



**Community
Waikato**

He piko he kaainga

Covid-19 Waikato Social Sector Survey Findings: June 2020



Covid-19 Waikato Social Sector Survey

Findings June 2020

Introduction

To better understand the impact of COVID-19 on Waikato community and social service agencies, Community Waikato undertook a survey of local providers. It was also anticipated that the findings of the survey would help to inform funders of the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and to provide the evidence needed to advocate on behalf of community and social service organisations. Community Waikato borrowed and adapted (with approval) the SocialLink survey investigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency response. This also allows some useful comparison between regions in New Zealand.

Method

Community Waikato adapted a survey developed by SocialLink during Level Four lockdown. Community Waikato's survey was also incorporated questions related to alert levels Three, Two and One. The responses gained primarily focus on Levels Four, Three and Two with Level One entry being very recent at the time of this survey.

While most the questions were multiple choice or rating questions, the survey provided space for free type feedback. This information has also been captured in this report to provide the broader context and the experiences of the respondents.

Overall there was little difference noted between Levels Four and Three, aside from Level Four being 'proactively reactive' to the immediate community needs in a rapidly developing situation, while Level Three responses reflected community organisations were adapting to and embedding these new ways of working. Level Two brought with it a 'this is how we do what we do at the moment' perspective, embodying a flexibility and acceptance of rapid change.

Note: A four-level alert level system was introduced on 21 March to manage the outbreak within New Zealand. The alert level was initially set at level 2, but was subsequently raised to level 3 on the afternoon of 23 March. Beginning at 11:59 pm on 25 March, the alert level was moved to level 4, putting the country into a nationwide lockdown. The alert level was moved back down to level 3 at 11:59 pm on 27 April, partially lifting some lockdown restrictions, and down to level 2 at 11:59 pm on 13 May, lifting the rest of the lockdown restrictions while maintaining physical distancing and gathering size limits. The country moved down to level 1 at 11:59 pm on 8 June 2020 (Wikipedia. 24/6/2020)

Responses

Ninety-four individual responses were received. The survey was open between June 2 and June 15 2020 (during Level Two and Level One restrictions). Of the 94 respondents 66 indicated they were willing to be contacted about any issues raised.

Profile of agencies:

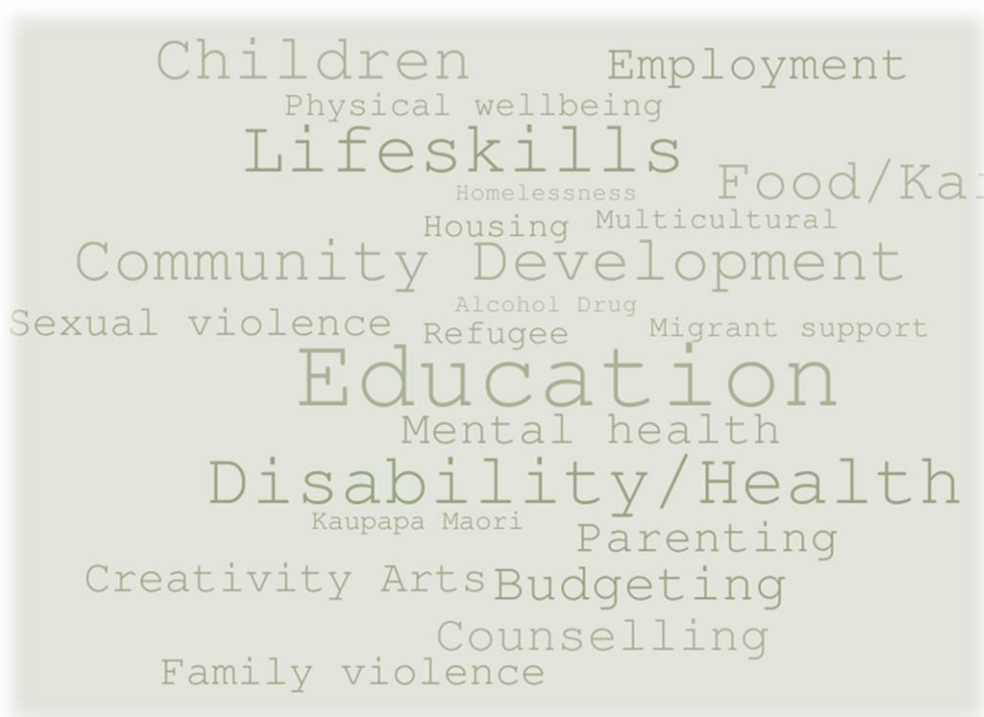
Of the 94 respondent agencies nearly two thirds (58.5%) indicated they were an open service, available to all, with the remaining 40% spread over a range of services targeting people of a specific age, gender, ethnicity or need (ref figure 1).

Figure 1: Sectors within the community served by respondent organisation



The agencies that responded provide around 24 different services between them and a number of these agencies provide more than one service. The most common service was Education 36%, (n=34) followed by Life Skills and Development 29% (n=27), Disability and Health support 27% (n=25), Community Development 24 % (n=23) and Children 21% (n=20). Figure 2 indicates the range of services being offered.

Figure 2: Core service areas

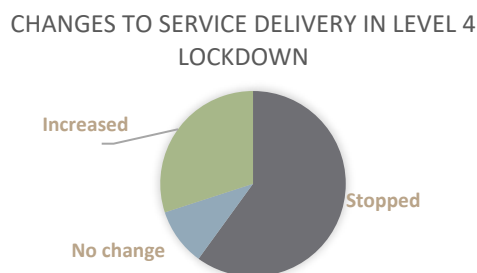


Changes to service delivery

Just over 60% (n= 57) of respondents reported their organisations had stopped delivering, reduced or significantly reduced their service delivery during level four lockdown. Just under 10% (n=9) indicated no change or that service delivery continued much the same, while just under 30% (n= 28) increased or significantly increased their service delivery.

In terms of qualitative responses, 'adaptation' and 'change' were common themes. This included working remotely, via phone, email, zoom and similar online methods. Change for some organisations meant doing completely different work to business as usual. Lack of resources for some organisations limited working from home opportunities.

Figure 3: Level 4 Lockdown



“Our service delivery was limited to online service through our website”

“Our normal service delivery did reduce, however we collaborated with other social supports to work with them to support the community”

“Services changed significantly rather than increasing / decreasing”

“Our classes that serve the disability sector had to cease altogether, but our community kitchen was busier than usual”

“We adapted existing services to allow us to still provide a level of service within the restrictions and we also created new services to meet community need”

...” (work) remained largely the same in terms of volume but method of delivery changed drastically”

“We completely changed what we were doing and were equally busy”

“Not our core business but we adapted our team to coordinate package and deliver food/care packs to the community”.

“We provide a range of services. Some increased while others reduced. We adapted existing services to allow us to still provide a level of service within the restrictions and we also created new services to meet community need.”

“Service delivery in support for food increased and other areas such as budgeting, counselling decreased due to having to be closed to the public. Level 4 increased the need for other ways for people to access supermarkets / doctors / pharmacy services”

Level 4 restrictions and/or an inability to deliver services via alternative methods meant some services had to stop entirely.

“We decided to not deliver our service as our volunteers were mostly 70+”

“We lost access to the prisons during lockdown”

“We closed so couldn’t service our customers”

“Client bubbles meant we couldn’t deliver services”

“We had to shut our vocational day service branches at Level 4”

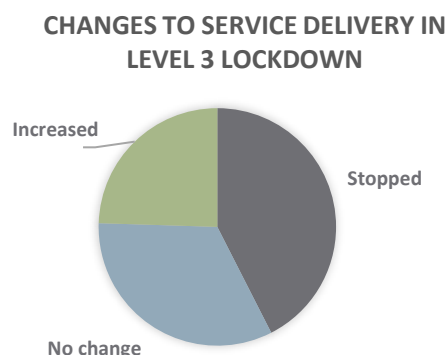
“We closed camp”

Level 3 Lockdown

Just over 42.55% (n= 42) of respondents reported their organisations had stopped delivering, reduced significantly or somewhat, or did not resume their service delivery during level three lockdown. Just under 33 % (n=29) indicated no change or that service delivery continued much the same, while just under 24.47% (n= 23) increased or significantly increased their service delivery.

There was about a 20 percent increase in service delivery between levels 3 and 4. Increasing familiarity with new methods of service delivery and a significant increase in food provision made up part of that difference. Many agencies noted that they felt little change between Levels 3 and 4 in terms of how they delivered services.

Figure 4: Level 3 Lockdown



“Roughly same as Level 4 in terms of volume but method of delivery different”

“The service delivery still occurred via work from home. The social services team delivered essential supplies to families in need”

“Increased demand continued”

“Roughly same as Level 4 in terms of volume but method of delivery different”

“Similar to Level 4 but more ability to connect remotely with clients”

“As above. Level 3 left little room for change as we continued to work from home”

“Still saw increase in the need for food and limitations around peoples ability to be able to get to supermarket / doctors / pharmacy this created an increase in volunteer drivers”

“Huge demand for food, doubling number of families we are supporting”

“Level 3 didn't make much difference to our delivery”

Level 2 Lockdown

Just over 33.98% (n= 32) of respondents reported their organisations had stopped delivering, reduced significantly or somewhat, or did not resume their service delivery during level two lockdown. 25.53 % (n=24) indicated no change or that service delivery continued much the same,

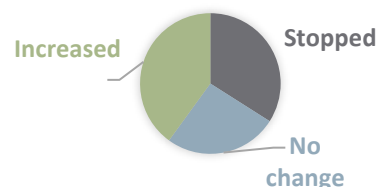
while just over 40% (n= 38) increased or significantly increased their service delivery.

Around one third of respondents were still not delivering or are delivering very reduced services. The other two thirds were continuing to deliver the same or increased their service delivery from Level 3.

People started to meet face to face with social distancing rules coming into effect. This meant people could (for example) collect food and care parcels, so delivery services dropped considerably. A variety of services noted an increase in distress in people they were working with as a result of the prolonged isolation. Some supported people back into more usual ways of working and schooling.

Figure 5: Level 2 Lockdown

CHANGES TO SERVICE DELIVERY IN LEVEL 2 LOCKDOWN



“We have had a significant increase in mums needing our help with babies as well as Postnatal Distress”

“No more purchase of groceries; community members now come to select and collect kai/evolution food at our Community Centre”

“Mostly as above except that our volunteers were able to visit Rotopiko and get back to their volunteering. It really hit us how important being able to do that has been for our volunteers, at each level they asked can we go to the reserve and do our volunteer work. I wonder if the mental health values of volunteerism are fully understood, especially by govt and funders”

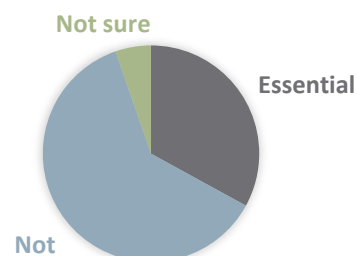
“We are busier within our area of supporting individuals and whaanau, e.g. supporting the transition back to school”

Essential services

Thirty one of the 94 agencies were officially designated Covid-19 Level 4 Essential Services, 58 were not and 5 were not sure if they had been. Those with essential service status were primarily providing support around the provision of food as well as family violence and disability and health support.

Figure 6: Were you an essential agency?

ESSENTIAL SERVICE UNDER LEVEL 4



New Issues arising

When asked what new issues organisations have experienced relating to Covid-19 lockdown over 50% noted the delivering of online services, having to cancel some services and enabling staff to work remotely.

Many groups also indicated they were impacted by the difficulty of no longer being able to deliver face to face services (46.8%) and unanticipated changes to normal work and roles (42.55%). Around a third of agencies indicated they were affected by having to stop delivering the majority of their usual services, increases in the number of clients they had to respond to and having to use and/or difficulty accessing PPE equipment.

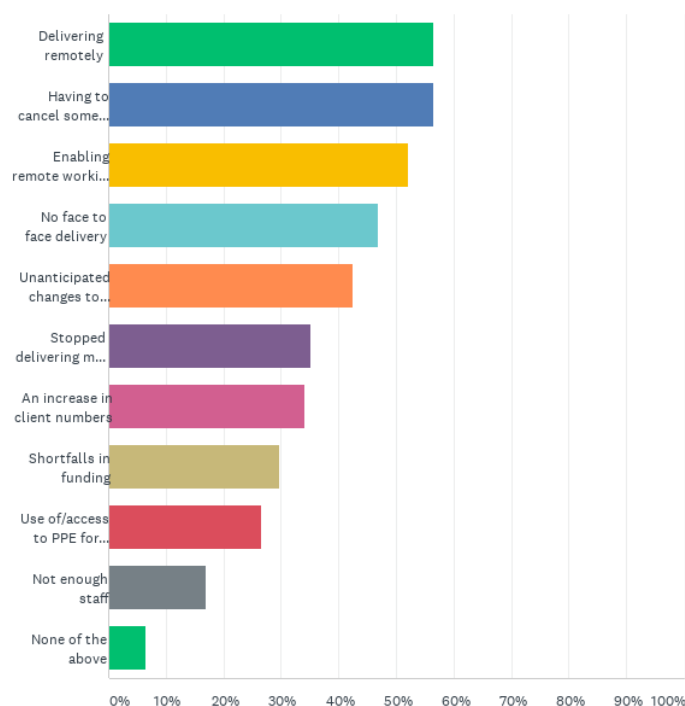
17% of respondents noted they did not have enough staff available to carry out the work of the organisation.

Funding shortfalls have impacted for some organisations as a result of their inability to deliver services and/or fundraisers that have been income generators.

Unexpected expenses, such needing to purchase PPE and/or equipment to deliver services remotely or needing to upgrade facilities to comply with Covid-19 safety measures, were noted as significant resource drains.

A number of agencies could not access the government wage subsidy and some have concerns about the medium to long term impact that Covid-19 will have on Philanthropic investment and future funding rounds. Covid-19 based age and health impacted on usual levels of volunteer support for many organisations

Figure 7: New issues impacting organisations as a result of Covid-19



Changes to services being delivered.

In terms of changes 14 organisations (15%) were providing food (meals and food parcels) and 17 (19%) were collecting and delivering items (groceries, medications, medical supplies) for the first time. Seventeen (19%) organisations that have previously provided food parcels and meals indicate an increase with 9 or 10% having increased collection and delivery services. Nineteen organisations (21%) indicated they had ceased providing groups support, and 29 or 32% are providing less of this service.

Agencies reported families are needing increased support with basic needs- such as food and warmth and many organisations have stepped up to deliver and increase their delivery of services, in a range of ways.

“Increase in our Meals on Wheels Service as well as community funded grocery deliveries”

“Warm bedding, heating and firewood are in high demand”

“Delivery of Firewood, Vege & Meat Packs, Vegetable Seedlings to Kaumatua”

“We have seen an increase in our meals on wheels service, support for people who have been reduced to 80% income or lost their employment and have never been on benefit previously”

“support individuals and families to access food and accommodation who haven’t before”

A range of other social supports have also been in high demand.

“Craft and stationery supplies were provided to 71 children from vulnerable families. Extra phone calls, a minimum of weekly, to support parents of our clients - helping relieve tensions in the homes, providing advice and strategies for dealing with stress of large families in small houses”

“We started providing online resources and session delivery. We continued with one on one support and group sessions but being only online, not to the same level as our normal delivery in centre”

“We play in many rest homes and to the elderly so all interaction with these groups has stopped”

“We have had to adapt to meet distancing so adapting our workshops to Zoom webinars and meetings”

“We are providing a lot of Zoom sessions and Whatsapp video calls for nearly all aspects of our service delivery”

“mental health.... our people are vulnerable to depression and anxiety ... isolation can make this worse so our volunteers were checking on many of them”

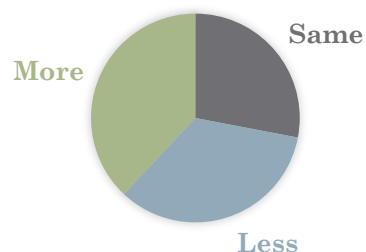
Figure 8: Changes to level and types of services being delivered

	FIRST TIME PROVIDING	STOPPED PROVIDING	SERVICE AS USUAL	MORE OF THIS THAN USUAL	LESS THAN USUAL	NEVER PROVIDED	TOTAL
Provision of information, advice and resources	2% 2	3% 3	37% 34	31% 28	21% 19	5% 5	91
One-to-one support	1% 1	8% 7	32% 29	32% 29	21% 19	8% 7	92
Group support (delivered in a group process).	2% 2	21% 19	15% 14	13% 12	32% 29	17% 16	92
Provision of food parcels/meals	15% 14	4% 4	8% 7	19% 17	2% 2	52% 47	91
Provision of emergency accommodation	6% 5	1% 1	3% 3	3% 3	2% 2	84% 76	90
Delivery of groceries/medications/medical supplies	19% 17	2% 2	2% 2	10% 9	3% 3	63% 57	90
Advocacy for clients (with Government agencies etc)	1% 1	7% 6	32% 29	17% 16	11% 10	33% 30	92

When asked about changes to client numbers, 26 (27.66%) of the respondents reported having about the same number of clients as expected in the same time frame, 32 (34%) said they saw significantly less and 36 (38.3%) noted they saw significantly more clients from lockdown level four till lockdown level one.

Figure 9: Changes in new client numbers

CHANGES IN NEW CLIENT NUMBERS



Client number changes moving through the levels

Fifty percent of organisations experienced changes in client numbers through the covid-19 levels. Much of this change was related to food provision and income hardship.

One health-based agency commented that they anticipated the continued increase in client numbers seeking support/advocacy for medical procedures as the lockdown time had exacerbated an already serious situation in this area.

“We have had less clients needed some services as the alert levels have reduced, although now we are seeing more needing food assistance”

“Different needs have arisen in connection with unemployment, lack of income, inability to manage before salaries or other support kicked in. So, at each level we have gained some and lost some; but also renewed requests for kai as need appeared again”

“During Level 4, new contacts were made with whaanau through the delivering of essential items such as food and hygiene packs. During Level 2, new clients are due to transitioning back into life, e.g. re-engaging with school”

“We believe that there will be a significant increase in new clients as wages subsidies finish, work and income assistance is less and more impact from job losses start to take effect”

“We are now providing more meals to Te Kohao Health clients who have a \$1,000 Waikato-Tainui grant for food and other practical support. They usually stop ordering when the credit runs out though. This demand was more noticeable when takeaways were closed”

“We were seeing more and more of our community in need, that never needed us before-or did not know about us and what we provided”

“They have increased as people struggle with debt from a reduction in income, struggle with the process of getting onto a benefit - conflicting information from MSD - one couple were told that they had to live of their savings before they would be eligible and they could not use savings to clear debt it had to cover living costs”

“More men have been volunteering to be mentors, possibly because they had time to think about what they want to do with their lives”

“Expect there will continue to be more and more enquiries as there will be a long-term issue of access to diagnostic tests and surgeries - this is longstanding but Covid has exacerbated the issue”

Community organisation needs

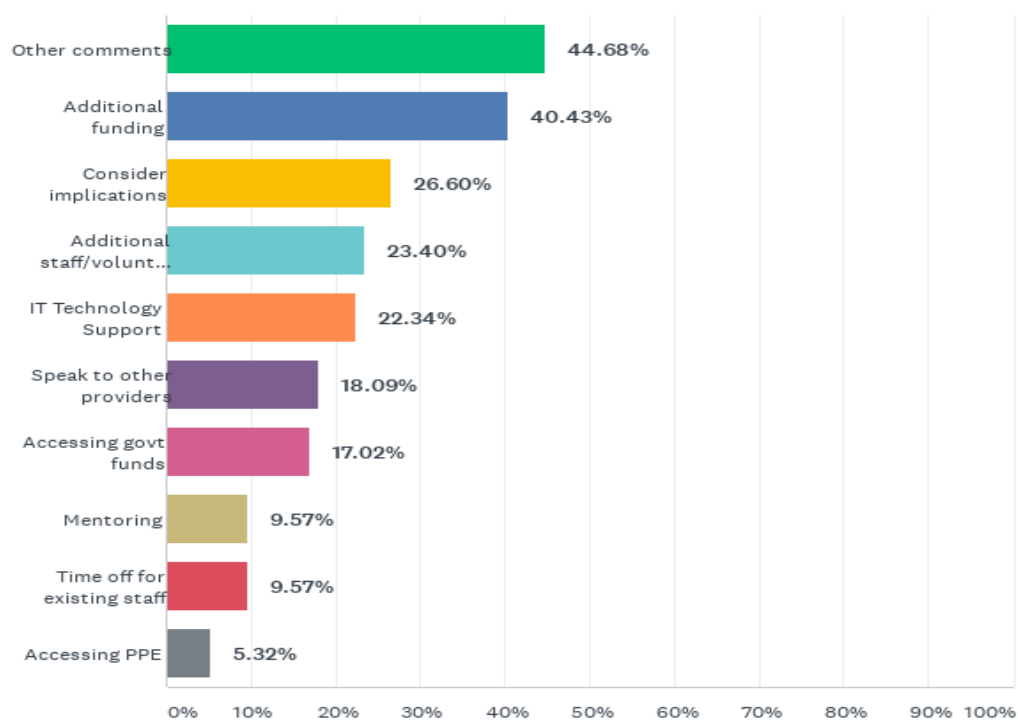
Respondents were asked if they required additional support as a result of Covid-19. They identified a range of issues including:

- sourcing additional funding (40, n=38),
- support to consider implications of Covid-19 to ongoing/future service delivery (27%, n=25)
- IT Technology support (22%, n=21).

Twenty-one respondents (23%) commented that they do not need any additional support. Others noted their concerns around funding and staffing, including needing more staff and supporting staff who have not had much needed breaks due to lock down work requirements, in the absence of volunteer support.

A full outline of support needs can be seen in figure 10.

Figure 10: Current Agency Support Needs



“We rely on support from the community to provide funds to deliver our support services, have had to cancel numerous fundraising events across the region and have many funding organisations who have closed opportunities to apply to them, the financial impact is huge for us”

“Funding is a huge issue for us”

“Time off is the key thing, as working parents didn't get their usual April school holiday managed break. Managing leave is a liability within a small staff”

“Feeling the pinch at the top, management have not been able to take any time off, bearing the brunt of the increase in demand. No sight of being able to take leave at any point soon (had to cancel leave during COVID-19)”

Others noted strategies they are preparing for the future based on current experiences including...

“We are committed to upgrading and maintaining our IT and related equipment to enable all our staff to operate distantly and at home should another similar situation arise”

“We are making moves to put our in-house training online, in case another lock-down prevents face-to-face training. Currently going ok, but support to develop online learning opportunities could be useful”

“We are needing continuity plans in case alert levels change for all new initiative. A lot of our volunteers have had to stop due to the lock down”

“Training in delivery of webinars would be useful”

Funding and revenue

When asked if they had experienced or anticipated a drop in revenue as a result of the pandemic 65% (n=61) answered ‘yes’, 25.5% (n=24) responded ‘no’, while 9.5% (n=9) were unsure about future funding. *Ref figure 11.*

Of those who reported they believed income would be impacted, 38 (40.43%) predicted a likely decrease in grant fundraising, 34 (36%) in Donations, and 29 (30.85%) believed or knew Gaming Trust funds and Lotteries were likely to decrease or be unavailable for an uncertain length of time.

Many organisations expressed their concerns about the financial implications of Covid-19 both short term and long term, being aware of losses in revenue and interest on investments experienced by many fund sources and of the different focus funders may have as a result of Covid-19. There has been a collective fear that organisational ‘business as usual’ may experience difficulty in successful fund seeking in favour of ‘Covid relief funding’. Respondents noted additional issues such as being unable to undertake normal fundraising activities or operate pay for service activities that would normally form a significant portion of organisational annual income.

Figure 11: Reduction in funding

ANTICIPATING A DROP IN FUNDING?

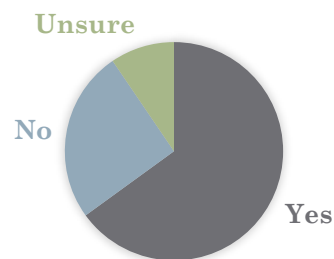
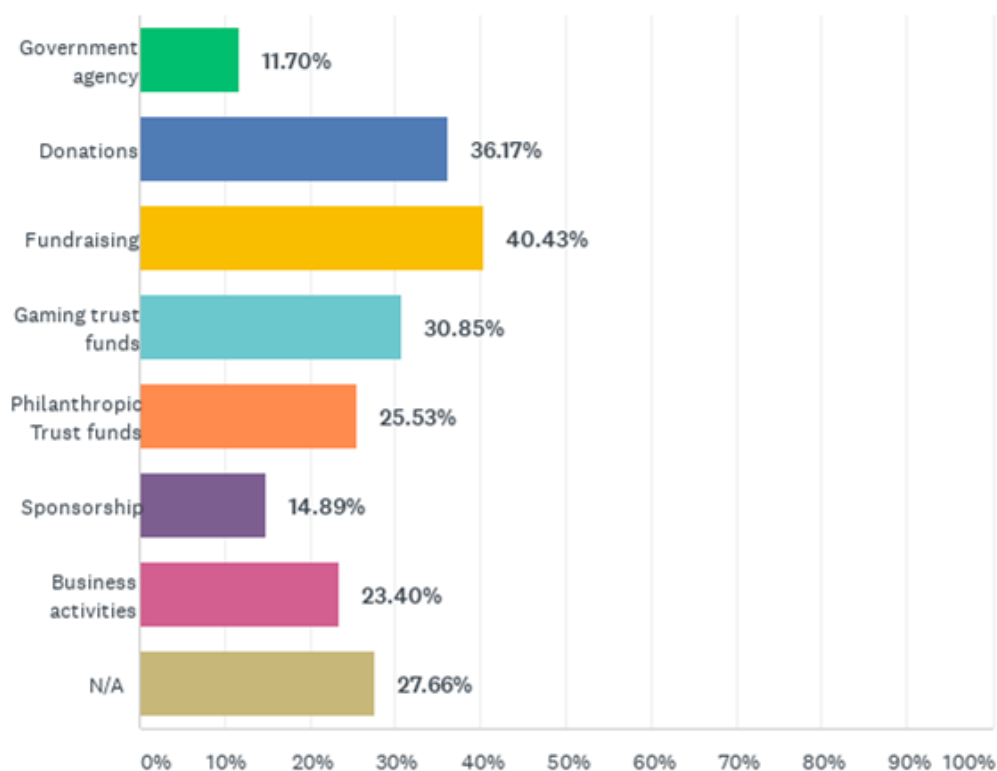


Figure 12: Where has funding been reduced?



“HCC estimate revenue to be down by \$22m - no income from usual sources eg pools, zoo, community facility hire, building consents etc.”

“We are constantly trying to address this shortfall by all the means at our disposal. We have found that funders have responded to Covid-19 by focusing on areas outside our core activities, so we don't qualify”

“Local funders like Lions and Rotary have frozen their funding activities. I am concerned about the next financial year (1st July 2020 onwards) and being able to meet our high fundraising needs to operate”

“investments have dropped”

“Coincidental to the Covid timing, we've had funding retrench from a number of funders. Meaning that we do not qualify for the wage subsidy because this is 'not due to Covid' We're aware that funding from philanthropists such as lotteries will be further reduced in the medium-long term“

“Received the govt wage subsidy but have to pay it back due to Additional Covid 19 funding support being received. We lost \$20k in grants due to the Govt wage subsidy”

“The organisation's fundraising drives are face to face conversations in shopping malls and public spaces. Hence, no activity during Lockdown Levels”

"We would normally have our biggest annual fundraiser in April but this was cancelled due to COVID19"

"We lost over \$120k from not having our shops operating during the level 4 & 3 lockdown, and there were not alternative funding sources we could access"

Changes to staffing and volunteering

When asked 'have you made any changes in relation to staffing and volunteering' 49% (n=46) of respondents indicated that they were not anticipating making any changes.

While 17%(n=16) of respondents increased staff hours, 13% were required to decrease staff hours. The sector experienced a similar pattern with volunteer hours, as 13% (n=12) increased volunteer hours, 11% (n=10) reduced their volunteer hours.

Organisations reported that the Government subsidy was helpful for some to retain staff and deliberate decisions made not to let people go during the lockdown were noted.

"Government funding enabled us to maintain most staff"

"Trustees made the decision not to let anyone go"

"We have maintained all of our staff at full pay"

"We anticipate a short term increase in hours and staffing levels"

"Plans are being developed around how we work in the future - some may continue to work from home or part time in office and part time at home. No job losses to date"

"Dependent on staff roles some are doing more hours more are doing less, many of our volunteers are elderly so we have not been utilizing many of them over the Covid levels"

While a relatively low number indicated volunteer hours would be actively reduced many noted their volunteers were unable to contribute during lock down due to age, health related concerns and lockdown restrictions.

"Volunteers not willing to come in until maybe Level 1 or 0"

"We aren't able to have volunteers on-site until we reach level 1"

"We have had to reduce attendance of volunteers until we enter Level 1"

"Due to their older ages, volunteers have ceased to support the House"

"Didn't use our volunteers but all are welcome back when level one is reached"

There has been or is expected to be an impact however with partial hours being lost and an expectation of future job loss or reduction in hours.

“Staff on casual contracts have been impacted with reductions in hours at Level 2. They were paid at full hours during Level 4 & 3”

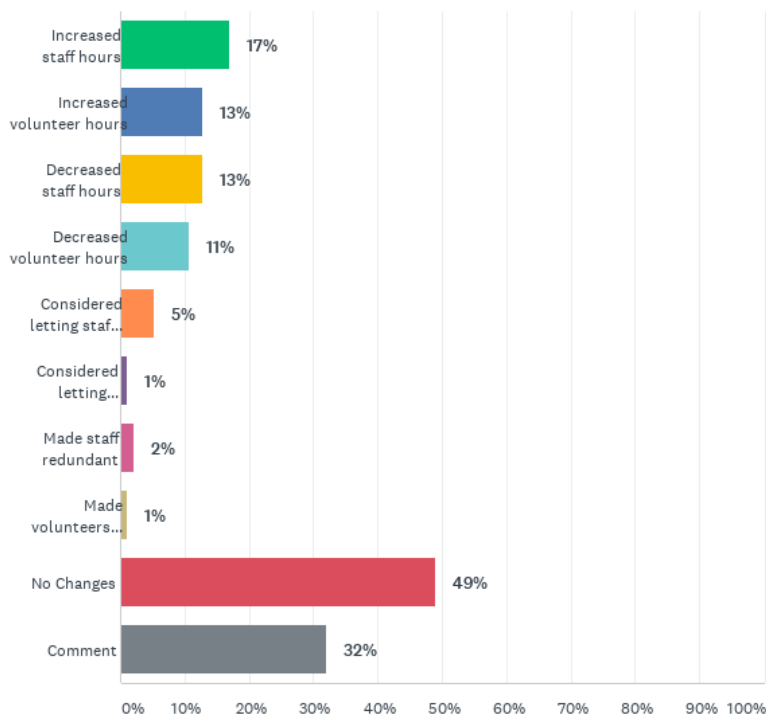
“We made 13 staff redundant who were working a small number of hours between 1 - 5 hours a week in preparation for reduced delivery coming out of Covid-19 so we could focus on better utilising the staff remaining when we re-opened”

“We have had instructions not to reduce any staff hours but rather to redeploy staff during the COVID alert levels. This will be changing in Terms 3 and 4 and some staff could possibly lose hours”

“When we are quiet staff are taking time off. If the service does not pick up we may have to reduce hours officially”

“If we had funding ideally we would look to increase staff hours to meet increased need. But with funding drying up we are looking to retrench hours from around September, when we will need to start utilising reserve funds”

Figure 13: Staffing changes made as a result of Covid-19



Anticipated changes to staffing and volunteering

When asked 'does your organisation anticipate making changes in relation to staffing and volunteering in the future', 45% (n=42) indicated they were not, while 15% (n=14) were intending to increase staff hours and 17% (n=16) were looking to increase volunteer hours.

Twelve % (n=11) of respondents anticipated reducing staff hours, 6% (n=6) letting staff go, and in one instance staff redundancy was being considered.

There was discussion about reframing what is already in place to make the best use of current staffing, recruitment, the need for more staff and the need for funding to support both new and existing positions or reducing hours and thus service delivery if resourcing cannot be found. This was primarily in concern of paid staff hours.

"We are recruiting a social worker and increasing staff hours due to new contract and programmes"

[we are] "Increasing staff"

"Continuing with the increased hours for one staff member"

"Decreasing hours to balance the budget not because there is not demand for services"

"Making changes to how we work"

"We hope to keep our program staff and hope to reduce overheads through transferring more operations to IT based activities"

"We need to increase our capacity with our services, especially our financial mentoring service, to meet the anticipated increased need for advocacy with work & income, creditors etc"

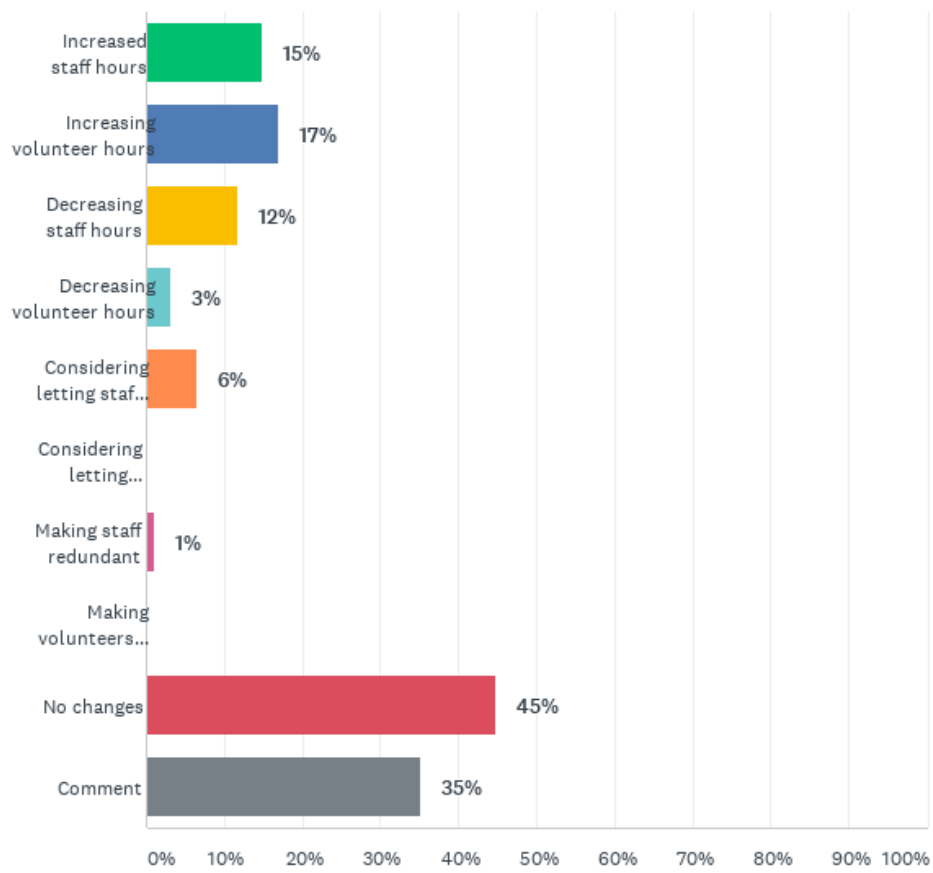
"When the wage subsidy runs out we will need to re-evaluate and if our delivery hasn't come back up we might need to look at reducing staff hours"

"Need additional (financial) support to provide our service online"

"From September we are looking at needing to utilise reserve funds. To be fiscally prudent, most likely our Manager/Educator role will decrease from 30hrs pw to 10hr pw. It might be 'fiscally prudent' but it will seriously curtail our ability to service our community. Question is - is this due to Covid? The increase in demand is. Funding however was an issue before Covid. Covid will just make funding availability worse in the medium-long term as philanthropic returns reduce. We were already being squeezed - this is just speeding it up. Not being able to access Covid wage subsidy seems a huge irony at this point"

"it depends if we can find some lifeline funding to keep our only employee (a contractor so not eligible for wage subsidy) going. If the Trust has to become wholly voluntary it could well fold or dramatically change its level and type of service"

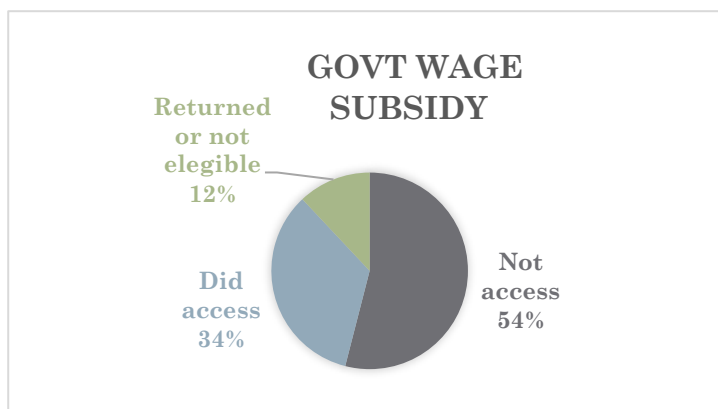
Figure 14: Anticipated changes in relation to staffing and volunteering



Government Wage Subsidy

Fifty-four percent (n=51) of organisations did not access the government wage subsidy, 34% (n=32) did and 12% (n=11) either successfully received it and returned it, were not eligible for it. Some of these respondents got the leave subsidy rather than the wage subsidy or received alternative funding from MSD. There was some frustration expressed at the difficulty of meeting the wage subsidy criteria despite being impacted by Covid-19.

Figure 15: Govt Wage Subsidy



"We could not sign a declaration that states our funding has 'declined due to Covid' as we are aware that it declined due to funding decisions"

"We have a part-timer on a contract, so were not eligible for the wage subsidy"

Identified community Issues.

Social Sector Organisations work closely with groups on the community who are often vulnerable. Respondents were asked about whether their agencies were seeing an increase in local needs or new community issues.

Figure 16: Community issues seen by Social Sector Agencies during Lockdown

■ 1 same no
 ■ 2 increased
 ■ 3 fewer
 ■ 4 n/a not seeing

	1 SAME NO	2 INCREASED	3 FEWER	4 N/A NOT SEEING	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Financial difficulties	16% 15	53% 49	3% 3	27% 25	92	2.41
Family violence	24% 22	24% 22	0% 0	52% 48	92	2.80
Mental Health issues	16% 15	53% 49	1% 1	29% 27	92	2.43
Drug and alcohol issues	23% 21	18% 16	2% 2	57% 52	91	2.93
Housing/accommodation issues	26% 24	28% 26	2% 2	43% 40	92	2.63
Isolation/loneliness	19% 18	57% 53	2% 2	22% 20	93	2.26
Health concerns	29% 26	36% 33	2% 2	33% 30	91	2.40
Worries about the Covid-19 virus	13% 12	61% 56	4% 4	22% 20	92	2.35
Specific difficulties related to lockdown	15% 13	53% 47	4% 4	28% 25	89	2.46

Client worries about the Covid-19 virus, isolation and loneliness, mental health issues and specific difficulties related to being in lockdown were seen by between 50% and 60% of agencies.

Clients often experienced a range of issues some of which were very difficult to deal with in lockdown, such as physical and sexual violence. There was an influx of people who have not needed to access social service agencies in the past, seeking support. This was most evident in regard to food.

Financial distress or concern became a common theme for some who experienced a drop in income with the wage subsidy, which didn't reflect overtime or extra shifts people used to supplement their usual incomes. Conversely, it was also noticed that people used to surviving on low incomes felt better off as food parcels, meals and other supports were more easily available.

Many services and people within the community made good use of online methods of communication to access services, however this was a barrier to people who did not have access to debit or credit cards for purchases, smart phones, or other devices and/or internet or data. Older people who were less conversant with online shopping struggled to get items they needed such as hearing aid batteries.

“we haven't witnessed family violence because people don't talk about it... but we know it's there”

“We had an increase in DV & FV related referrals. We had referrals towards the end of lock down for sexual violence where the client is still in lock down with the perpetrator which posed a serious challenge”

“Access to groceries/shopping was a major issue for individuals/whanau supporting a person with disability. Waiting in queue's, having to do shopping on own when normally have support, higher cost of food and heating homes 24/7, etc”

“We had clients request grocery, essential supplies assistance when they had previously not asked or needed the help.”

“Our clients did not have access to hearing assistive / repairs devices/ such as batteries or able to get hearing aids repaired. Chemists etc sell batteries for double our prices, so some of the elderly suffered not being able to afford the batteries”

“Lack of IT skills and or access to devices eg. for connection to Zoom and other platforms. No credit card for access to online purchases.”

“The cost of "connectedness" became crucial - we provided phone top ups for some clients”

“IT access was a big one. Many learners only having one mobile phone per family. Or, if they have a computer it is for the children's study”

“An increase in requests for information on self-sustainability, resilience, networking and food security.”

“Some of our people have really struggled, but others have loved the isolation... social difficulties can get minimized if you don't get to socialize ... coming out of lockdown has raised many issues for our people too.”

Further comments

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments about needs/issues not previously mentioned that they have seen since the Covid -19 emergency started. Fifty-nine respondents commented. Several key themes became apparent including anxiety about the future, ensuring those who have not navigated the social service sector before, receive the needed support and a small amount of concern over community organisations moving into a space others are already in.

Respondents expressed that people are worried about the future, older people are afraid to leave their homes and that people are stressed and needing mental health support. People are concerned about the future in terms of health and employment, food surety and sustainability and finances.

Secondly, people who have not needed social support, food parcels etc are now accessing services and it is clear they are far less equipped than long-term low-income people to cope.

At risk children have been significantly impacted. Lockdown has meant they have been unable to access safe spaces when necessary, meals or other sources of help and support. Not having access to food in schools' programmes, clothing, monitoring and referrals and the support of teachers has created hardship.

A couple of organisations noted with frustration that range of agencies came into their area without consultation with the groups who serve this community, provided varied assistance and left potentially leaving a gap in service delivery that cannot now be filled by the existing agencies. They have left no records of what was needed or provided to show funders and the sector the actual level of need.

Conversely for other people, such as farmers, isolation has been pretty much life as usual. For some people having to stay home has been a wonderful opportunity- the 'normal' way of interacting with others can be far more stressful.

Responses included:

"Growing racism targeted at ethnic communities"

"concerns about visa status -working/student travel restrictions to overseas to visit family/friends"

"Community groups winding up"

"Elderly fearful to go out of their bubble"

"an increase in anxiety levels with staff and clients"

"Fear of COVID when reconnecting back into communities."

"Most rural people we work with were just getting on with farming during this time, and there wasn't much difference to be fair"

"Hopefully, the hardship so many more people are now experiencing will help people generally understand the struggles of people who always live like this... perhaps there will then be more help for them in the future"

There is "Need for counselling to deal with the aftermath of Covid 19"

"There are more "new" vulnerable families due to loss of work, reduction in pay etc. Many of these families are not used to accessing supports"

"As people return to normal we anticipate an increase in the number of people experiencing financial hardship and in particular the working families who would not normally have accessed our service or were on the boundaries of financial hardship"

"Grocery request, unemployment financial difficulties, housing search, safety concerns and a general increase in client referral for social services and ACC"

“There are people who have not had to receive social support before that are now needing it. There is a lot of whakama (shame) for many about coming out and asking for help “

“We need “A SAFE SPACE where our Children who have been abused or are getting abused by their Parents / Family over Lockdown has increased with Children Sleeping on the Street or sheds just so they can be safe or sleep without being abused. A serious issue we have experienced over this lockdown duration. Parents are Violent / Drugs / Gang and Alcohol abusive. Kids have no food, no clothes, no shoes, no power, no place they can come to feel safe and secure to address these issues. Some are too scared to sleep. They roam the streets just so they don't get abused and are suicidal. or the kids are with Kaumatua / Grandparents in an overpopulated Cold home with many kids sleeping in one bed. Grandparents are tired while the kids parents are out Partying, Drinking, etc”

“We are experiencing a huge interest in food growing, community growing projects and accessible community-based information”

“Opportunities for learning technical/ IT skills and use of devices that are affordable for those on low incomes/beneficiaries”

“There was an influx of agencies who during level 4 and 3 made a decision that Ngaruawahia needed assistance without talking to existing groups / organisations such as Nga Miro Health Centre, Tu Tangata Trust, WDC Civil Defense - organisation who work within our community such as Family Start. So whilst as a community we were organising a collaborative approach we have what I can only describe as pigeons, fly in gather stats never to be seen again”

“We are becoming aware that other providers have been supplying our community - civil defence and individuals, and that has been causing the decline in need for our service. We are concerned what the longterm impact on our service will be. If we close and then the local new people find they do not have the infrastructure to continue, what will happen to our community?”

Good news stories

Beneficiaries and low-income families are finding life is easier with extra support and benefits available was a common theme as was people being kinder to one another. People have reported feeling safer and well supported by their community groups. Businesses showed extraordinarily generosity with donations and some people built their resilience with self-care and reflection. Families had more quality time with one another. We also say a stronger sense of community, links and relationships were forged between organisations and with government agencies. The benefit of meeting need under pressure, minimising red tape and providing resources and solutions quickly that best meet the needs of clients have all been noted as ‘wins’ during this period of time.

"I have been incredibly impressed by the way in which the community sector came together to find the best ways to meet people's needs during the lockdown. Similarly, our community funders made accessing funds a smooth, streamlined process that made light work of one of our burdens"

"Was such a pleasure to be able to be supported by many Waikato Funders to get Firewood and now Kaumatua Meat out to our many whanau who are in need. We wouldn't be able to support our Community with the success rate without the Funders "

"Stronger sense of community; relief of many who didn't know how to find help (many of the most vulnerable in our community have no access to internet, no transport, etc.), so often contact made through word of mouth, letterbox drops etc."

"Beneficiaries are finding things a lot easier with the increase in payments (including Winter Energy payments). Things are probably better for them at present than it has been for a long time"

"Amazing support from local businesses (especially our Four Square) to create the food parcels we took out into the community"

" the efforts from other agencies in our community to contact, feed and support our community"

" Agencies collaborating much more closely and seamlessly to facilitate solutions for clients - better communication, quicker decisions with less red tape, etc. Better individualised solutions"

"We have seen an increase in solidarity and those in need thinking about others during a time of their greatest struggle. E.g. We supported a whanau to access food parcels and bedding and they returned with baby clothing for another family"

"For some individuals/whanau they have found a new level of resilience or a greater awareness of their own resilience"

"People sharing, caring and more loving to neighbours and family"

"Generally the way that people supported neighbours and supported local services"

"When we could help it was received very gratefully - these are people used to calamity and although resilient in some ways, needed reassurance that their lives would become safer as a result of the lockdown"

" So many good stories of family being so grateful and blessed to have us provide food and care packs over the tough times"

“Very proud of how our community came together, pooled resources, worked together. Our strong networks were a real bonus in setting up support networks. People willing to go above and beyond. Awesome job”

“Collaboration and relationships - services working together for the good of the community”

Final Comments

There was great appreciation and acknowledgement for the people of New Zealand, our ‘Team of Five Million’, and the leadership shown by our Prime Minister during this global pandemic. A number of people thanked Community Waikato, hoped their responses would help and said they enjoyed the survey and appreciated the opportunity to reflect on and provide an account of their experiences.

Concern was expressed about how vulnerable people in our community would cope with the change back to pre-Covid practices, such as needing to follow the pre-covid process for accessing food parcels and other assistance. There was concern raised about the impact of the closure or significant reduction of the food hubs, who provided thousands of meals and food parcels during Levels 2, 3 and 4.

A number of agencies wanted to know if groups and funders would continue to be as collaborative and responsive as they were during Covid-19. There was understanding that while going back to ‘business as usual’ would happen in some aspects of work, some Covid-19 inspired ways of working should be retained, and they need to be intentionally incorporated and embedded into organisational practice going forward.

“A Blessing our country came through so well, many thanks to Jacinda and her team”

“Thanks for asking. We will be reflecting on changes that may need to be made to meet new needs in our community”

“Very proud of how our country rose to this challenge”

“Deeply concerned about what will replace the food hub at Claudelands to meet the needs of hundreds of people a day. Hopefully we'll hear some good news soon.”

“The Covid 19 situation has been challenging for members governance and volunteers”

“Good job people - it would be good to know if community groups will still be committed to working collectively (here to help you, Waikato funding Collective) or prefer to return to BAU”

“Thanks for the opportunity to give feedback”

Discussion

There is a great deal of similarity between the Bay of Plenty social sector communities survey results, with almost identical findings and observations reported by our Waikato Social Sector organisations.

The relatively short timeframe between the onset of Level Four and changes down to Level One restrictions (a little over 10 weeks) saw significant changes in services, service delivery and community need. The pandemic and emergency response impacted organisations in different ways - severely limiting the ability of some agencies to continue to provide services, whilst others have significantly increased their service delivery and in some cases taken on entirely new roles to meet their communities need.

Organisations had to respond to a rapidly changing environment, with some agencies better placed than others to be proactive and flexible in their response. This was supported both by attitudes and openness on the part of staff and trustees who quickly adapted to the changes and having the resources available to do so. Some organisations were unable to continue service delivery or adapt due to the nature of their services (face to face reliant), or lack of resources (i.e. laptops etc for people to work from home) and made the difficult choice to close fully, or in some cases partially throughout Levels 4 and 3 (i.e. the Manager continuing with administration work and the rest of the staff ceasing work entirely). Some organisations who were unable to deliver their 'usual' services collaborated with other agencies and took on entirely new roles. Waikato Funders made a big difference by coming together very quickly to distribute funding, cutting 'red tape' and collaborating with one another and in this way donating nearly \$2500,000 which was a significant support during this time.

Changes made through, or as a result of lockdown, may potentially change the way many organisations function going forward. This includes people continuing to work from home, organisations continuing to deliver (all or some) services online and through video conferencing and continuing to deliver the new services picked up as a result of the emergency response.

Some organisations, particularly those who were struggling pre-COVID-19, may not survive, either at all or in their current form. The COVID-19 emergency and subsequent and expected funding reductions and/or inability to earn revenue proving from usual sources (i.e. fundraising events, op-shops etc) may prove too hard to overcome. It seems clear that funding for the sector cannot be maintained at pre-COVID-19 levels, with impact on investments for some significant funders to be expected going forward, and with other funds (i.e. gaming trusts) being put on hold, and usual revenue collecting events being curtailed.

While this has been a challenging time, new partnerships and collaborations have been formed, service delivery models developed and new ways of working have been embraced.

Each of these changes have brought with them significant benefit to the communities they work within. Great leadership, flexibility, kindness and endurance on the part of everyone in our community, at times at significant personal cost, has been demonstrated as people adapted to a range of new requirements in their daily lives and agencies rose to meet this new challenge, with often significantly altered ways of working. Clearly the impact of Covid-19 has brought a range of challenges. It has also shown clearly how strong and resilient our social service community is, here in the Waikato.

Comments specifically about Community Waikato

"It was good to have Community Waikato providing information to the sector during lock down levels"

"Community Waikato have been very helpful and supportive"

"Thank you for the regular and helpful emails that you send."

Thank you for the good work you do. Community Waikato has been very supportive to us. They do such a good job."

"Nga mihi ki a koutou - it was awesome to see all of the support that the Community Waikato team was coordinating and hands on providing during the Covid experience."