

KAI EXPERIENCES IN TE AWA KAIRANGI

Making good food the reality for our people



November 2020


healthy
families
Hutt Valley
He oranga whānau



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ngā mihi nui

To the whānau and hāpori of Wainuiomata, key stakeholders and dedicated people working in the community of Taitā and Pomare and to all our networks, leaders and partners who have contributed to this mahi. Thank you for your support and commitment.

OUR VISION - NEW ZEALAND'S HEALTHIEST PEOPLE

Healthy Families NZ is a Ministry of Health funded prevention initiative, operating in ten locations across Aotearoa, which supports change for better health and wellbeing outcomes. Healthy Families Hutt Valley is led by Hutt City Council.

We work alongside local leaders and our communities to identify change that supports people to make healthier choices in places where we spend our time. We have prioritised working in the food system as food plays an important role in our health and wellbeing.

EVERYONE DESERVES TO HAVE GOOD FOOD

Food plays an important part in our lives, it brings whānau and communities together and is one of the key ways we share and celebrate our culture and family traditions. In Aotearoa New Zealand, there are too many people experiencing the health and wellbeing impacts of a food system that doesn't meet their basic needs.

Making it easy for our tamariki, whānau, and our whole hāpori to access good food is vital for creating a healthier and happier Hutt Valley.

The question we set out to explore with our whānau and those working with our communities across Te Awa Kairangi was:

What can we do to make good food the reality for all of our people?

“The food budget is the first thing that goes, so when you've got high rent, fixed costs... the food is the first thing that people have visible control over.”

– WAINUIOMATA RESIDENT





OUR APPROACH TO EXPLORING THE FOOD SYSTEM

We started this journey with some existing knowledge as well as gaps in our understanding. The rapidly changing social context that has emerged due to COVID-19 has added a renewed urgency and an opportunity to create pathways to food system sustainability and resilience.

We already knew:

Our environments, the places where we spend most of our time, can either support our wellbeing or be a barrier to our wellbeing, making it harder to be well.

In environments that enable our wellbeing, children learn better, workplaces are more productive, people are healthier and happier, and communities thrive.

The solutions to our food system lie within our communities, in their experiences and mātauranga.

Change is urgently needed to make good food affordable and accessible to all people no matter where they live or who they are.

We wanted to learn more about:

The lived experience of our people, to deeply understand the role food plays in the lives of people across the Hutt Valley.

The influence our environment has on the food choices and behaviours in our communities, to identify what system and environment changes may be needed.

The impact COVID-19 has had on our people, to ensure action is directed where it is needed most.

What we did:

We led three engagement projects in different communities with the aim of identifying, through the eyes of our whānau and those working with our communities, the opportunities to make good food the reality for our people.

What we've learnt:

The following emerging themes present the honesty and reality of our community's experiences. It inspired us to think about how we might make good food the reality for our people.

TIME

Our available time to shop, prepare and share food can determine our food options. Many things influence our available time, some are actual and others may be perceived.

People work hard, some in multiple jobs to provide the best life possible for their whānau. The weeks that the household bills are paid are often the most difficult time because a family's fixed living expenses leave little money left over for food and any other necessities. People find it tiring and stressful to always be thinking about living within the means of a household's income, and live a balanced lifestyle.

“Coming home stuffed and then going out to another job in order to exist and survive, you have to be working – play just doesn't come in to it.”

– COMMUNITY WORKER IN TAITA



How might we ease the challenge of being time poor when it comes to accessing good food?

RESOURCE

The personal and whānau resources we have, as well as those in our geographic and social communities, influence our food experiences.

The global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 changed the world and disrupted the food system, revealing weaknesses and highlighting inequities and existing hardship across the Hutt Valley. People who were already struggling to access food found the COVID-19 lockdown period extremely challenging and scary.

People found it even more difficult to manage money, particularly because there was an increased demand for food at home. This led to people needing to be smarter about their choices when buying food, to make their money go further, and many more people were in need of additional support, such as food parcels.

“It’s quite embarrassing to ask for help for not having food in the cupboards. It feels ** because, I mean, I’ve still got kids living at home who are constantly hungry, so it makes me feel bad.”**

- WAINUIOMATA RESIDENT

“Lockdown was a scary time for our household. It was the fear of the unknown.”

- HUTT VALLEY RESIDENT



How might we create a secure local food system?

MĀTAURANGA

The intrinsic understanding of what nourishes us and practical knowledge, plus the ability to access the food that contributes to that nourishment, impacts on our wellbeing.

Growing food is a way of connecting
People are interested in, or are already growing their own fruit and vegetables and many see it as a way of connecting to the whenua, de-stressing and relaxing. People have fond memories of big gardens where they grew up and some enjoy passing on the skills that they have learnt to their moko. However, for some people keeping a garden is not possible due to their housing situation, and other people would like to start a garden, but feel they do not have the knowledge to do so.

COVID-19 lockdown shone the light on growing your own food and pushed gardening to the top of people's minds. There was a re-discovery of neglected gardens or the creation of new gardens to provide another option for families who were limited to buying fresh fruit and vegetables from the supermarket.

Kai knowledge is passed down through the generations

The way some people ate as children is remembered fondly and often includes an abundance of home grown produce, as well as kai that was hunted, gathered or caught from the rural surroundings. People naturally prioritised home cooking, as alternative options were limited. In the urban environment that people live in today there are many options, but not all are equal in price, quality or nutritional value.

Knowledge passed down through the generations about growing and cooking kai, keeps the traditions of some whānau alive. However, something this knowledge is lost, combined with people not knowing how to cook with some fruits and vegetables, leads to an unbalanced diet.

How might we use intergenerational knowledge as inspiration to eat good food?

“When you’re living off the land and living in that environment that’s what you do, not because you know the nutritional value... When you come to urban areas you live off what’s readily available.”

– WAINUIOMATA RESIDENT





“Takeaways impact on my ability to live a healthy life. They have so many shops that it is way cheaper to buy a \$5 pizza than to go to the supermarket to buy a \$10 pack of meat.”

– WAINUIOMATA RESIDENT

ACCESS

Time, resource and our geographic and social communities impact our ability to access the food that is appropriate, affordable and nourishing for whānau.

In some communities, fast and convenient foods are readily available and more affordable, compared to fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and other grocery items. For some of our communities, accessing good food that is affordable requires a decent amount of travel, and for many people this isn't feasible for reasons including, the difficulty of travelling with young children, or managing shopping bags on the bus to travel to and from a supermarket.

How might we make it easier for people to access good food that is affordable and appropriate?

KOTAHITANGA

Food brings people together and is central to the experiences of whānau and community. Building on existing strengths and beliefs around food can contribute to wellbeing.

Kai is a connector for whānau

Whānau spend quality time together around meals and when everyone prepares their favourite dishes to share, it brings people together. Some classic favourites such as roast lamb are now outside the family budget and kept for special occasions. Sharing traditional kai such as hāngī brings happiness and good memories. In Māori and Pasifika cultures, sharing an abundance of food is a way of looking after each other and showing manaaki. This manaaki is still present, but the kai is often replaced by fast convenient food, which is in part due to the kinds of foods readily available.

During COVID-19, and in particular during lockdown, many people felt lonely or isolated when they couldn't share food or meals with whānau and friends. Being at home during uncertain times caused comfort food cravings

and guilt about the amount of baking and snacks that were consumed.

Food is comforting in times of stress; however people also feel that it can bring about feelings of low self-esteem when it is scarce, and shame when someone doesn't know how to cook or has to ask for help to provide food for themselves or their whānau.

A change in lifestyle resulting in weight loss or feeling healthier is motivation to continue to choose good food, but the results are hard to achieve and maintain when someone is experiencing low mood or energy, and this results in choosing healthier comfort food. This can transform into guilt, feeling lazy and having low self-confidence, as well as a realisation that eating good food has a big effect on the way the body feels.

How might we normalise good food as part of showing manaaki and doing what is best for our whānau?

“Everybody loves food, food is everywhere. Even if you go to someone’s house they put food on the table, it could be just a snack. And we know that food fuels our bodies, without fuel, we would starve. Even the kids know the importance of that.”

– WAINUIOMATA RESIDENT



OUR FUTURE

It is evident from what we have heard from our people locally, and from others working across Aotearoa New Zealand, that our food system is not meeting the needs of all of our people.

It wasn't working for some people before COVID-19, and now there is an even greater and more urgent need to take action to make good food a reality for our people.

Healthy Families Hutt Valley invites you to be part of the national movement for change to create food security and food sovereignty for all of our people.

If we use what we collectively know, work together and take action locally, regionally and nationally we have the best opportunity to make good food the reality for our people.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Get in touch with us and share your learnings and knowledge of how we can make good food the reality.
- Work with us to bring in more ideas and design real solutions for action in Wainuiomata or Taitā and Pomare.
- Join us to continue to lift the community voices that contributed to this report to those individuals, organisations and agencies that can influence change to our food environments.

Imagine if good food was easy to access for all of our people, every day.








**healthy
families**

Hutt Valley
He oranga whānau

healthyfamilieshuttvalley.org.nz