



Refining the Picture of the Waikato Social Service Sector

A Qualitative Snapshot

Prepared for Community Waikato by Natalie Cowley

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*He mihi tēnei ki ēra o ngā
tangata i whaiwhai wā
hei whakawhiti korero
mo ēnei āhuatanga
maha. He mihi ki ia
whare kua huakina o
koutou kuaha.*

*Ko te amorangi ki mua,
ko te hāpai ō ki muri!*



*A big thank you to all of the participants; it was
great chatting with you. Thank you Ione Herewini for your valuable assistance.*



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Executive summary

A user-focused qualitative evaluation of the Waikato social service sector was undertaken to define the gaps in social service provision within the community sector, with the aim of identifying ways in which Community Waikato can help to fill those gaps. Simultaneously, the project constituted a reflective appraisal of Community Waikato. Incorporating a diverse range of organisations with regards to geography, size and services, semi-structured, mostly face-to-face interviews were conducted with both community organisations and those who fund them. Prominent themes were frustration over lack of recognition from central government and a withdrawal of resources; a cumulative 'do more with less' ethos; a need for a collective voice and advocacy for community organisations; a call for more solidarity and opportunities to connect; and a need to raise the profile of both the community sector and the services provided to the community.

The gaps identified were largely funding-related. Salary funding was a significant issue, for both administrative staff and those who work directly with the key issues in the communities – for example, counsellors, youth workers, and domestic violence support workers. Funding for upskilling/professional development was lacking in some cases, but generally the skilled people exist; community organisations find it difficult to retain and remunerate them. The consistent funding gaps are understood as government-created and driven, which also manifests in gaps of recognition and respect. For effective delivery of social services, there are gaps in regards to access and awareness. No significant gap between the understandings of philanthropic funders and community organisations was found; the funders are cognizant of and empathetic to community needs and feel they are doing the best they can with the funds available, and for the most part, community organisations feel that their funding gaps cannot be entirely filled by the philanthropic sector.

The ways in which Community Waikato can help bridge the gaps identified are in raising the profile of the sector through advocacy; raising the profile of community groups through publicity; and fostering a sense of solidarity through the facilitation of networks while creating opportunities to listen, share and connect.



Introduction

Recent evaluations of Community Waikato¹ have found the organisation is well-regarded, of high quality, and has a wide reach of effective service delivery across its target groups. A recognised area for improvement is the need for reflexive strengthening of internal organisational capacity to ensure the organisation can demonstrate and report on the difference it makes. This project goes part-way to implementing that recommendation in a user-focused and forward-focused evaluation of the role of Community Waikato and its effectiveness in facilitating change.

Qualitative data held by Community Waikato reflects the state of the social service sector² in 2012. Here, significant concern was expressed by those in the social service sector around issues of funding; most notably with funders changing criteria, ‘capping’ of amounts available and an increasing number of declined applications. While there was general understanding around the changes philanthropic and community funders had put in place, considerable frustration was expressed over government funding sources. Frequently changing and unreasonable criteria, lack of consultation with communities about community need, focus of funding priorities, and inordinately high and unnecessary compliance requirements were the main causes of concern. Further, those working in the sector were uneasy with what was seen as an increasingly competitive funding environment, which served as an impediment to genuine collaboration³.

The largely favourable evaluations of Community Waikato⁴ have focused on its role as a capacity-strengthening network for community organisations. Its role in the wider sense of enhancing the wellbeing of the people in the Waikato region⁵ through ensuring the wellbeing of community organisations is an area that this project begins to elucidate.

This project builds on a Community Waikato report entitled *Developing a picture of the Waikato Social Service Sector* (2015), which collated quantitative data with the aim of

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¹ *Counting on capacity* (2009); *Review of Community Waikato* (2012).

² Social service sector and community sector are used interchangeably.

³ These concerns are reflected in Grey & Sedgwick’s *Fears, constraints, and contracts. The democratic reality for New Zealand’s community and voluntary sector* (2013), who point out that the role of the community and voluntary sector as ‘indispensable intermediaries’ or the ‘voice for marginalised groups’ has been subverted through central government policy into one that is “focused almost entirely on the technical and administrative aspects of performance and compliance”.

⁴ Nowland-Foreman & Pipi, 2009; McKegg, Crocket & Goodwin, 2012.

⁵ Strategic Plan 2010-2013.

enabling Community Waikato to more soundly promote and advocate for the sector⁶, and to be more effective in its primary goals. Using a qualitative approach, this project sets out to:

- Isolate gaps in social service provision within the community sector and ascertain their nature – whether they are funding based, organisational, or something else;
- Identify ways in which Community Waikato can help to fill those gaps;
- Pinpoint what is needed for a stronger community sector.

The key research questions focuses on these areas:

- The most pressing issues facing communities as seen by both social service providers and funding organisations;
- The constraints funders/providers face in addressing these issues;
- The extra support needed for community organisations;
- The role of Community Waikato in addressing these issues;
- Overall, what is needed to strengthen the social service sector.

The research findings will act as a sign-post for future directions of Community Waikato and the organisations for which it provides support, as well as determining the scope for those organisations that do not currently utilise its services.



Initially, discussions were held with Community Waikato staff to identify key stakeholders and define the scope of the research. The body of the research encompassed brief (20-30 minutes) semi-structured interviews (mostly face-to-face, some telephone) with 14 community organisations and 5 funders of social service organisations within the Waikato region. Sampled from Community Waikato's database, the organisations were selected for a range of size, location and services, inclusive of community organisations outside of Hamilton City, local community houses/centres and larger, more wide-reaching social service organisations. Most of the potential participants from community organisations had either used Community Waikato's services in the past, or were currently doing so. The funders were all known to Community Waikato.

Respondents were initially contacted by Community Waikato via email or telephone to request their participation. All of those contacted participated in the project. While most of the interviews were with one person representing an organisation, two of the interviews

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⁶ As a working definition, the 'sector' refers to social service providers who are part of the wider 'community and voluntary sector' – a term preferred by those involved, as opposed to 'non-government sector', 'non-profit sector', or 'third sector' (Grey & Sedgwick, 2013).

had more than one representative and thus took on more of a focus group atmosphere. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and collated for this report. The interview questions are replicated verbatim. The interview responses as primary data form the substance of the project.

Limitations

Care has been taken to maintain anonymity for the participants. In so doing, specific information shared during the interviews has not been detailed here. A general discussion can help draw out themes yet omission of specific issues can mean they are continually overlooked. The particular issues of specialist organisations/services would benefit from further research. It is recognised too that the challenge of retaining full anonymity is hampered by the nature of the sector and the region, in that everyone does know everyone.

This is not the whole story of the Waikato social service sector, but rather how part of it was perceived by one researcher.

*A conversation
with community
funders*

Discussions with five diverse community funders in the Waikato region have generated a story of empathy with community organisations and their constituencies, philanthropic quandary, and a need for raising the profile of the community sector. What follows are their collective responses.

What types of community groups do you fund?

Two of the five groups interviewed funded a wide range of groups – including much of the social service sector. The other three were largely focused on social services, with two distinctly funding those who worked with “the most disadvantaged” or those “most in need”.

How do you decide your priorities?

All of the funders had an inherent priority of assisting the most disadvantaged, variously described as “where there was the most need”, “where (the donation) would make the most impact”, how funds would “most benefit the community”, and looking after “basic needs”. For most, priorities were decided on by their respective boards of trustees at strategic planning meetings, usually after consultation with district councils, iwi, and community sector gatherings. The priorities had remained more or less the same for most of the funders, most notably retaining the over-arching aim of addressing those most in need. One respondent put it this way: “If it looks like the need can be met elsewhere, then we don’t fund it”.

One funder had a point of difference in that they had recently implemented a research-driven change in direction, from what was described as a “scattergun” and “reactive” approach to one of “pro-active funding” with a specific focus. Another funder, while keeping the main priorities in mind, said they “kept an open mind” as to whom and what they would fund, and encouraged all types of new groups to apply. Overall, most had quite broad criteria, while two funders specifically mentioned a local priority – that which is specific to the region and would benefit “the well-being of the people in the Waikato”.

Do you find legislation/funding criteria a constraint in allocating funds, or is it helpful?

All of the funders said they found it helpful to have direction and focus – the criteria were necessary in order to make decisions. The constraints felt were around making the difficult decisions on who *not* to fund: “There are, of course, limits on funding – we can’t fund everything that comes to our attention, as much as we’d like to”. While those with large budgets often gave partial grants, those working with smaller grants tended to donate the full amount requested.

Constraints were also felt around government policy on and attitudes toward the community sector. It was seen that central and local government had progressively “pulled back” from the community sector – in both resource and recognition capacities. At the same time, it was felt that community organisations and funders alike were expected to “do more with less”⁷, which had become a sort of “mantra”: they were to make their dollars stretch to cover the gaps left by government withdrawal and disinterest.

One funder stated that “the philanthropic sector can’t be a substitute for central government”, yet it was felt by most of the respondents that they were expected to be. This expectation was a significant constraint for funders: the notion that community sector funders, and the organisations they fund, could *fix* the social problems that, as one respondent put it, “were created by forces much larger than the sector”.



Other constraints felt were those around yearly funding rounds, although most funders had introduced an element of multi-year funding for those who fit the criteria. The effect yearly funding rounds had on community organisations was recognised, in that they could not plan, were uncertain of the future, and had to exist as “anorexic organisations”.

All of the funders wanted to be able to do more, to give more, and for the funds donated to be more secure. However, one respondent did express some reservations in that so doing would further erode the responsibility of central government for the community sector *and* the well-being of the populace. It was felt they were in somewhat of a bind in this regard.

Another constraint felt was to do with “collaboration”. Here, government expectation of collaboration⁸ was an additional burden for both funders and community organisations, as there was “already collaboration within the sector”. Generally then, rather than being constrained by self-set criteria for allocation of funds, funders discussed the burden of government expectations and the frustration caused by lack of government support.

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⁷ Although one funder had experienced an increase in the amount of funds available for donation.

⁸ Ostensibly this was to avoid duplication of services, which was, “in fact, not a reality”, according to one respondent.

What changes have you noticed during your time in this position?

All of the respondents had served a significant number of years as funders, with most having worked in the community sector in various roles. The average time in their current positions was eight years. Significant changes noted were the rise of the number of community organisations and thus a lot more need for funding, as well as more complex community needs, which made funding decisions more difficult. One respondent pointed out that applying for funding has become a job in-itself, which led to time being stretched by already “time poor” organisations and “less effective governance and management”, as “sometimes it is one person doing everything”. This had, however, led to better quality, more robust applications, as organisations became more proficient with the application process – “they have to do so many – just to survive!”

Other changes observed were centred on central government policy. The social sector was experiencing “tough times” as far as recognition and support was concerned, which was felt more acutely than with previous governments.

An example offered was the recent changes in regulation and criteria around counselling services. Clients have been left “high and dry”, looking to other community organisations to supply their interrupted counselling services – organisations that do not have the capacity but cannot turn people away. It was seen that the government’s focus on outcomes and measurement was over-burdening community organisations, with lottery funding given as one example – an area that was seen to be suffering from political interference.

One funder noticed that as society had become more hectic it was harder to recruit volunteers. It was felt that people have less time and/or inclination to volunteer. The ageing of the volunteering population was also noted. It was mentioned that there is more demand on people who are on committees: the expected level of commitment had increased as fewer people volunteered, and those who did were overextended. A consequence of this was that there was an increase in the number of individuals serving on multiple committees, which only further served to strain the capacity of those in the community sector.

Frequent government shifts... my view would be that we're in a time of policy that's unsupportive of the community sector...and so the drive to have fewer, larger, organisations under government contract – the whole efficiency and effectiveness rhetoric is very hard for community groups (...although I'm not completely opposed to evaluation...). The lack of inflationary increases in contracting, the massive compliance around government audits, the lack of safety to be advocates for the communities they support... I think the whole government/community sector relationship is just so fraught at the moment – and that's a huge challenge for any groups that contract with government

Further changes noted were the growth of specialist needs as well as more specialisation on the part of organisations. It was mentioned as an example by one respondent that The

Salvation Army had moved away from food provision and counselling. This did lead, said the respondent, to other organisations filling the gap, as the need for food parcels, shared meals, and counselling was still very much there.

It was also observed that groups in rural settings are struggling more than before, and do not have a great deal of capacity (more on this later, from the outlying organisations themselves).

Has the number of groups requesting grants increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?

While some said the number of groups requesting grants was “the same” or “steady”, the funders from the larger organisations had seen an increase in the number of groups applying for funds. One pointed out that there were more applications from more groups due to the gap left by government withdrawal from many community services. The shutdown of Relationship Services was offered as an example, whereby community groups were applying for grants to fund the burgeoning need for counselling services.

What role do you see for Community Waikato in the social service sector?

All of the funders were positive about the role of CW: it is “fantastic” in its service and advisory capacity, has “good people”, and is a crucial (and unique) component of the community sector, as well as a resource for it. The role for CW was seen firstly as one that preserves its current services as a capacity-building organisation. Two of the funders made particular mention of the importance of retaining the level and quality of one-on-one, on-the-ground mentoring, as well as workshops and marae seminars.

One respondent mentioned that CW should continue with their role in funding facilitation, as well as in the administration of funds themselves. However, another respondent expressed reservations with CW’s role as a funder, stating there could be a conflict of interests.

It was suggested that CW facilitate meetings with funders of the community sector, in order to share trends, information, and encourage funding collaboration. One respondent shared an example of a successful project that was initiated through funders “getting together” – food rescue service ‘Kaivolution’. Special reference was made by all to the conference organised by CW in 2015. It was highly regarded and enjoyed, and seen as something CW should look at holding every two years as a great way to “listen, share and connect”.

While one respondent stated that CW “do enough now”, the role of conduit or connector was raised and elucidated on by the other four respondents. It was felt this role could grow in several areas. The first was in advocacy: CW could grow their role as advocate for the community sector, taking issues to local and central government and feeding back to community organisations the policies that will affect them and the communities they work with. One funder pointed out that it was important that advocacy was seen as not just for the sector, but for the communities as well. It was proposed that CW could act as a “bridge” between policy makers, community organisations, and the people of the communities themselves. It was seen that “advocating around policy and law that affects the community sector is important, as well as helping to ease that compliance load”.

The second area relates to the direct connectivity that needs to be enabled in order to achieve effective advocacy: coordination. It was suggested that CW could facilitate networks more effectively⁹, in not only organising the big conferences, but also creating opportunities for those in the community sector to “listen, share and connect”, with regular, smaller hui or “catch-ups”.

The third area is promotion. It was suggested that CW could take on more of a marketing role and do more to raise the profile of services available in each community – informing people of the services in their community and how they can access them. The example was given of an iwi radio station that broadcasts such information on a regular basis. In addition it was felt that “they can also raise the profile of the sector as a whole – valuing it, appreciating it, and helping it to shine”.

Overall, it was thought that CW could perform multiple yet intersecting roles as capacity builder, mentor and educator, network facilitator between key players¹⁰, connector, communicator, publicist and advocate.

*They bring in the services...
they provide the
information on local social
services, asking them ‘So
what can you offer? What
do you do? How can people
make contact with you?’
Because also a lot of people
are transient, and they
don’t know what’s on offer
in their communities.
There’s a feeling of being
shy – whakamaa – to reach
out.*

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⁹ Mention was made of the Community Houses Network – the respondent said that CW used to facilitate it but that they were not sure what was happening now.

¹⁰ Including the communities themselves.

The positive stuff

While there was no direct question regarding the positive aspects of the community sector, these emerged spontaneously:

There's a fantastic community-based social sector in this region - absolutely fantastic. And Community Waikato are part of that. Appreciating and valuing that is important.

There are some amazing organisations...Waikato is particularly good at networking...We are very strong here.

*There is a real sense of privilege (for CEOs) about working in the sector, and having access to and seeing the amazing work being done in our community. So it is a privilege, and we are reasonably **privileged**...We tend to be reasonably well resourced organisations.*

What are the key issues facing the community, as you see them?

Responses to this question were influenced by the size of the funding organisation and their grants, and their particular funding focus/priorities. All of the funders cited unemployment/underemployment and housing as pivotal community issues. One respondent mentioned that these problems were particularly acute in small, often isolated communities, and noted the “impoverished lives” of people faced with the consequences or symptoms of poverty. These consequences were mentioned variously by all respondents, and included things such as family violence, child abuse, mental illness, alcohol and drug addiction/abuse, unhealthy homes, poor parenting skills, high incarceration rates, hunger, and poor diet. One funder raised abuse (sexual, physical and mental) as possibly the most central factor affecting the abilities of the communities for which they provide.

All of the funders raised the issue of youth/young people, and one discussed how all of these issues, but unemployment in particular, affect their well-being and sense of purpose and belonging.

Some of the respondents provided their views on the reasons these issues exist, or what causes and/or exacerbates them. These included lack of services for mental health issues, the cost of living, benefit levels, rising inequality – “the gap is so huge”, access to education and health services, ineffective government policy for community organisations, and the loss of the ‘cradle to the grave’ ethos.

In general, the issues facing the communities served by the community sector were viewed as causing more stress at a time when there was less support. Under-staffing of community organisations was seen as a crucial factor.

We worry about our young people. We need our young people to feel valued... Employment is a critical issue; finding ways in which people can be purposefully and gainfully employed – and some of that might not always be in paid employment, but to be able to make a contribution.



Community organisations were selected to obtain a representative spread in regards to size, services, and geography. What follows are the composite responses of fourteen community organisations operating in the wider Waikato region.

What are the key issues presently facing the communities you work with?

The wide variety of community groups interviewed meant the key issues identified had a wide spread as well. Issues mentioned were often dependent on the type of organisation. While there were commonalities and intersections, the more specialist services, such as those that deal with addiction, those that work with ethnic communities, or those working with the “homeless”¹¹, identified issues such as stigma, discrimination, sexual violence, family violence, mental health/illness, isolation, language barriers, disability and access to services as key concerns. Organisations that provided more general services saw the key issues as poverty, unemployment and inadequate housing, with the numerous “flow-on” effects of these recounted, such as disenfranchised youth, increasing personal debt, a need for driver licensing, poor health, vulnerability – “people exist on the edges, easily tipped over by the whims of policy makers”, domestic violence¹², addiction and drug/alcohol abuse¹³. One respondent raised “intergenerational beneficiaries” as a main issue, while another respondent saw the matter as one of “intergenerational marginalisation”.

Other issues mentioned related to policy decisions that were “felt on the ground immediately”, such as loss of community policing, while structural causes such as inequality were seen as pivotal: “I don’t think there’s anything new, but I think that the compounding impacts of inequality (are key) and the sister to inequality is often material poverty”. As two of the most salient issues were unemployment and inadequate housing, they deserve

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¹¹ Inverted commas are used because the respondents in this case felt that “homeless” was a misnomer for people who often have “homes” but are primarily “vulnerable and looked-through”. Time is spent on the streets for social engagement. Here, the term “community people” was preferred.

¹² Used here in the same vein as ‘family violence’ and also recognised as not solely effecting those of low socioeconomic status.

¹³ Again, this is not dependent on socioeconomic status. One respondent commented that the new drugs (‘synthetics’) prevalent in marginalised communities are a significant concern.

special attention. As one respondent put it, “These are our basic needs. We’re seeing a loss of basic needs”.

Unemployment

Invariably, unemployment was seen as a major contributor to the other problems. There was growing unemployment, and notably, underemployment, due to, among other things, “an erosion of working conditions – with the casualisation of the workforce, zero-hour contracts...”. Explaining employment problems at a local level, two respondents discussed the lack of regional development as a contributing factor, while one mentioned drug-testing as an issue, as many in the community were drug dependent and thus found it difficult to gain and sustain employment.

However, not everyone saw unemployment as a central element. One respondent said there was a need to recognise that not everyone would find employment. Others felt that poverty and inequality were more centrifugal than unemployment.

There were particular concerns about unemployed and disengaged youth, with one respondent stating that it was “the saddest thing to see no hope in young people”.

Housing

The issues with housing were reiterated as a lack of affordable, healthy, long-term dwellings that people could call home. Most were primarily concerned with the cost: “I had a lass in here the other day...I can’t remember what benefit she’s on...paying \$200 a week on rent – she has \$30 a week to live on! How do people get ahead if they can’t even look after health, food, housing... the basics?” One respondent talked about a lack of emergency accommodation as well, pointing to the demise of caravan parks as an example of the increasing shortage of places to send people in an emergency.

The reality is, with both of the sectors we work with, that people are not going to get jobs. That’s just the reality. The policy that the disability sector is working with...is that all people with disabilities should be able to get some kind of job. There are able-bodied people who are educated and they have struggles. It doesn’t make sense. Some of our people are incredibly capable, and in the right environment...but if someone is going to employ someone, they’re going to say, honestly ‘I want someone I don’t have to put the energy into’. We’re quite realistic.

The issues for small towns

The aforementioned problems hit small communities especially hard. All respondents from small towns or rural communities raised the topic of youth unemployment. Here the problems were intensified by isolation – lack of transport to larger centres for employment opportunities, education/training, and less expensive grocery shopping; a dearth of suitable training/education opportunities in the area; drug/alcohol use/abuse; and violence, family or otherwise.

Aside from concerns for their youth, other specific issues raised were high beneficiary populations; an absence of investment in infrastructure; and the marginalisation of local people – notably tangata whenua – in that any ‘development’ in small towns and rural areas fails to include their needs and aspirations. This, said one respondent, had resulted in a sense of resentment toward and exclusion from the community at large. In addition, it was felt that local councils and central government alike commonly ignored the special identity of smaller centres: “There’s a huge difference in how communities work, and what would be the priorities in each community. We are distinct. They need to understand the nature of the community”.

Another significant issue for outlying ¹⁴ communities, and one which served to increase the sense of isolation was the closing down/withdrawal of many key services and funding, such as counselling, youth work, holiday programmes, schools ¹⁵, legal services, and Work and Income offices/satellite services. Not specific

to small towns but also of concern were the insecurity of funding and the necessity of redirecting funds: “We don’t have enough funding for youth work... We’re closing our youth space (to fund a counsellor) – we’ll have to find other ways to fund that, and it’s a huge loss to our community”. It is, said one respondent, the “rural challenge”.

We had some funding for an alcohol and drug youth worker here, she is highly connected to our community, and good value. We had (a group) very open to sub-contracting that role with us, but the DHB, who hold the contract, were not prepared for that to happen. In this environment of government-driven collaboration and different ways of doing service delivery, yet the DHB didn’t allow that to happen. We’ve lost a fantastic worker and an asset to our community as a result of that... There’s amazing expertise in our community... If only some funders would listen to us – we can provide those solutions.

¹⁴ That is, lying outside of Hamilton.

¹⁵ Many noted a ‘flight’ from local schools to larger centres, resulting in low rolls and low morale.

Given all of these issues, the respondents from small towns and rural communities reported a wonderful sense of community. It was felt by and large that while government initiatives are “knocking things down”, the communities themselves are resilient and resourceful (although issues outside their scope still need addressing).

Our whole rohe is an amazing place. We do network really well... people say they're going to do something and they do - because they're going to meet the same people on the sidelines of their kids soccer team or rugby team, or some other social gathering. Things get done. It's a very self-sufficient region... We know our communities really well.

In contrast to this, many respondents from community organisations in Hamilton City felt that a strong sense of community was lacking.

There are more and more people who have been marginalised that we just don't have that strong sense of community. There are the 'haves' and the 'have nots', and the 'haves' are in a culture of judging the 'have nots', not realising that any of us are one step away from being in that position.

In sum, although some issues were service-specific, the key issues facing the communities worked with were generally the consequences of marginalisation and relative poverty, intensified by insufficient recognition and resourcing of the community sector.

Do you have the support needed to address those issues? E.g. resources/skills/expertise

While there was an assortment of different responses to this question, with four respondents initially stating they had enough support, with regards to funding the response was a resounding “no”. Twelve of the fourteen organisations interviewed mentioned funding as a major deficit – there was “never enough to operate to capacity” or to adequately address community issues. Some said that funding priorities resulted in lack of stability for organisations, with reliable funding for staff a key concern.

For many, there was uncertainty around core salary and wages funding: “It’s critical to have the right people”. While some had managerial salaries funded by either government or philanthropic organisations, in a lot of cases there was no security of salary from year to year. There was often also insecurity about the existence of the organisation from year to year, due to lack of funding for operational costs and things that many funders did not provide grants for, such as equipment. Some of the community houses were operating with “old technology” (e.g. computers) and felt it would be beneficial to be a bit more up-to-date. Other concerns were lack of funding for building maintenance and debt¹⁶. Some of the respondents raised the need for a finance person: “You need the people skills, but you also need someone with the financial skills, someone to keep the records, apply for funding, with the skills to budget year to year”. Often these tasks were left to “already stretched and over-worked” staff members, many of whom had insufficient financial experience and were “flying by the seat of (our) pants”. It was in this area that some saw a need for training: having the time and resources to train existing staff in financial management, or to hire someone with the skills.

This organisation has one full-time employee – me. If I have to go anywhere I have to close the door. This year I’ve been trying to find the funds for a point 5 admin person who could be here – open up from 9 til 1; that would be great... that allows me to get out and develop those relationships – those connections and networks – it’s really important. I can’t understate how important that is.

Echoing some of the key concerns from the previous section, while under-staffed and under-resourced, it was felt that the skills and expertise needed are “at our fingertips – the right people are there, we just can’t pay them”.

There were some organisations who thought they were more or less fortunate with funding – even though there had been cut-backs – as they belonged to larger umbrella organisations

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¹⁶ This meant some organisations were always close to “going under”.

where most administration was centralised; e.g. tasks such as applying for funding, salary administration, accounts and accountability reports were taken care of at another level. Others felt fortunate in that they had created some of their own income stream, which gave them more freedom and security.

Crucially, for the smaller organisations the support needed was consistent funding: “Getting adequate, long-term, secure funding is one of our biggest issues. We feel like we’re being supported well by local funders, but getting secure government funding, or an increase, in an uncertain environment has been difficult”. In general, funding was viewed as an increasingly competitive arena, wherein insecurity was an everyday (stressful) feature. One respondent pointed out that funding is about relationships, and that relationships must be genuinely built and maintained (which is a job in itself) to secure funding.

In most cases, the withdrawal of government funding for the sector overall was cited as the biggest support deficit: “The support is just not there, financially or morally”. It was restated here that “it’s about being listened to”. For some of the more specialist/targeted organisations, it was felt their issues were especially ignored by central government, with one respondent very concerned about the lack of recognition and support as they were cast into the “other” category.

Other types of support frequently came from the communities that the organisations work with, and of which they are a part. There were commonly shared resources, such as equipment, people-power, and information: “That’s how collaboration happens”. One respondent shared a story of the person who cleans their centre. It was seen as a reciprocal arrangement, whereby the person had volunteered to regularly clean the centre in return for what the centre provided for them.

Four of the respondents said that they would not have the support they needed if it was not for Community Waikato. Their advisory, educative, mentoring and networking services were of immense help. It was mentioned by several organisations that as far as support went, the Waikato was “the best” at networking, and that they were fortunate to be in this region.

Finally, one respondent stated that the support needed for *all* organisations was supportive political policy, and having the chance to influence that: “Most of the issues are around political policy. It’s about having opportunities to strengthen political will. The outcomes of poverty... it’s all related to a political philosophy”.



It's in the water! We're small... the size makes a big difference. We're also quite unique – we've got the tertiary sector with the hospital, university and polytechnic, and we've got the primary sector with dairy farming. In the middle you've got this business sector (and a central city that's almost dying)... And you've also got these strong satellite towns, that have niche issues and niche industries – forestry, meat-works; everything in quite a contained area. It's a good microcosm of the whole country.

If not, what would you need?



*Listen
to us!*

A common response to this question, and a need that is indeed a prerequisite to all the others, was that community organisations needed government to take heed of what they have been saying “for a long time” about support. For the most part, this meant central government “listening to us”, but some respondents noted that local councils needed to listen too: “They just do what they want to do”. While some felt that private funders could do more, or direct funds differently – “They need to get out and about (in the community)” – most felt that the majority of funding support *to address the issues* could only be met by central government¹⁷. Said one respondent: “We know what works, we tell them what works, and they do the opposite!”. One organisation was repeatedly ignored over funding for a specialist issue, as the government needed ‘evidence’ of the issue, which could not be collated due to lack of organisational funding... “We can’t pay anyone to do that”. This, said the respondent, contributed to a frustrating cycle of invisibility.

As well as recognition of the issues, the work the organisations did, and the funds required, many respondents wanted recognition that the communities themselves are not helpless – they *can* get things done – but they need support: “We need nurturing”.

Another common need was for more paid staff – both in an administrative and social work capacity. It was reiterated that secure funding was needed to achieve this. Several of the respondents mentioned the need for funding certainty from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) – for both salaries and operational costs. One organisation had hired a much-needed social worker without security of salary funding: “We’ll just have to keep fighting for the funds”. One respondent expressed frustration over the recent loss of funds to employ a social worker, and said all they needed was the funds to keep doing what was proven to be effective.

*Salaries are not secure...
These are the issues that all
non-profit organisations are
facing, and government is not
taking note of that... We’ve
been living in an uncertain
funding environment for
some time, but over the past
two years even more so,
where they keep talking
about centralisation of
services and we just keep
rolling things over from year
to year – some certainty with
funding is really needed..*

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¹⁷ However, some of the organisations interviewed were entirely privately funded – through (variously) philanthropy, other donations, volunteering, and their own income streams.

Four of the respondents thought that the competitive culture that had developed in the community sector – primarily over funding – needed to be addressed. One way to do this was through more collaboration – not in the sense that organisations should merge to avoid “doubling of services”, but rather to foster a sense of counteractive collectivism.

The competitiveness is rooted in the funding, and it creates a culture that makes it continue. I don't think we need to be as competitive. I think it's a culture, and the funding is almost an excuse – to justify why we work in that way. If we want to be a long-term sustainable sector, then we have to work together.

One respondent raised the need for some “good press” – some way of providing a different, more accurate media discourse to the prevailing one, which was seen to consistently misrepresent their constituency: “We need to talk about and celebrate the good stuff”. It was suggested that more research – “the right research” – could help with a more accurate and positive portrayal of people in the community and their needs, and that this would require a conduit to help with dissemination.

A further, overarching need was for an alternative social strategy, one that was not focused on funding.

Maybe we all need to be contributing something to a social strategy, and not have the barrier of money. And we need to be lighter on our feet to respond, because we've kind of got caught in a sort of 'tyranny of busyness', and it stops us doing some of the big thinking, because we're so busy doing the little stuff... and we're not thinking strategically – we're reacting.

What role do you see for Community Waikato in the social service sector?

One of the roles I've always seen Community Waikato playing, which is a really pivotal role, is to advocate for the sector. And be the voice for community organisations. So that when something is happening, they can take it to the powers that be. I think there's got to be one point where community groups can contact someone and say 'This isn't on', – CW can be the conduit for that information through to the people who are doing that stuff.

Almost all of the respondents felt that one of CW's roles could be as a collective voice for community organisations, a voice that could be taken to local and central governmental level; conveying the concerns and interests of the sector to council meetings, select committees, and national fora such as Community Network Aotearoa, for example. Many of the respondents felt that a co-ordinated, unified voice was absent in the community sector, and that CW was in a prime position to fill that role.



As advocate and conduit, it was seen that CW could “report back”– informing organisations of, among other things, policy changes that might affect them, “...hopefully before they are changed, to give us the chance to do something about them!” As one respondent shared, “The last CE (at CW) was on a

council forum, but we didn't ever get to hear back about what she was hearing in that forum, or how she was representing us in that forum. They're the person that has the mana to represent the sector”. Another respondent suggested that CW take on the Council of Social Services role in Hamilton, with others talking about the need for a “strong political voice”.

One respondent felt that CW had “lost their way” somewhat, in that their role had become one of providing a service and an ‘expert’, rather than being a “friend... to help, walk alongside, and be able to come into the communities rather than just stand in front of a class”. As another respondent put it, “Talk to us, find out what's going on in our communities”.

All of the respondents saw CW's role as one of network facilitator. The 2015 conference was viewed as an exemplar of this, and was deemed an “outstanding

We need champions for the not-for-profit sector, that can be the cheerleaders in the national forum and the local political forum, to go 'Hey, stop knocking them. You're not giving them the money to do these things but they're doing it anyway, on the smell of an oily rag. Acknowledge them and work with them a bit better!'

success”: “It was a terrific opportunity to connect”¹⁸. Many favoured more such opportunities, with the general consensus being that conferences should be held every two years with CW facilitating smaller meetings in between. Smaller catch-ups were considered a good idea, with the Community Houses Network referred to as an example. “We need chances to hear about what other organisations are doing – getting inspirational people together”; “We need something to pull us together – a co-ordinator”.

Two of the respondents did not raise the issue of advocacy when asked about the role of CW, with one feeling that what they did now was “about right”, and another stating that “They should stick with what they’re doing, rather than branch out”.

A further role for CW suggested by some of the respondents was one that raised the profile of the sector and the individual organisations within it, variously described as marketing, publicity, and promotion. This could help address the problem of access to services mentioned by several respondents. It was also felt that CW could be promoting themselves more, exploring alternative ways of advertising – of “getting their services out there”.

All but two respondents thought that CW did a “wonderful job” at present, and all said that they should retain their current capacity building, support and advisory services, such as manager training, managers’ forums and strategic planning. Particular emphasis was placed on maintaining one-on-one mentoring – as one respondent stated, “Having one advisor as a go-to person is the best”. Another respondent said that CW needed to remain a “neutral force” and “focus on the positive aspects” of the sector.

One respondent not so impressed with CW felt that a rethinking of their philosophy was required. It was felt too that “It had become more about Community Waikato than the organisations they’re meant to support”. This respondent felt “let down, disappointed and lied to”, stating that “Community Waikato ditched us” when they did not join a Multi-Employer Collective Agreement (MECA) that they initially supported.

One thing that would be really good would be to have a clearer understanding of the philosophical foundation in terms of community development philosophy. When the role was first set up it was as an independent advocacy organisation, and now it’s become a funder, which was always considered an issue in that it would compromise the organisation. The other aspect was that it was deliberately not government funded, and now that it has significant government funding... priorities have changed – if you’re doing advocacy work you’re putting your funding in jeopardy.

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¹⁸ It was noted that many community organisations could not afford to send a representative. One of the funders mentioned that they provided funds for this purpose.

Could they be doing more? If so, what could they be doing?

Many re-stated the advocacy role in response to this question, with one respondent saying that “We need more political stuff – representing the community sector, making it strong”,

This has a look at how you build campaigns, and it's actually being really practical, it's like 'here's the issue, how do you mount a campaign, and how do you execute that campaign?', so it's getting some people that would have some expertise in this sort of thing that would be really helpful.

while another proposed that CW could hold a “campaign boot camp”, and another suggested a “roadshow” to showcase CW’s services. It was also thought that CW could grow their Kaupapa Māori service, along with the re-establishment of rural advisors. Some of the rural respondents discussed the absence of Community Waikato in their regions, and suggested that there could be advisors situated in each outlying region – “Even better, they could be locals, (they could be) part of the community”; “Having the local knowledge is important”.

One respondent offered something that CW could do “...right now, that would really make a difference – bring (Former Council of Trade Unions President) Helen Kelly here! What is it that she’d want to say to us? Bring her here, have her inspire us, and let’s give her an award from the community”.

In expanding their role in the co-ordination of the community sector, two respondents saw a place for CW in creating a foundation for community sector employment conditions. Another respondent proposed that CW have a representative attend Community House

Network meetings, as well as providing incentives for members to attend.

Engagement with media, especially social media, was echoed in the responses to this question. One respondent thought it would be good if CW provided media training, and had a ‘media person’ who could be contacted for help with press releases, for example. Marketing or promotion of community organisations was again mentioned – one respondent said it was a skill set that was particularly lacking within the sector.

As a final point, two of the respondents raised the need for continued research with the community sector and on the issues affecting communities. It was seen that CW could develop this aspect more, which would not only provide information for the sector about itself, but would potentially aid in enhancing the previously mentioned roles of advocacy, co-ordination and promotion.

Overall, what do you think the social service sector needs to strengthen it?

There seems to be a lot of talk, but nothing really changes.

This quote from one respondent typifies much of the sentiment gaged from this study. “And here we are” said another, “talking some more!”

Most of the responses to what would strengthen the sector were focused on the development of a stronger, unified voice. The competition within the sector was seen as corrosive, and while collaboration was a term used by some respondents, others used the terms unity, collectivism, co-ordination and connection. Some raised the need for strong leadership in order to achieve this, while others felt (strong leadership notwithstanding) that a restructuring of the sector was required.

I think it needs some new imagination around how to connect up again. We’ve really suffered from the divide and conquer funding mentality – we’ve really suffered under contract and competition. Money and funding completely dominates the talk when we get together and I think we’ve got to have some different talk that’s not money-based. Let’s get back to our real kaupapa which is the common good. Some of that will mean that we need to restructure our sector.

There was a general sense that the sector needed to develop or salvage its own identity and culture, with one respondent asking: “How do we reclaim our identity? We’ve been pushed and shaped into a sector that serves government. What happened to our advocacy and our freedom to protest?” Several respondents felt that the sector had become reactive, due largely to funding constraints, and that what was needed was a more defined strategy and direction – a proactive and innovative stance.

I've always gone on about being able to develop our own culture. That needs to be supported. As times get tougher and tougher, which they have over recent years, in terms of accessing funding, and around the controls that funders have, we start to become mini-arms of government – that's certainly what their plan for the future is. We've all seen how the public service has been silenced by government. So we need good leadership, leadership that understands the nature of our communities and our concerns, and who are prepared to actually have a voice that sometimes isn't going to be the same as... everybody else's.

It was felt that a collective voice means solidarity, and that solidarity should be sought not just within the social service sector, but with other, like-minded sectors, such as those of health and education. It was seen that in order for a collective voice to manifest, a co-ordinating force or conduit was required. To ensure the voice of the social service sector¹⁹ was heard at the right levels – local and central government, funding, the community – advocacy and publicity/promotion were critical.

Government recognition was felt to be a significant factor for a strong sector. Greater recognition meant more funds to enable optimal operation, but most importantly to “fund people”: “We need to be able to pay the right people. That’s crucial”; “Long-term roles need to be funded – it’s about staff, it’s about the people”. For some however, while seeing more funding as a necessity for the perpetuation of the sector, felt it created a dilemma. For them, reliance on and accountability for government funds undermines efforts to create a separate identity or independent culture, and compromises the freedom to decide their own priorities.



*A bit
of a
bind*

In addition to being able to pay the right people, special mention was made of the personal characteristics necessary for a resilient sector. Those working with communities needed exceptional communication skills, experience in and knowledge of the social service sector; knowledge of community issues; an affinity with the people they work with; integrity, resourcefulness, the knack of forming positive relationships; and vitally, a sense of humour.

A few of the respondents mentioned that strengthening communities themselves would strengthen the sector. Suggested ways to do this were to create employment opportunities, raise the minimum wage, help develop meaningful engagement and a culture of respect, and place a greater focus on mental health. A strong sector too, said one respondent, would include more recognition of and consolidation with tangata whenua.

¹⁹ One respondent said it was important to remember that there are many different voices within the sector, and that care should be taken not to subsume these voices under the collective.

Something that came up at the conference was how can we more collectively be a united voice? We could actually, dare I say, push back if something's being done to us... So how can we harness come good stuff there, and be seen as one huge social service collective – all saying the same thing? But we probably need the likes of Community Waikato to help draw all of that together.



Discussion & Conclusion

Change is a theme that has strongly come through with the interviews. For some, that means a change in funding criteria/allocation, or a change in government policy around the community sector. For others, the change envisaged is structural, in that the social service sector needs reimagining and revitalizing from the bottom-up. While inadequate funding has been and remains a central frustration for the sector, for the most part the interviews with community organisations demonstrated a desire to reclaim identity, to connect with each other, and to create their own strategy and direction, which, while sharing common goals, would be community-specific. The consensus was that the change sought could be facilitated by a return to earlier community sector principles of advocacy and solidarity²⁰. It was recognised that the government of the day is not about to embrace these principles²¹, thus, a supportive conduit for community sector concerns and aspirations would be extremely helpful. These overarching leitmotifs were common to all but two respondents, whose replies were, understandably so, focused more on the day-to-day needs of their organisations and constituencies. The interviews with funders of community groups/projects demonstrated an empathy with the concerns and aspirations of community organisations and their frustrations with central (and at times local) government.

The key issues facing communities are those resulting from inequality and relative poverty, issues that are not new, but increasingly hard to address in an uncertain and often inhospitable funding environment. Unemployment/underemployment and inadequate and unaffordable housing were the most common issues raised, yet they were issues that the community sector felt least able to address. Aligning with Community Waikato's *State of the Sector* findings (2010; 2012) the respondents were for the most part understanding of the constraints of philanthropic and community funders, but continually exasperated over poor government effort and lack of goodwill.

The current role of Community Waikato is one of much valued service provision, with respondents having utilised the organisation in an advisory and mentoring capacity. Without these services, many felt they would have floundered. Significant scope was seen, however, for expansion of services, an expansion that would retain service provision but see Community Waikato take on the symbiotic roles of advocacy, community network facilitation, and publicity at several levels. Grey and Sedgwick (2013), in their discussion on democracy and New Zealand's community and voluntary sector, point to the separation of

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²⁰ See Tennant, O'Brien & Sanders (2008) for a solid discussion of the early aims of the community and voluntary sector in NZ.

²¹ Elliot & Haigh (2012, p. 2) discuss the nature of advocacy in NZ in regards to the government/not-for-profit sector relationship, and how many organisations "...have had their advocacy functions curtailed by the requirements of government contracting and by the decisions from the Charities Commission".

service and advocacy functions, which characteristically co-existed within community organisations. They point to the distinction made by a John Hopkins University study:

(S)ervice functions... involve the delivery of direct services such as education, health, housing, and community development, social services and the like; *expressive* functions... involve activities that provide avenues for the expression of cultural, religious, professional or policy values and interests. Included here are civic and advocacy; arts and culture; and recreation; environmental protection; and business, labour, religious and professional representation (cited in Grey & Sedgewick, 2013, p. 6).

This distinction, say Grey and Sedgewick (2013), has become the dominant approach found in research and policy statements on the community and voluntary sector in New Zealand. They argue that dividing service provision from advocacy work “...leads to a situation where the value of the community and voluntary sector is almost entirely measured in economic terms and quality is evaluated by its ‘efficiency’ and ‘accountability’ – its managerial competence” (p. 7). Rather than a divisive model, they favour a “...more expansive functional definition...” (p. 7), one that better reflects the reality of the sector: “The key to this definition is that the community and voluntary sector are intermediaries, not just in relation to service provision, but in terms of the generation and collation of knowledge for policy development. They are the voice of marginalised groups” (p. 7).

The implications for Community Waikato are that their constituency sees a much needed role for them as advocate for the social service sector. The model above demonstrates that conduit for the community voice(s) and service provider are not roles that need to be mutually exclusive.

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