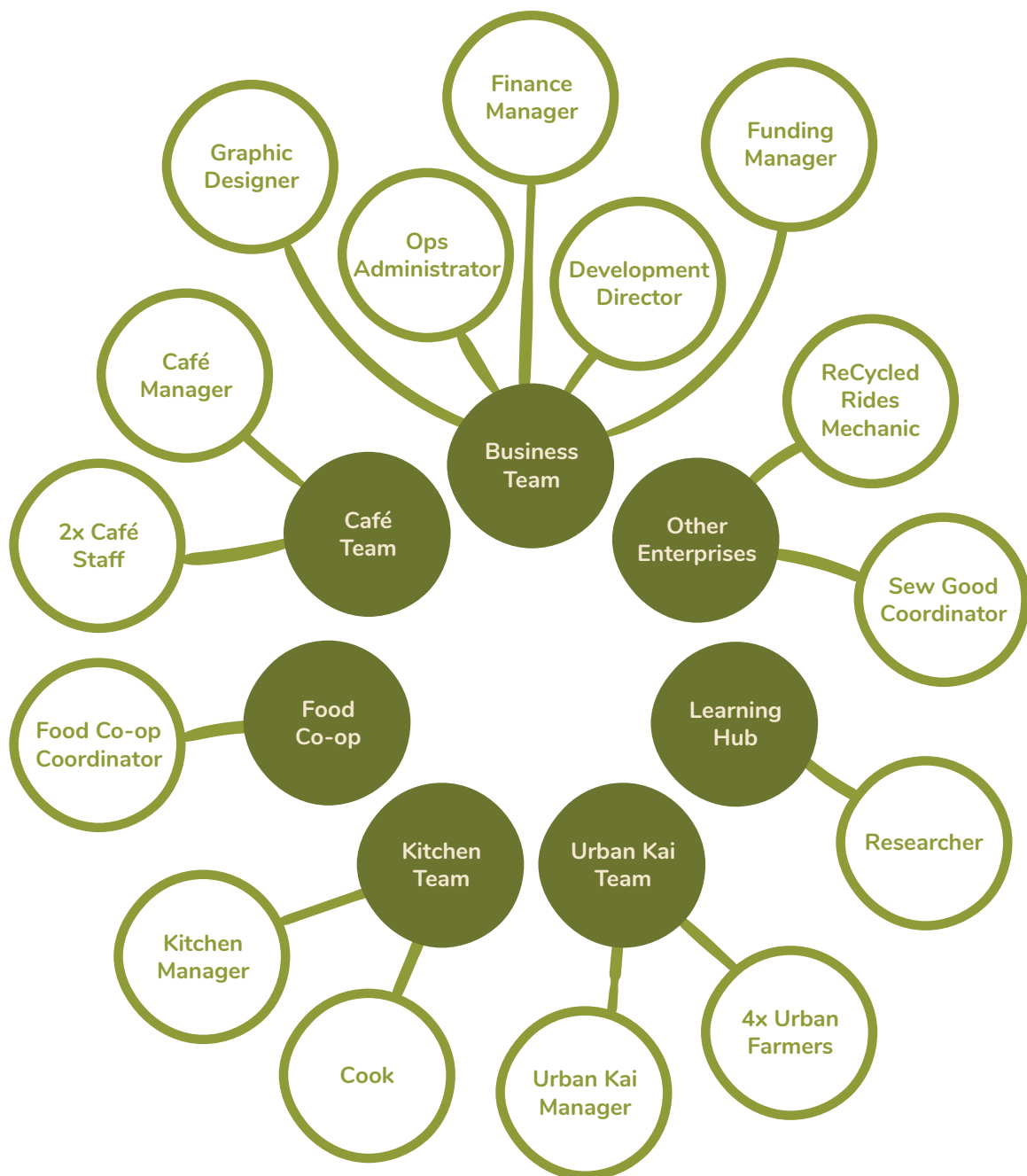


Figure 7. Common Unity's paid staff positions in 2022.

## **Funding has helped and hindered Food Hub developments**

Funding is important for developing and delivering projects. Government grants, philanthropic giving and private donations have funded infrastructure and staff salaries.

Funding can also be a burden. Below we explore two funding scenarios to show how funding can be a help or hindrance, depending on the context.

### **#1 Rigid, siloed government funding compromises development potential**

Epuni School is Common Unity's original collaborator, beginning with the development of the school gardens in 2012. The partnership was based on a shared vision for hands-on gardening education, healthy food and the opportunity for tamariki to experience the full cycle of food from garden to plate. The relationship was a friendly one built on reciprocity.

“

In the past, any produce from the garden was made by the Kitchen into a hot lunch three times a week for the students. And it was a really lovely time. We had volunteers who used to go over and get the lunch. And for the children it was wonderful to have seen that produce followed right through. So we had quite a close connection with the kitchen then.

(Partner)

In 2020, Epuni School joined the Healthy School Lunches programme and invited Common Unity to be their provider. Common Unity was excited about getting funded for something they had been doing for a long time. But this new arrangement shifted their relationship from one based on collaboration and shared vision, to one defined by government regulations which didn't work for Common Unity's Food Hub.

“

Trying to bring the ministry's model of what a healthy school lunch would be and then funding it with what the ReMakery were doing just didn't mix. It caused a lot of stress for all of us really. So that's not happening now and that connection's different.

(Partner)

In accepting the Healthy School Lunches funding, Common Unity compromised the autonomy of an unregulated partnership with Epuni School for greater financial security. This decision damaged a long-standing partnership.

## #2 Funders as collaborators and learning partners supports development

Common Unity's most successful funding relationships have been with funders who see themselves as learning partners in the exploration of

community-led development initiatives. In these arrangements, the relationship is founded on shared learning and trust rather than financial transaction alone.

“

We see [Common Unity] as learning partners. We're not just funders. We really value what we learn from our relationship with them.

(Funder)

“

They are the people that know what they're doing. They're the experts in this. I'm just along to learn and help where I can.

(Funder)

### Development has required vision and courage

Several stakeholders acknowledged the “visionary” leadership of founder and Development Director Julia Milne in driving the Food Hub forward. This vision has been essential when navigating the “pointy end” of learning. In 2021, Common Unity's Food Hub operations came under investigation following a food safety incident. The investigation highlighted the complexity of an operation like the Food Hub which includes primary production, preparation, packing, transport and retail.

“

When we were spending a lot of time interfacing with government agencies, we were told our model was more complex than Fonterra.

(Common Unity staff member)

The investigation exposed how top-down food system regulations can discourage community-led innovation because they are so “fraught and difficult.”

“

I can totally see why people don't do this kind of stuff. Because it's just so bad. It feels like every door is closed. You can either give up at that point, or you develop a way you can make it and bring some courage, which is what we did.

(Common Unity staff member)

Rather than giving up, Common Unity pivoted. They hired a food consultant to develop a Food Control Plan (FCP) which complied with legislative requirements and aligned with Common Unity's culture and values. The vision is for the FCP to become a best practice resource for other community organisations working in the food space.



### Too many ideas can become a development barrier

Some stakeholders noted the limitations of frequently trialling new ideas without sufficient time or planning. These limitations include placing unexpected pressure on staff, decreasing people's agency to contribute and damaging the brand and relationships when projects are poorly executed.

“

I think there is a need to be consistent – to concentrate on getting the model right, not constantly changing it. There are so many changes at Common Unity it is hard to commit or trust

*(Common Unity volunteer)*

“

The chopping and changing... decreases people's agency. Stops [their] ability to guide and be a strong part of the overall direction.

*(Board member)*

### Unresolved relationship “breakdowns” are a barrier

Several stakeholders were aware of unresolved relationship “fractures” with key partners, funders and community members which have dogged the Food Hub's development. Stakeholders acknowledged misunderstandings happen easily, particularly when engaging with “vulnerable” people who may not have strong resolution skills. However, they felt more work was needed on Common Unity's side to develop conflict resolution capability, structures and processes.



## How is the Food Hub's theory of change understood by stakeholders?

A theory of change (TOC) explains how activities are understood to produce results that contribute to intended impacts for a particular audience. Common Unity has a principle-based theory of change (Appendix 1) but nothing formally related to the Food Hub. This section explores stakeholders understanding of the Food Hub's theory of change including their understanding of the Food Hub components, intended audience, intended outcomes/impacts and its strategy for achieving these.

### Summary

Most stakeholders are aware of most Food Hub activities but there is some confusion about how the system fits together. Stakeholders understand the intended audience to be those in need. Stakeholders consider community food access and food resilience to be the primary intended outcome of the Food Hub. Community connection is an additional intended outcome.

Stakeholders have a clear understanding of the Food Hubs operational principles which align closely with Common Unity's theory of change. Stakeholders were unaware of the Food Hub's strategic pathway to achieve its intended outcomes. Stakeholder opinion was mixed and reflected the tension between the need to have a plan while being responsive to changing community needs. Several stakeholders suggested the Food Hub needs a resilience-focused flagship project to replace the Epuni School collaboration, currently on hold.

### Recommendations

- Build on existing opportunities to showcase the Food Hub system to help the community understand how the different components fit together
- Consider the option to develop a formal theory of change for the Food Hub which clearly outlines the intended audience, outcomes and strategic steps to achieving that
- Scope opportunities (including existing projects such as the toolkit) for a flagship project with a food resilience focus.

### Most stakeholders are aware of most Food Hub activities

As part of the interview, stakeholders were shown cards of different Food Hub components and asked to describe them. Most stakeholders could describe most components. The least known component was Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective. Few stakeholders were aware of what it was or what it did. When interviewers explained what it was, some stakeholders then recognised it.

“

I think I've seen that on a Tuesday when I was there. Where all these boxes were outside, and all these people just came along and picked them up.

(Common Unity volunteer)

**Some stakeholders did not understand how the Food Hub components, and other Common Unity initiatives interact**

Some stakeholders found it difficult to understand what the Food Hub is trying to achieve.

“

There is a bit of a sense of people arriving and not knowing exactly what is going on, at Common Unity with little bits, different bits and pieces. And I'm finding that hard to piece together.

(Urban Kai intern)

Some stakeholders involved with the urban kai farms part of the Food Hub were unaware of where or how the food they help grow is distributed.

“

A lot of people go to the farm, and they don't know where the veggies go. Whether they get cooked in the kitchen or whether they go in a box and go to someone else or whether it's being thrown out. They don't know

(Urban Kai volunteer)

Stakeholders suggested this lack of understanding means volunteers don't always understand the impact their contribution is having which could reduce their interest or participation. Several stakeholders noted the film Together We Grow is an important resource for explaining Common Unity's operation.

**Most people think the intended audience is those in need**

Most stakeholders understand the Food Hub to have a very broad audience focused on “those in need.” Stakeholders frequently mentioned people in need of food, but also people experiencing mental health challenges, social anxiety, poverty, addiction or a challenging home environment.

**Community food access and food resilience are key goals**

Stakeholders used a range of terms to describe the primary goal of the Food Hub. These included food resilience, food sovereignty, food security, food equity and food accessibility. Many stakeholders said food access was the immediate goal.

“

Helping people, feeding people. Make sure their tamariki have got food, they can look forward to without having to stress about paying for it.

(Common Unity volunteer)

“

The big goal would be to provide food for people who need it.

(Common Unity staff member)



Stakeholders who focused on the food resilience, sovereignty and security dimensions talked about upskilling whānau to grow their own food.

“

Success is people knowing how to grow food, people growing their own food, and just that kind of upskilling

(Common Unity staff member)

Several stakeholders noted the Food Hub's shift since the first COVID lockdown from being focused on food resilience to being an “ambulance organisation” focused on food delivery. Several stakeholders felt food access was the immediate community need and should be prioritised while others felt there needed to be more focus on resilience.

“

I think [emergency food provision] is what is needed now. Funders need to provide flexibility and understand that this is the reality for whānau in a very high needs community, that they do need support now. And with the current inflation in food and housing costs, and the level of homelessness, it's really not an easy thing to say, hey, everybody, grow your own kai! Come and eat some fresh vegetables!

(Funder)

“

We're providing emergency kai, for people that need it. That's responding to a community need, but it's not building community resilience.

(Board member)

### **Community connection is another intended outcome**

Many stakeholders also talked about the intention for the Food Hub to be “an enabler of community interaction,” and the ReMakery as “a place to be.”

“

Urban Kai is also trying to solve the crisis of loneliness and disconnection

(Common Unity intern)

“

The Food Hub seeks to ensure all people know they are valued members of society and that they deserve a life, which allows them to flourish in all ways.

(Urban Kai intern)

## Stakeholders understood the Hub's operational principles

Common Unity staff, volunteers, key partners and wider whānau were aware of the general principles underpinning Common Unity's approach. While participants did not name the specific principles described in Common Unity's theory of change, they explained them in different words. Each heading below is a principle in Common Unity's theory of change.

### Creating space for connection

“

I get the sense that things are very emergent. A lot of cross pollination, a lot of joining up, a lot of it based on relationships.

(Funder)

“

To me it comes back to this word called Kotahitanga, which is together as one, or togetherness. Unity.

(Common Unity volunteer)

### Growing richer through sharing

“

One of the best things I think [staff member] ever said to me to really make me understand how it all works, and the circulatory learning and support is you have two hands. One for giving, one for receiving, because a lot of us really just do the give, give, give, and it's really hard to allow someone to give back. So that was a little learning in itself. It was only a sentence, but it made a big impact for me.

(Partner)

“

The sense that you can learn from anyone. Everyone comes with their little package of stuff that they know.

(Common Unity volunteer)

“

They always have this massive pile of free mulch and other free things and I thought geez, not very often you see somewhere where they're offering free stuff to help gardeners.

(CSA member)



## Co-designing inclusive systems

“

It's that attempt to be really inclusive and hold space for people in the community to really get involved and to lead change for themselves.

(Funder)

“

I think there's a culture of being welcoming. I naturally now...I want to be like that, because I've seen other people be like that.

(Common Unity volunteer)

---

## Restoring community capacity

“

This place grows with people. They learn all this stuff. And they go and they leave here and then they do wonders.

(Kai Collective member)

“

It's working out how can I help them achieve what they want to achieve. It's up to them what they want to do. And then how can I help you do that.

(Common Unity staff member)

“

[Common Unity staff member] talks a lot about that concept of no throw-away people... everyone has strength, everyone has something to offer. And we can all be a part of feeding our children, feeding our communities together.

(Funder)

---

## Being sustainable and effective

“

It's not just about holding all the power and deciding. It's about observing where the energy is. And how to engage people. Yeah. And it just happens in a really emergent, supportive way.

(Funder)

“

Urban Kai is trying to solve the crisis of insufficient nutritious, climate resilient kai grown locally by using methods that attempt to replenish the soil health and release as little toxic gases as possible.

(Common Unity intern)

### **Stakeholders were unaware of a strategic pathway to achieve food resilience outcomes**

While most stakeholders had a strong understanding of the principles underpinning Food Hub operations, no stakeholders were aware of a formal strategy for achieving its goals. Some stakeholders felt the lack of formal strategy was appropriate given Common Unity's focus on being responsive to changing community needs. Other stakeholders felt concerned an organisation of Common Unity's size and influence did not appear to have a clear strategic pathway or definitions of success.

“

I don't think we are measuring beyond 'we've delivered this many emergency meals to these whānau' or 'we've grown this much food', which is output data. I think the definition of success doesn't even exist yet, so it's hard to know what it would take to get there.

*(Common Unity staff member)*

An important factor in stakeholders concern about strategic direction was the loss of the Epuni School arrangement where children grew food for their own school lunches. Several stakeholders felt the collaboration with Epuni School was the “coolest” of all the Food Hub projects, and the one most aligned with food resilience outcomes. These stakeholders felt the Food Hub needs a flagship project with a food resilience focus to ensure it is working towards this intended outcome.

“

[The school lunches] was the trophy example of the amazing work that Common Unity does... And when that fell away...yes, the urban kai and Kāinga Ora homes is cool. Some of the [tenants] are more involved than others. But I think most of the time it is our urban kai team going in, doing the mahi māra and there's not much interaction or knowledge transmission happening there.

*(Common Unity staff member)*

“

What next is something we have to keep asking ourselves as a board all the time, not now feeding the kids of Epuni school. That's a risk and a real issue for the board to have to address in terms of how we feed school children or not. And if we're not feeding school children, what else are we doing with that food?

*(Board member)*

## How well is the Food Hub achieving outcomes for whānau?

This section identifies key outcomes the Food Hub is achieving for whānau. It assesses whether these outcomes are distributed equitably, and whether these outcomes are occurring at an individual, targeted group or population scale.

### Summary

Common Unity's Food Hub is achieving positive outcomes for whānau through the provision of nutritious kai, learning opportunities, community connection and capacity building. The Food Hub is achieving outcomes for whānau Māori through its partnership with Kōkiri Marae. Some Food Hub components are mostly accessed by middle-class Pākehā. At this point in time the Food Hub is mostly achieving outcomes at the scale of individual whānau as opposed to targeted groups or populations.

### Recommendations

- Explore how the Food Hub can achieve positive outcomes for a greater diversity of whānau
- Develop strategies to extend outcomes beyond the individual level to the scale of targeted groups and populations.

## The Food Hub feeds people nutritious kai

The Food Hub grows and distributes veggies and vegetarian meals to hundreds of whānau in Te Awa Kairangi. In the last financial year, Urban Kai Farms grew more than 5.4 tonnes of organic veggies. This produce, alongside food rescued by Kaibosh and bought from wholesalers, reaches a diversity of whānau through different distribution pathways. These pathways include the café, co-op, sharing shelf, food pantry, agrihoods, CSA veggie boxes, lunches in schools, Kōkiri Marae and, Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective and in previous years, catering.

“

Common Unity has always been producing huge amounts of amazing, delicious food out into the community. And then it reached this boosted steroid level of food out to the community during the COVID lockdown and beyond. It's still happening now.

(Funder)

“

I've seen a lot of families that do come in that need food. They will take from the sharing shelf. Also, they will donate food. And just knowing that there's food in the pantry for families that just need food. It's just good to have that there.

(Common Unity staff member)

This flow of low-cost or free veggies and plant-based meals into the community is enabling tamariki and their whānau to eat more fresh vegetables and introducing them to food they haven't tried before.

“

It's been good for us on a nutritional level. Because I'm not going and buying stuff at the supermarket and it's going off. I pick what I need. [Daughter] is really happy because we're growing cucumbers at the moment. And that's her absolute favourite, so she's eating all of them.

(Kāinga Ora tenant in the Agrihoods project)

“

It made me get a lot more creative in trying different vegetables that I haven't cooked with before which was really cool. We feel healthier eating more vegetables. And that's all there in the fridge. Just pick out things and it's ready to go. Easy.

(CSA member)

Since engaging in emergency food delivery through Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective, Common Unity helped lift the standard of food local food banks are willing to accept. This has helped boost the quality of kai reaching whānau in need.

“

Prior to the Kai Collective, the food we were getting was disgusting. Like the lettuce had died and wilted... I mean, I wouldn't have eaten that. But then we expect people who are struggling to eat a carrot that is soft, or bread that's a couple of days old...you're expecting the kids to eat really crappy food. Now we are picking what we put in our bags, so it is much better quality which makes people a little bit happier, so that's really good.

(Kai Collective member)

### **The Food Hub empowers people to grow, prepare and preserve their own food**

Most Food Hub initiatives include an education focus, helping whānau grow food-related skills, knowledge and experience. Sometimes this education focus is explicit, for example with the 'Grow Your Own' and composting workshops delivered by the Urban Kai team. In many cases, the learning experience is more subtle, where people share skills and knowledge while doing mahi together. One stakeholder described these as 'soft learning spaces.'

“

Gardening has become quite a big thing in my life. I always wanted to do gardening, but when I was really depressed, I was like, oh, I can't do that. It's too hard. But then just going every week [to the urban kai gardening sessions] and seeing little bits that I could do. I just every time would go home and do a little bit that we'd done, and now I have a massive garden

*(Common Unity volunteer)*

“

One story that stood out to me from Kōkiri was about the breadmaking kits. Common Unity put them together because they had been donated a whole lot of bread and yeast.... And [one Kai Collective member] said she now has a senior [gang] member who regularly makes bread for his family.

*(Kai Collective member)*

The learning is not isolated to volunteers and workshop participants. Staff are developing their food-related skills and knowledge too.

“

Oh, my gosh. What haven't I learned? I've learned so much. Basically everything in the café now. Making breads. I know how to make the bread. And just different things on frittatas and spices in the curries. Yeah, everything that I just did not know anything about.

*(Common Unity staff member)*

### **The Food Hub is transforming people's approach to learning**

Stakeholders noted the Food Hub is also a learning hub where people can learn together in a relaxed, fun way, in contrast to most other learning institutions.

“

Education is the big one. And that practical hands on and doing it together, learning together. And making it fun, I think is also massive.

*(Common Unity intern)*

The Food Hub creates a place for people to share their skills and knowledge with each other. This is a positive outcome experienced particularly by some of the older volunteers who have few other outlets to share what they know and be valued for it.



“

Getting out what I know about growing kai. I've helped a lot of people on the way... I've done some interviews on my journey with the maramataka. Also growing kai and doing seedlings. And me putting that out and letting everybody know that I do know a little bit about gardening. They've come out and they've said 'hey, that was great. We all learned from that.' So I'm glad I could help some people.

*(Common Unity volunteer)*

For one stakeholder, the Food Hub's education approach has transformed how they engage with learning.

“

[Common Unity's] given me the sense of you can give things a go, you don't really need to be an expert. And I've experienced that not just with gardening. I've had a few goes at other stuff like the café and sewing. And that's had such a profound impact on my life. Often in my head, I used to be like, I can't do that, because I wouldn't know how to do it. But now, I might get involved in that thing because I can just do it a little bit and I'll learn some stuff.

*(Common Unity volunteer)*

### **The Food Hub creates opportunities for community connection and belonging**

The Food Hub is also a community hub for social connection and support. A positive outcome experienced by many stakeholders was the new connections and friendships developed at the ReMakery, and a sense of belonging to a community.

“

I don't have children and I'm not a member of a church, so this is my link to community.

*(Local resident and CSA member)*

“

Just been awesome meeting new people here. I don't really know anyone in the area, so it's been really cool making connections and community. I feel like I've found my place.

*(Urban Kai intern)*

“

I come in for the company. Because they're a good crew in the kitchen. So nice and bright, takes your mind off other things.

*(Kitchen volunteer)*

Positive social connection has been important for whānau experiencing isolation or negative social interactions because of mental health challenges, COVID mandates or court sentencing.

“

We go to do farming. Sometimes we see the [resident] there and they are sometimes distressed and depressed. You go have a chat with them. And you talk to them. There was a man who, when we would go, would go away. Now he comes to the ReMakery, he shares things with us. He talks about it, and he also wants to participate in lunch.

*(Urban Kai volunteer)*

“

And it's a really safe space as well. Where you never feel shamed for having a rough time and there's always someone who will be willing to give you a hand in whatever way they can. Yeah, especially with COVID. And the feeling of isolation. I think it's really nice to know there is a place you can go where you just have that sense of being normal again.

*(Urban Kai intern)*

“

She loves that we have visitors because I don't usually have visitors. She loves that they all know her, and she can go and get dirty out there with them. She does the whole 'Oh, I'm really interested now just because you're here doing it.

*(Kāinga Ora tenant involved with Agrihood project)*

“

Working with some of our PD workers...a lot of them would mihi to me and [volunteer] for creating a space where they didn't feel like they were being punished. They were just a part of our volunteer crew.

*(Common Unity staff member)*

“

when I was really depressed, I felt so worthless that I thought no one would want to talk to me, because I didn't want to talk to anyone. But people would say 'how are you? Nice to see you here' the first time you were there. I felt like they were so excited to see you. And every time you came back, even though I never said anything for weeks, people would be like 'oh, so nice to see you again' And I would be like- oh my god, I'm actually valued here, even though I feel like I've contributed nothing

(Common Unity volunteer)

Some social connections are beginning to form beyond the physical domain of the ReMakery. Several Agrihood residents are sharing their skills and garden space with others outside of Common Unity.

**The Food Hub is growing and sustaining people's capacity to dream and lead**

The support, skills and resourcing provided by the Food Hub has empowered and sustained individuals in the community to lead.

“

A really amazing success for [agrihood resident] this year was that she was engaging with her neighbours and helping them set up their own backyards

(Common Unity staff member)

“

When [the Kai Collective] got together, the support from the other food banks was incredible, and from Julia. I would have probably burnt out by now and we would have closed.

(Kai Collective member)

Engaging in new activities through the Food Hub can create new pathways of possibility for people.

“

One time there was this kid who found a bird in the netting. We put netting over the raspberry and the bird had got stuck in it. And its neck was quite strangled. And so we had to hold the bird and try and cut the net off it. And that was a pretty amazing experience because he was so gentle. And so into it. And he was like 'Oh man, I could be a vet, I could be a vet.'

(Common Unity staff)

### **The Food Hub is achieving outcomes for whānau Māori through its partnership with Kōkiri Marae**

Kōkiri Marae ensures the emergency meals prepared by the ReMakery Kitchen reach Māori whānau in need. Several stakeholders felt it was appropriate Kōkiri and not Common Unity maintained these frontline relationships with Māori whānau in need but questioned where Common Unity would be without the partnership.

“

I don't know what Common Unity's intentions or outcomes would be like without having that relationship [with Kōkiri Marae] and them knowing exactly what whānau to drop off packages to.

*(Common Unity staff member)*

### **Some Food Hub components are mostly accessed by middle-class Pākehā**

Some stakeholders observed most people accessing some Food Hub components including the café, co-op and urban kai gardening sessions and workshops are middle class Pākehā. Some stakeholders felt concerned this inequitable access could be leading to an inequitable distribution of outcomes for whānau.

“

A failure might be that in some parts of the Food Hub, the majority of the recipient population tends to be middle-upper class white people – thinking of the café, co-op grocer, CSA boxes, and even the volunteers.

*(Common Unity intern)*

“

There's a real difference between volunteers who come in and people who are receiving the food. They're different people. You don't get a cross over there.

*(Common Unity staff member)*

**The Food Hub is mostly achieving outcomes at an individual whānau level**

Almost all the examples of whānau outcomes provided by stakeholders were at the individual level. Just one stakeholder who is a local Epuni resident talked about the Food Hub having an impact at the broader scale of targeted groups or populations.

“

[The Food Hub has] definitely had a positive impact on the whole community. People come from Wellington to go there. Yeah. It's one of the biggest things that's happened to Epuni ever.

(CSA customer)





## How is the Food Hub contributing to systems change?

Our systems change analysis draws on the Waters of Systems Change model developed by Kania et al. (2018) (Figure 8). The model illustrates six conditions of systems change, categorised as structural, relational and transformative change.

### Summary

The Food Hub is achieving small-scale systems change in an environment of multi-layered systems failure. Structural change has been achieved through collectivist approaches to resourcing and the creation of structural alternatives to supermarkets. The Food Hub is creating relational change by providing a platform for new relationships and connections, and modelling relationships based on reciprocity, trust and power sharing. The Food Hub is shifting the mental models of some individuals and helping create the conditions for transformative change by showcasing what's possible.

### Recommendations

- Continue influencing systems change by supporting community-led food solutions
- Continue strengthening high-trust relationships with government and philanthropic funders to increase impact through scaling and innovation
- Seek greater financial support for infrastructure, core operational roles and learning to increase impact
- Maintain community at the centre of efforts to address food insecurity
- Develop strategy to expand beyond individual mindset shifts to change mental models at the scale of targeted groups and populations.

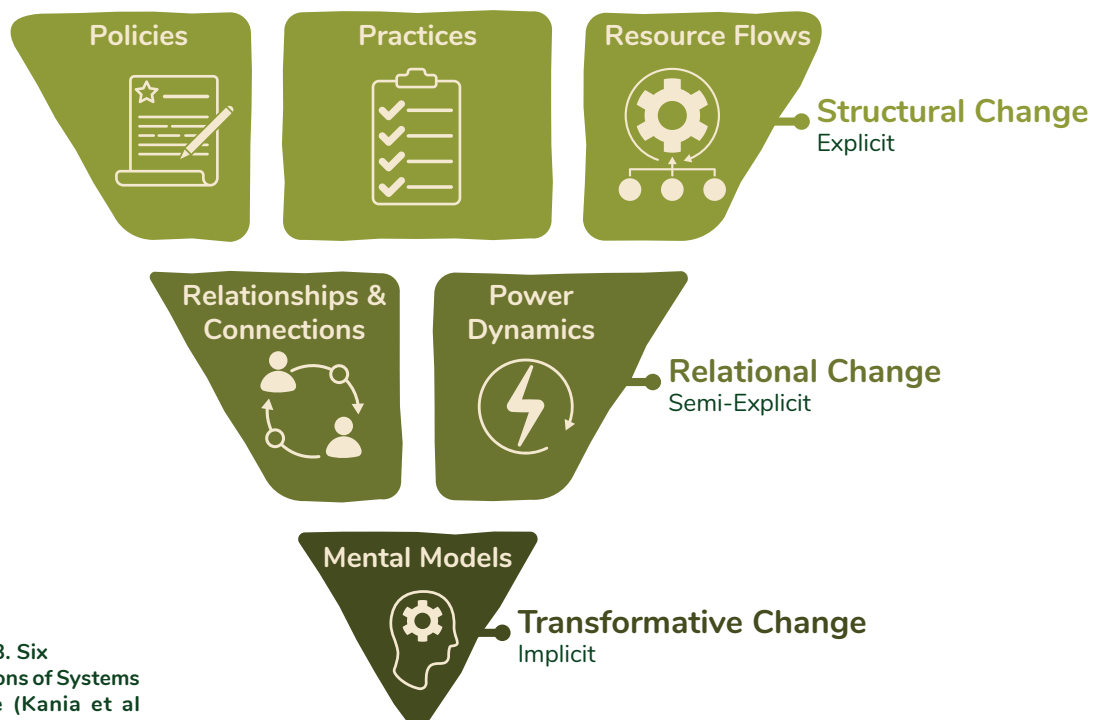


Figure 8. Six Conditions of Systems Change (Kania et al 2018)

### **The Food Hub operates in an environment of “multi-layered system failure”**

Food Hub staff, volunteers and the wider community see and experience food system failures daily. Stakeholder examples include the inaccessible price of fresh fruit and vegetables and particularly organic produce and a culture of shame around needing food support. Stakeholders identified many system failures within the food rescue and emergency food provision sector, for example how corporations place restrictions on how rescued food can be used.

“

Some of the [food] comes with forceful demands from the corporate sector... you can only accept it if you promise not to repackage it. But no family is going to want five kilograms of cream. And that's when you realise... oh my goodness, the food rescue sector has become the handmaiden to the corporate sector. They are offloading stuff onto community to deal with.

*(Kai Collective member)*

Food Hub staff also observed systems failures across housing, health, justice and social services. These failures compound and complexify the problems the Food Hub works to address.

### **The CSA Vege Box pilot is achieving structural, relational and transformative change at a small-scale**

An Urban Kai intern summarised how the CSA vege box is influencing systems change

- The structural change, I guess, would be creating this alternative to the current way that people access food. So not just through supermarkets or buying from places where there have been a whole lot of middlemen along the way
- That leads to relational change, where people have a direct relationship to their food and the people who produce the food. And I think that is very empowering for all of those actors involved. And also takes power, hopefully away from the people who don't need so much of it
- Then that would lead on to people just thinking about so many things differently, about what they eat, how they eat, where their food comes from, the people involved in making their food, how those people work with the land
- That leads to relational change, where people have a direct relationship to their food and the people who produce the food. And I think that is very empowering for all of those actors involved. And also takes power, hopefully away from the people who don't need so much of it.



### **The Food Hub's collective approach shifts resource flows**

A leading example of structural change is Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective. Collective members share resources, skills and capacity, creating efficiencies across the system. For example, members now use the Kōkiri Marae van to collect food rather than taking four cars. The Collective purchases vegetables in bulk and is investigating the purchase of a forklift to enable large quantities of food to be moved faster and more safely. This collective approach has most benefited the smaller food banks who previously had very limited resources.

“

As a collective, we've got a more powerful voice. Because [Kai Collective members] have dealt with MSD on a higher level, they've got those personal connections where I don't. I can't ring up MSD and say, hey, let's have a conversation. We need more funds. But they have those connections.

(Kai Collective member)

Working together has also helped spread the load of administration, coordination, and reporting requirements. Members now share the load of referrals across the Collective and connect clients to the Food Bank closest to them. This cuts down the time spent supporting whānau outside their area. These structural changes have made the operation of the smaller food banks more sustainable and rescued some members nearing burnout.

### **The Food Hub creates a platform for new relationships and connections**

Stakeholders shared many examples of new friendships and connections they'd forged through involvement with the Food Hub. In some cases, new or strengthened relationships created the conditions for structural or transformative change. The deepening trust in relationships with funders and government agencies enabled more resourcing towards community-led solutions.

“

Being able to see that MSD had a high trust relationship with Common Unity and were really happy to give more money ... so that almost like was a systems change effect because they were able to see that here was something in the community that was a better way to use the money and generate food than it coming straight from head office or policies being worked there.

(Board member)

The deepening relationship between Kai Collective members created space to explore different mental models related to food purchasing. For example, whether to prioritise quality and ethical considerations by buying organic eggs, or affordability. Building these new relationships helped Collective members challenge assumptions they held about each other and for one member kickstarted their Māori cultural competency learning journey.

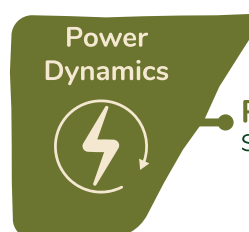
“

We had a hui there [at the marae] and it's the first time I've ever been to a hui at a marae. So I emailed to see what I had to do, I'm not confident, am I supposed to do something. Am I supposed to bring something? What am I supposed to do? So learning different things ... and trying to say to my volunteers, do not put the toilet paper, the cleaning stuff with the food. A separate bag – you need to separate it ....

(Kai Collective member)

### **The Food Hub models relationships based on reciprocity and trust**

Most interactions people experience related to food access are individualised and transactional, involving the exchange of money and few (if any) words. Stakeholders observed the Food Hub fosters exchanges based on reciprocity, collective action, and the belief everyone has something to offer.



**Relational Change**  
Semi-Explicit

“

The Food Hub is challenging our capitalist system through adopting relational rather than transactional means of giving and receiving goods and services.

(Urban Kai intern)

“

It's really opened my eyes to a new way of running things. I really like how it's a relationship-based system rather than just being a service that you pay for. It's fostering a relationship where you share and receive. Because most of the places similar to this that you go to you are kind of just a customer or someone requiring a service whereas here you are a whole person. And there is something we can give you and something that you can give back

(Common Unity intern)

This focus on reciprocity, trust and human worth is reshaping traditional power dynamics. By reaching a level of trust where Kai Collective members felt comfortable combining funding, the Collective had greater power and influence when negotiating bulk purchasing with suppliers and engaging with funders.

“

We have more say as the 5 food banks together, that is a bigger voice. And [the Kai Collective] gave us that power and voice.

*(Kai Collective member)*

COVID-19 also played a role in nudging the system of relationships between community organisations, government agencies and other funders. The pandemic forced government agencies to recognise the significant role played by local community organisations in understanding and meeting the food needs of whānau. This recognition was made possible in part by the existing relationships and communication pathways between community organisations like Common Unity and government agencies.

“

COVID has brought about some big shifts in the way we work together and partner locally, that would not have happened if we weren't in an emergency situation, and the same with government. Government couldn't operate with its traditional kind of hands-off lack of real community knowledge. Yes, that's forced that different way of working and funding.

*(Board member)*





### **The Food Hub “shifts the Overton Window” by showcasing what’s possible**

The Overton window is the range of policies politically acceptable to the mainstream population at a given time. Several stakeholders believe Common Unity is expanding this window by showcasing different ways of doing and being. The recent release of the film *Together We Grow* and the Common Unity Grow Kit are two examples of sharing their vision.

“

I’ve seen the way that they work highlighted by organizations like Kore Hiakai and used as examples of good practice that are shared around the country. So I feel like they have influence in the local level, but also at a wider national level and I imagine that’s only going to expand further with the release of the film that’s just come out and the toolkit as well.

(Funder)

“

The mindset shift is a really strong role Common Unity plays alongside Kōkiri Marae in terms of having a vision of a community that is really caring and wraps around to support each other in a very human way, and also involves people in producing kai and being part of that sharing of kai even if they are also receiving the kai. It’s just a beautiful model, that takes us away from that hand-out relationship with food charity which I understand can be really shame-inducing for people.

(Funder)

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### **The Food Hub is shifting the mental models of some individuals**

One stakeholder described their experience participating in Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective as a mindset shift. They shifted from questioning whether people accessing emergency food services were deserving enough, to understanding there are “a million reasons” why someone might access food in this way. “It’s not for us to judge.”

## How well does Common Unity identify strategic learning opportunities to increase the Food Hub's impact?

This section assesses how well Common Unity creates opportunities for strategic learning. Strategic learning is the use of data and insights to inform decision making about strategy (Coffman & Beer, 2011, p. 1). We use the triple loop learning framework to help with this assessment (Figure 9). The triple loop learning framework illustrates the need for reflection about our actions, thinking and identity for effective strategic learning. See Appendix 4 for a list of reflective questions associated with single, double and triple loop learning.

### Summary

Single and double loop learning about how Common Unity acts and thinks is evident in the way some Food Hub initiatives are refined in response to feedback and emergencies. Common Unity offers few opportunities for 'triple loop' strategic learning to reflect on organisational identity and perceptions. Opportunities for the participation of the wider community in strategic learning is also limited.

### Recommendations

- Introduce fortnightly or monthly sessions for ongoing strategic learning, planning and accountability, with a focus on single, double and triple loop learning
- Secure more resource in the form of staff hours to increase opportunities for strategic learning without increasing workload
- Create more opportunities for volunteers, partners and wider community to participate in strategic learning and ensure invitations are shared through a variety of channels.

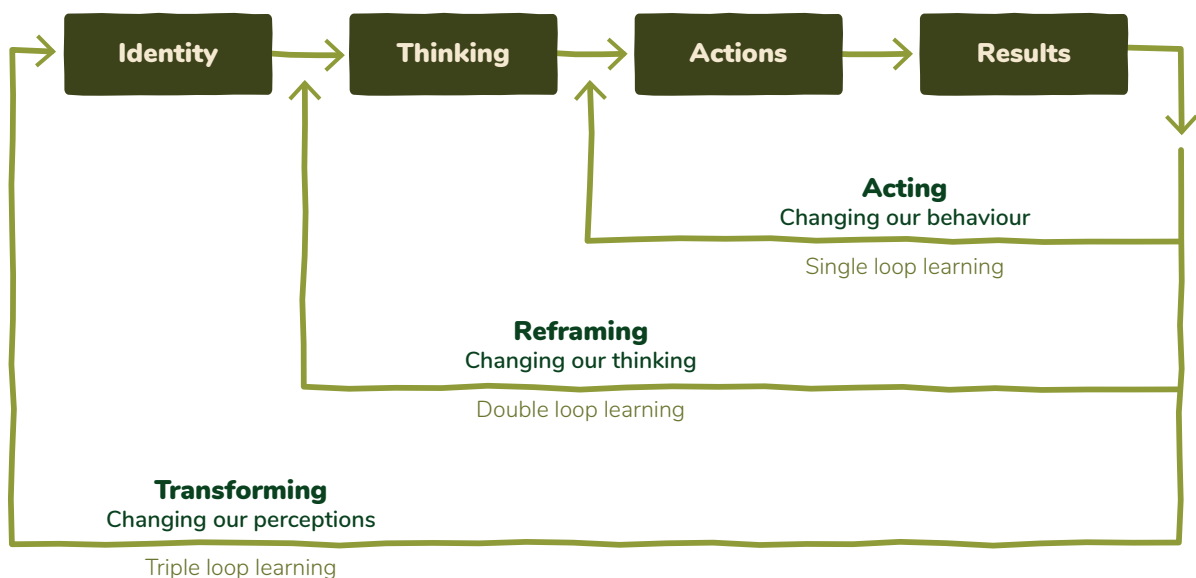


Figure 9. Learning Loops

### **Strategic learning is evident in the way initiatives are refined**

Some stakeholders observed Food Hub staff adapting initiatives in response to community feedback or emergencies. Stakeholders gave examples of ‘single loop’ learning about what they are doing, and ‘double loop’ learning about assumptions they are making.

“

I think they do a great job. Mostly because I’ve seen how quickly they’ve adapted to situations in the last few years. Like their own emergency situations, where they’re able to reach out to people, community to get fixes. Like most of the chiller systems went down one day pre-COVID, and everyone’s on board

(Kāinga Ora tenant)

“

We’ve seen really a lot of reflective practice in terms of- actually, I thought that everyone would want to come and garden with us, but actually, they don’t want to engage on that level. So meeting people where they are and listening

(Funder)

Urban kai staff found their fortnightly meeting with other people in their team a good opportunity for strategic learning together.

### **Common Unity offers few ‘triple loop’ strategic learning opportunities**

There was limited evidence Common Unity creates opportunities for triple loop strategic learning related to emotional triggers, habitual responses, social norms/group dynamics and values and narratives. The only examples of group learning mentioned by stakeholders were staff workshops on approaches to conflict and communication.

Some staff shared personal ‘triple loop’ observations about how Common Unity operates. Examples include the importance and value of womanhood, a fear of gangs, and the prevalence of white middle-class cultural narratives around what counts as healthy food. One staff member demonstrated ‘triple loop’ learning through their awareness of different gardening norms and narratives within the community and the importance of not being “too dogmatic.”

“

We were trying to encourage the oldies not to dig...But for them, that’s what they’ve done their whole lives, and everybody’s got a different approach to something and that’s just the nature of shared space. It’s always gonna be a negotiation with collaboration, trying to reach a common kind of practice. That’s hard. And sometimes you kind of go- well how important is it that we’re all doing the exact same thing?

(Common Unity staff member)

**The Food Hub needs more opportunities and resourcing for staff and community participation in strategic learning**

The opportunity to reflect and plan together at Strategy Week 2022 was appreciated by many staff stakeholders. But staff felt more regular team time and resourcing for strategic learning was needed. Some staff stakeholders requested monthly strategy sessions for ongoing strategic learning, planning and accountability. Morning team meetings were not considered an appropriate time for this.

Volunteers and funders also appreciated the occasional invitations to participate in strategic conversations but often felt “out of the loop.” Stakeholders want more opportunities for volunteers and wider community to participate in strategic learning.

“

A blind spot could be providing regular opportunities for community input to help shape the vision and outcomes of the Food Hub which should be offered through a variety of channels.

*(Common Unity intern)*

“

I think there are lots of people who are interested [in strategy] and therefore if we’re saying that we’re place-based for community, and that’s something that we can offer, then I think it’s to be encouraged.

*(Board member)*



# Additional Findings

In addition to our key evaluation questions, the evaluation uncovered important findings related to governance, Treaty responsibilities and management.

It is important to consider these additional findings in the context of the immense growth Common Unity has experienced, particularly in the last two years, transitioning from a small volunteer project to an established charity with 19 paid staff. Here we include high level reflections to help Common Unity navigate this ambitious transformation and to support other community organisations who may be grappling with similar issues. The evaluators will share the details of these findings directly with Common Unity Board and staff.

## **Governance needs to be more inclusive and well-connected to community**

Board members, Common Unity staff and volunteers have different understandings of the Board's purpose. Board members believed their purpose is to be a decision-making body with financial oversight, removed from day-to-day operations. Staff and volunteers were unaware of the Board's function, membership or how someone became a Board member. Volunteer, staff and Board stakeholders agreed the Board should be well-connected to, and representative of, the local community.

Our recommendation was for Common Unity to explore governance structures and processes with Board members, staff and volunteers to clarify the Board's purpose and ensure governance aligns with organisational principles and purpose.

## **Common Unity needs to reflect on its role and responsibilities as a Pākehā organisation**

Common Unity is a predominantly Pākehā organisation at the beginning of their Treaty learning journey. Stakeholder examples suggest the organisation has low Māori cultural competency and limited recognition of Pākehā privilege at the volunteer, staff and Board level. As a result, Common Unity has not always felt culturally safe for some Māori stakeholders and has damaged some partnership opportunities. Several Māori stakeholders observed an important part of Common Unity's Treaty journey is critically reflecting on its role and contribution as a Pākehā organisation operating within Māori communities.

## **Our recommendations to Common Unity are to**

- Formally acknowledge the contributions of Māori individuals and organisations towards building Common Unity's cultural capacity and treaty understanding
- Commit substantial time and resource to treaty education and developing Māori cultural competency at volunteer, staff and Board levels in ways that keeps Māori safe
- Develop a shared understanding across the Board, staff and volunteers of what is and is not Common Unity's role in supporting Māori communities



## Common Unity staff and volunteers need management support

Over the last ten years, Common Unity has transformed from a volunteer project run by several people into an established community organisation supporting nineteen employees and many volunteers. Stakeholders observed Common Unity does not always create a safe and healthy working environment for staff. The number of employees has grown dramatically, but there has been minimal increase in staff management capacity. This means staff experiencing challenges such as unsustainable workloads or negative workplace dynamics have no one dedicated to support them. The lack of a formal internal dispute resolution process also leaves staff in a vulnerable position.

Although Common Unity now has paid staff, it continues to rely heavily on volunteers. Common Unity staff noted the fine line between wanting volunteers to be involved and feel a sense of ownership over projects without being overly demanding or exploitative. Some stakeholders felt uncomfortable with the amount of work completed by volunteers at Common Unity without compensation.

### Our recommendations to Common Unity are to

- Employ a full-time manager to help support staff
- Collectively develop a formal, internal dispute resolution pathway for staff
- Review non-monetary compensation strategies for regular volunteers
- Consider employing a full time volunteer coordinator to help support volunteers.

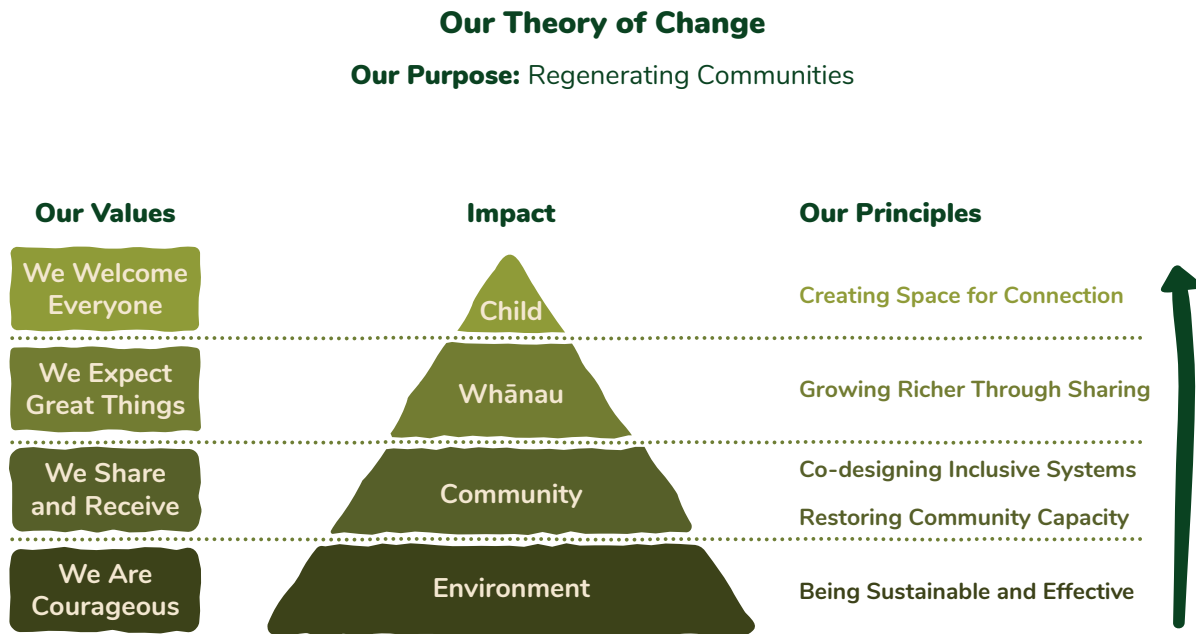


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# Appendices

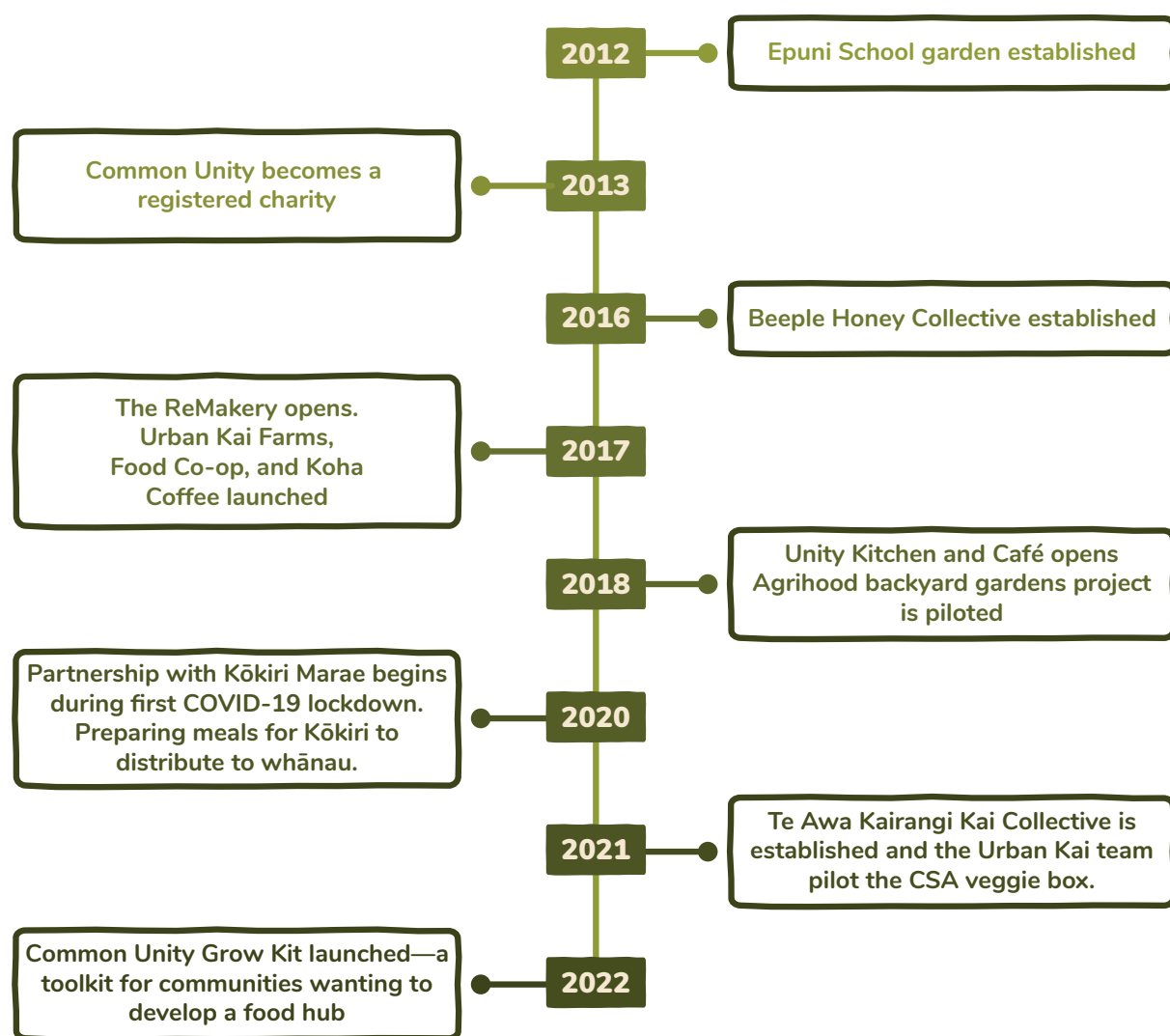
## Appendix 1 Common Unity's Theory of Change



### Our Activities & Enterprises



## Appendix 2 Timeline of the Food Hub's development



## Appendix 3 Evaluation methods

The evaluation included three phases: scoping, fieldwork and analysis and reporting.

### Phase One: Scoping

The scoping phase built our understanding of the context of Common Unity's Food Hub and the evaluation purpose. In the scoping phase we:

- Conducted a desktop review of relevant internal documents
- Conducted three scoping interviews with Common Unity's Development Director, and two Board chairs (past and present)
- Developed an evaluation plan detailing our evaluation methodology and key milestones in the evaluation process. The evaluation plan included tools to support fieldwork including an information sheet, a participant consent form and discussion guides for different stakeholder groups. It also identified case studies and a sample frame for stakeholder interviews detailed below.

### We used systems and developmental evaluation tools

Common Unity uses a Community Led Development (CLD) approach. CLD is a strength-based approach that seeks to grow local visions, learning and leadership in collaboration with diverse local people. This approach creates an environment of social complexity, uncertainty and innovation. To capture the Food Hub's dynamic nature and systems change focus, the evaluation drew on techniques from systems evaluation and place-based evaluation to inform our interview and analysis approach. These included:

- Most Significant Change tool (Dart 2018) to understand outcomes and learnings
- Waters of Systems Change model (Kania et al. 2018) to assess systems change
- Triple-loop learning framework (Coffman & Beer 2011) to assess strategic learning



## **We identified four case studies**

Case studies were selected to capture the diversity of the Food Hub. We chose elements at different stages of development and at different points in the food chain (how food arrives at the Remakery, how food is processed at the Remakery, and

how food is distributed out of the Food Hub). We included three elements held within Common Unity (urban kai farms, the Kitchen and CSA veggie box) and one collaborative project; Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective.

<b>Urban Kai Farms</b>	The purpose of urban kai farms is to maximise bio-intensive urban agriculture across Te Awa Kairangi. Farms operate in the backyards of Kāinga Ora social housing, Remutaka Prison, Epuni Care and Protection, Epuni School and at The ReMakery. Urban kai staff also deliver weekly education and volunteer sessions on farming and composting. Produce is distributed through the café, CSA veggie boxes, Co-op and the Kai Collective. Urban Kai has existed in the form of Epuni School garden since 2012.
<b>ReMakery Kitchen</b>	This off-grid, purpose-built community kitchen produces meals from the veggies grown by Urban Kai staff and volunteers. Meals are distributed into the community through the café, Kōkiri Marae and a local school. The kitchen also provides a soft learning space teaching cooking skills to volunteers. The kitchen opened in September 2017.
<b>Te Awa Kairangi Kai Collective</b>	The Collective evolved from a partnership between Kōkiri Marae and Common Unity during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 focused on emergency kai provision for whānau. The Collective now includes several other Pātaka Kai and Food Banks working together to coordinate food distribution to households across Te Awa Kairangi.
<b>CSA Veggie Box</b>	The Food Hub's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) veggie box scheme involved supporters subscribing to a month of weekly veggie boxes grown by the urban kai farms team. Common Unity has delivered two CSA trials in December 2021 and February 2022. CSAs strengthen local food systems by forming direct relationships between a farm and a community of supporters, without middlemen or supermarket monopolies. The second CSA pilot used a sliding pay scale to enable lower income whānau to participate.

### **We developed a sample frame**

We developed a sample frame identifying the number and type of stakeholder groups we would seek to include in the evaluation. Key stakeholder groups identified included Common Unity staff, Common Unity volunteers/whānau, participating community members, partners, funders and board members (Table 2). Given the variation in size and complexity of the different case studies, we allowed for some flexibility in the number of interviews per case study.

**Table 2. Sample frame for Food Hub case studies**

Type of stakeholder	# interviews / case study	Total # interviews
Common Unity staff member	2	8
Common Unity volunteer whānau	2	8
Participating community member	2	8
Partner/collaborator	2	8
Funder	0-1	0-4
Board member		1-2
Total # interviews	8-9	33-38

### **We identified stakeholders to interview**

Stakeholders were selected to ensure a diversity of experiences, perspectives, ages and ethnicities. The Food Hub ecosystem is predominantly women across the different stakeholder groups and our sample reflect this. The sample was guided by suggestions from the Common Unity Development Director.

## Phase Two: Fieldwork

In the fieldwork phase we gathered data to inform our analysis.

### We conducted 31 interviews with stakeholders

Most stakeholders were invited to participate in an interview via email. With guidance from Common Unity staff, some volunteer whānau were initially contacted via text. Most interviews lasted about 45 minutes and were supported by discussion guides developed in the scoping phase. Interviews followed an informed consent process and participants were offered a \$50 voucher in acknowledgment of their time. Most Māori stakeholders were interviewed by a Māori interviewer.

Due to limited time and/or availability of participants, the total number of interviews was slightly less than our intended sample frame. For cases where there were fewer stakeholders available than intended, we sometimes sought additional interviews with other people in different stakeholder groups eg volunteers for the urban kai and kitchen case studies. This resulted in volunteer whānau being the largest stakeholder group in the evaluation (Table 3).

**Table 3. Actual number of people interviewed across different stakeholder groups.**

Type of stakeholder	Urban kai (Agrihood)	Kitchen	Kai Collective	CSA veggie box	Total # interviews
Common Unity staff member	3	2	1	1	7
Common Unity volunteer whānau	5	4	0	2	11
Participating community member	1	0	0	2	3
Partner/collaborator	1	1	3	0	5
Funder	1	1	1	0	3
Board member					2
Total # interviews	11	8	5	5	31

### **Phase three: Analysis and reporting**

Interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai and transcripts tidied by the interviewers. Where requested, we sent people their transcripts to review. The three main interviewers attended an analysis session to share insights and identify high-level findings. A thematic analysis process followed to identify patterns and themes. This involved analysing all interview transcripts to identify key themes and extracting quotes from the transcripts as evidence of those themes. We produced a draft evaluation report based on the analysis. As a qualitative evaluation, the report focused on sharing the diversity of participant perspectives rather than only including findings of perspectives held by a majority. The report indicates the weighting of different perspectives by using words like 'most', 'some', 'a few' or 'several.'

The draft report and a summary powerpoint was circulated to the Common Unity Board members. Once adjustments were made based on feedback, the report was formatted. The evaluators shared the evaluation findings with interested stakeholders, staff and community members through two presentations, one in person and one online. Based on feedback from Common Unity staff at these presentations, the evaluators made some final tweaks to the report.

### **We are confident in our results, and some limitations exist.**

As an in-house evaluation, the evaluators hold existing organisational knowledge, experience and relationships which can be both a strength and limitation. Due to staff absences, we did not receive feedback on the report from all key decision-makers at Common Unity. Due to time constraints, we were not able to undertake a sense-making workshop with the organisation more widely as originally planned. The evaluators are confident this report accurately represents the views expressed by stakeholders.

#### Appendix 4 The triple loop learning framework three types of learning (Argyris 1991)

Type	Questions
Single loop	<b>What are we learning about what we are doing?</b> Strengths and limitations of <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ core practices and activities</li><li>▪ relationships and processes</li><li>▪ core practices and activities</li></ul>
Double loop	<b>What are we learning about our assumptions, understanding, and thinking?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ the challenge we are trying to address</li><li>▪ the systems and context in which the challenge is embedded</li><li>▪ the strengths and limitations of our strategy</li></ul>
Triple loop	<b>What are we learning about how we are being?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ our emotional triggers</li><li>▪ our habitual responses</li><li>▪ our social norms/group dynamics</li><li>▪ our individual and shared values and narratives</li></ul>