

# Four Seasons: review of a pilot community food centre

Cannons Creek Community Pantry pilot project report



The Cannons Creek Community Pantry Pilot has worked with residents of Porirua East on the idea of evolving our existing food bank into a community food centre; a place where people can come to grow and harvest fruit and vegetables, share their skills and learn about gardening, cooking and healthy eating all while building social skills, confidence, and strong community links. This report is a review of our one year pilot. We hope that collecting and recording our story so far will help us to develop our work as well as inform and inspire others.



Wesley Community Action has run a food bank in Cannons Creek for 19 years. The needs identified by the people accessing this food bank have been developed into a range of services and in early 2011 we added the Community Pantry to this work. This project is a capacity building initiative that is community led and owned and has a focus on increasing consumption of healthy, environmentally friendly and culturally appropriate food. The Community Pantry has arisen from our local connections in the community and discussion of the way we all want to achieve food security in Cannons Creek.

Outlined in this review is our vision for the Community Pantry, what we have planned, our successes achieved, and the lessons we have learned. We also discuss the milestones we expect to achieve in the next 12 months, and identify some potential future activities now that we have finished our pilot and are ready to fully launch the Cannons Creek Community Project.

### The Big Picture

There is a recognised need for better access to food in communities such as Cannons Creek. National studies have identified clear links between low income, reliance on government support and lack of food security with 47% of low-income households reporting that they sometimes or often run out of food in their households because of lack of money. This problem is particularly severe for Pacific Island and Maori households who have reported that food runs out 54% and 38% respectively compared to 13% for Pakeha households. Food insecurity is more common in lower socioeconomic areas (such as Cannons Creek) and food insecurity is directly linked to obesity and chronic disease. Unhealthy diets are the number one cause of chronic disease such as cancer and diabetes that lead to 8,500 deaths in New Zealand every year.

References: Smith, C., W. Parnett & R. Brown. 2010, *Family and Food Environment" barriers to acquiring affordable and nutritious food in New Zealand households*. Wellington: Families Commission  
Ministry of Health. 2003. *NZ Food NZ Children: Key results of the 2002 National Children's Nutrition Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.



# Vision

The Cannons Creek Community Pantry has a vision of *growing a good food community*. We continue to have a primary focus on the needs of low-income members of our community but instead of solely providing food to recipients through our food bank we have been working collaboratively to address the reasons people don't have enough food and widening the range of solutions and opportunities for action available to them. The Community Pantry focuses on community food security (across the board access to good food) rather than just the nutritional intake of individuals and families that food banks traditionally focus on.

Demand for our food bank in Cannons Creek is continuing to increase every month. There are many people in our community that do not have access to the food they need to be healthy and happy.

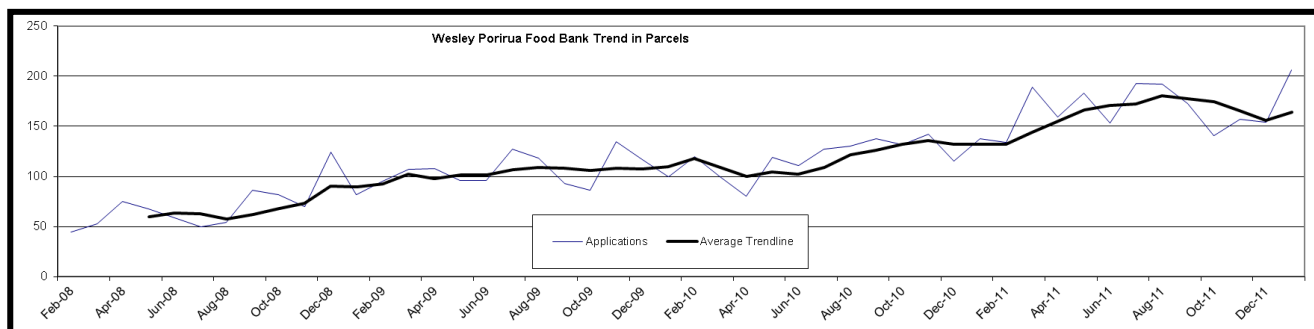
**Food security** means having easy access to enough healthy, culturally acceptable food every day.

Reference: Rush E. 2009. *Food Security for Pacific Peoples in New Zealand. A report for the Obesity Action Coalition*. Wellington: Obesity Action Coalition

People rely on food banks like ours to provide their nutritional and social needs when they cannot afford to purchase food. Food security experts argue that food banks alone do not address food security appropriately and that they may in fact maintain status quo by enabling people to donate time and money instead of pursuing more systemic solutions, and by maintaining the disempowerment of those that have to continue to rely on hand outs from the food bank<sup>1</sup>.

The main barrier to food security in New Zealand is low-income<sup>2,3</sup> and so food banks should not be closed while the economic conditions of high unemployment, high rent, and low government assistance prevail.

Opportunities do exist however, for changing the way that users of the food bank interact with it so that it can be a source of empowerment and pride rather than shame. We want to foster an environment of reciprocity and relationship building. The experience of Wesley has



“In order to eliminate food insecurity, the people in the community who experience poverty, deprivations and food insecurity must be actively identified and assisted in sustainable and empowering ways.”

Reference: The Stop Community Food Centre. 2010. *In Every Community a Place for Food: The Role of the Community Food Centre in Building a Local, Sustainable, and Just Food System*. Toronto: Metcalf Food Solutions.

highlighted the important relational aspect of our operations. A degree of empowerment is achieved through forming trusting relationships with people that are then the basis of discussions about what else could help them set and achieve their goals. The Pantry also has a goal of reconnecting people with their environment, both built and natural, and helping people grow the skills they need to advocate for themselves, their community, and their environment



# What We Bring

As a Wesley Community Action coordinated project, the Community Pantry has a secure, long-term base and management structure. The sustainability and viability of this initiative is long term due to the goodwill component of involving users in the achievement of their own food security as opposed to the dependency created by hand outs. The ever-increasing usage of our food bank and the growth of unemployment within our community, means that we have physical assistance and co-operation from these people who are looking for opportunities to use their time productively. Generally people within this community willingly give for the benefit of others and with this added incentive we are able to further nurture and strengthen the concept of community wellbeing.

Before the start of the Community Pantry pilot, Wesley already had the physical infrastructure of a community space and grounds. We also already had the relationships and expertise to successfully carry out this project. We already offered a range of services built primarily around the provision of emergency assistance and



welfare involvement. Our successful programmes such as social work, free counselling, Strengthening Families coordination and the financial stability programme 'Good Cents', have given us many skills, relationships, and insights that have been invaluable as we have progressed the Community Pantry project.

## Why a Community Pantry? The benefits

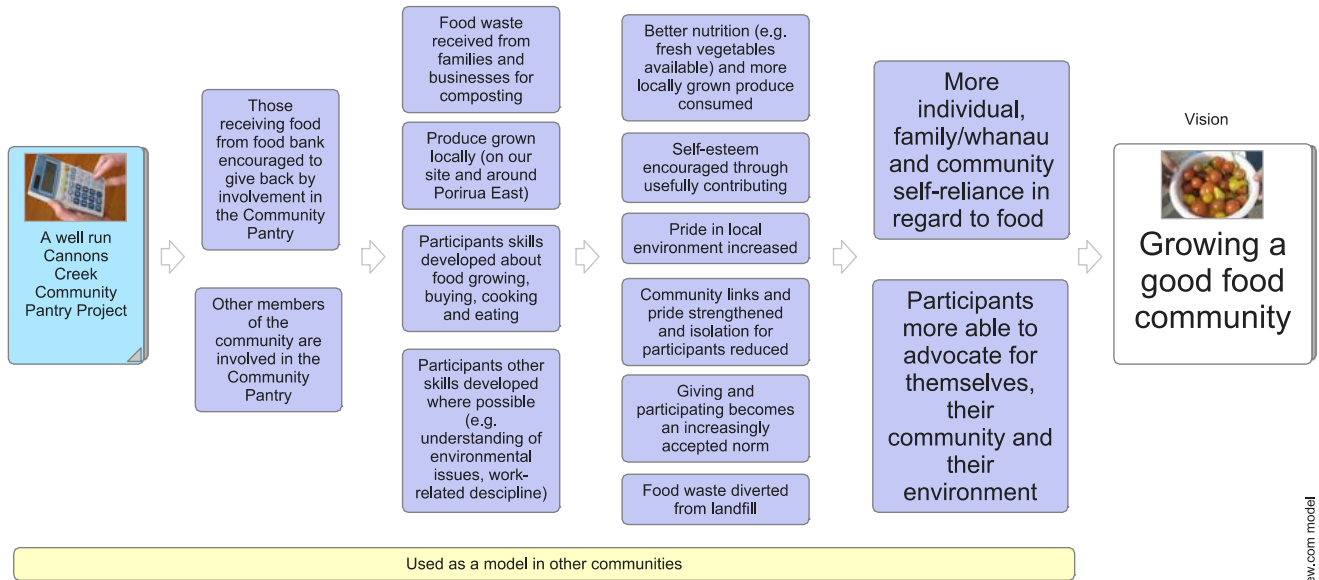
The Pantry has a view of food as not only an end in itself but also a means to achieving broader goals of empowerment, environmental awareness, and health. We aim to build community capacity and co-operation within the Porirua area. There is a range of fundamental benefits to applying such a project within this community where families and individuals are currently struggling to get enough healthy food.

- Educational – horticulture, food preparation, healthy living, home economics.
- Enhanced work ethic – minimising dependency, practicing behaviour needed for stable employment and providing an activity and skill.
- Community participation – sense of ownership, pride and worth.
- Limiting community isolation – encouraging people to leave their homes and build relationships with others
- Budgeting – practical money management.
- Improved health – through better nutrition and more exercise.

# Our Plan

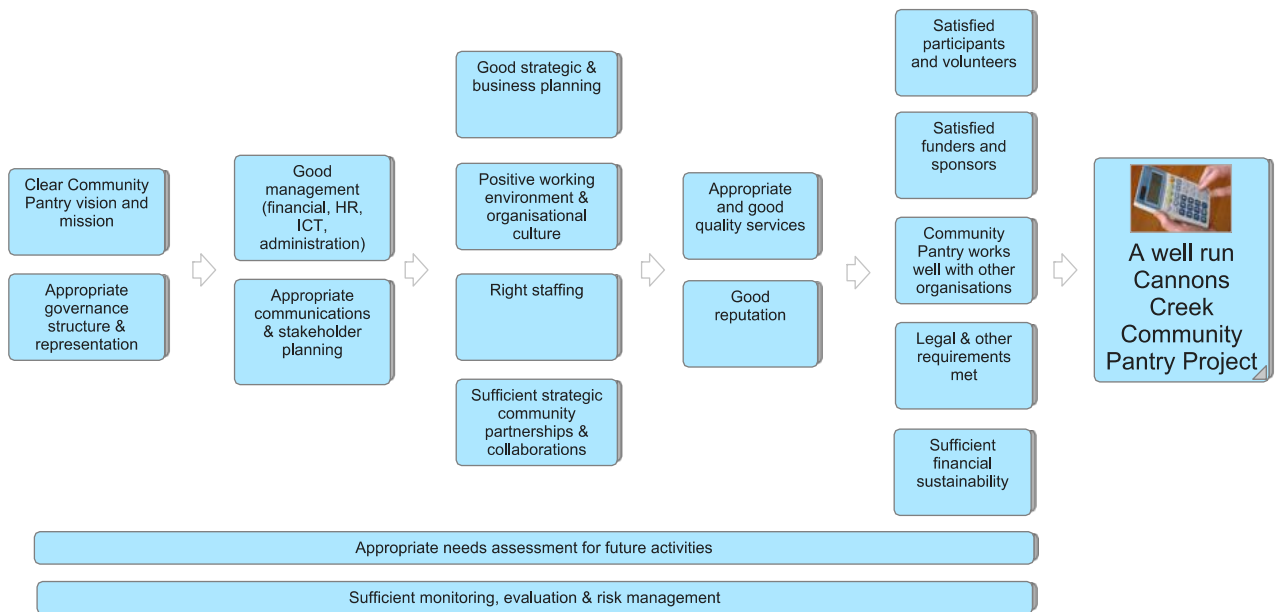
We have developed two visual outcomes models<sup>4</sup> for the Community Pantry project. One is an overview of the outcomes we want to achieve and the other is a sub model giving the specific requirements to ensure the project is well-run. These both set out from left to right the outcomes required to achieve success. It is against these models that we plan our work and communicate to others what we are hoping to achieve.

## Outcomes model of the Community Pantry project



dovievr.com model

## Outcomes model of a well-run project



dovievr.com model

(These models can be downloaded at <http://outcomesmodels.org/models/communitypantry85.html> and adapted for other projects)



## Successes So Far

The range of solutions we have added to our current food bank service during our pilot phase over the last year show the commitment from our community for innovative solutions to social problems.

### *Food bank*

The Community Pantry has maintained our emergency food program as it is still needed by our users. We have continued to run it in a way that reduces the signs of traditional food banks, such as long waits, intrusive needs testing, and lack of choice in food. The goal for our Community Pantry approach is that eventually there will be little need for a specific food bank as community food security is maintained in Cannons Creek through a variety of alternative initiatives.

Over the last twelve months we have instilled within the wider community a collaborative communal sense of pride and ownership of our service and a group of regular volunteers has been built.



### *Food bank gardens*

The first action of the Community Pantry pilot was to establish food bank gardens situated on our property in Cannons Creek. These gardens supply the food bank and other programmes we run with fresh produce.

2011

2012



Moving the food bank under the umbrella of the Community Pantry has meant that opportunities for reciprocity have been created and taken up by our community. People who access our food bank feeling ashamed can leave proud and excited about the help they have given through volunteering in the garden.

Home vegetable gardens used to be commonplace in Cannons Creek and the loss of food growing skills has been within a generation. Our clients' knowledge in gardening has been identified and from this group have emerged individuals with natural leadership qualities to help drive this initiative. Those participants who have limited skills and knowledge, work alongside others more confident and gain these skills.

We are still only on limited production and all produce is given out in food parcels or to our volunteers. As production increases the wider community will benefit from the proceeds of the garden. Families and groups in special need will be able to access the produce on a case-by-case

basis for events such as Tangi hanga and community meetings

### *Tool library and home growing support*

We have had great success in our campaign to receive donations of tools to the Community Pantry. We have had over 100 tools donated and a significant number of seeds and seedlings. These are used in our Tool Library from which families can borrow tools on a long term loan and have access to seeds, plants and advice for their gardening at home. We have recorded 14 families that we have assisted to start gardens at home since we began offering this support in August 2011 and have anecdotal evidence of more gardens having been started because of the increased profile of food growing in our community. For example the neighbour of one of our gardeners now also has a vegetable garden as our gardener has helped them dig it and shared seedlings with them.

### *Good food education*

The work of involving community members with a garden has been complimented by some initial capacity and skill building programs. These training and teaching sessions have been so far limited to gardening and cooking through a compost building workshop, a tour of other

## **Success Story One: a snowy rescue**

In July 2011 we had a very unusual cold snap and it brought snow throughout New Zealand including Cannons Creek. We had left out a hundred or so seedlings in the open air. The co-ordinator was at home with a broken ankle at the time so wasn't going to venture out at night in the snow to save them and had resigned herself to the fact that they wouldn't survive. When we returned to work we found that one of our volunteers had come up during the snow storm and moves all the seedlings to the shelter of the compost bin, safe and warm.



inspirational gardens, a sunflower planting session for kids, and a marmalade making session. Future topics will be identified in collaboration with the participants but are likely to include:

- cooking
- food purchasing
- preserving
- nutrition
- new parents' nutrition and breastfeeding
- food growing

Where possible these classes were run as a collaboration between a community member with the appropriate skills and a professional trainer or Wesley Community Action staff member. The unintended benefit of these session has been the team building between our key gardeners.

### *Relationship building*

Along with the relationships we have built with our local residents, we have also built relationships with organisations who are working in our community and on the same issues as us. These relationships have resulted in donations of money and resources for the project as well as sharing of expertise and promotion. We have also joined *The Stop* in Toronto's Learning Network and are planning to build relationships with them for support and continued inspiration.

### *Opportunity assessment*

The activities of the Pantry have been supported by ongoing opportunity assessment carried out by Wesley staff in consultation with the Pantry participants in order to identify the areas for future focus. The Tool Library has come directly from this opportunity assessment.

### *Securing funding*

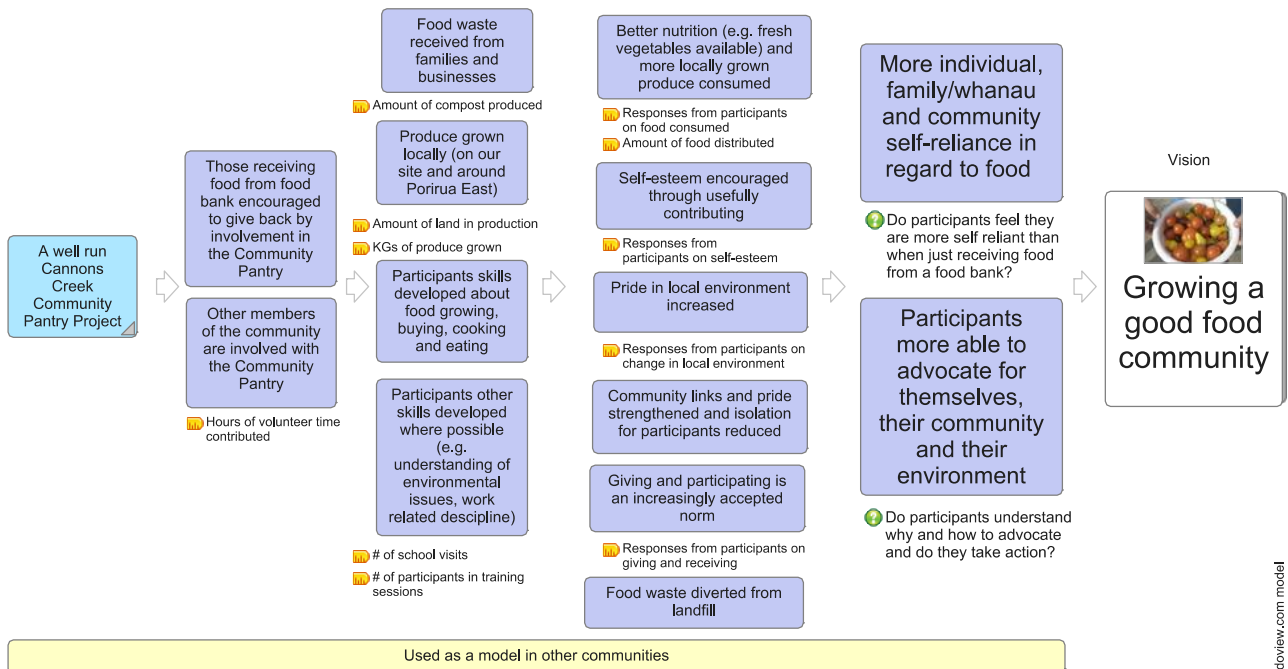
We have been running the Community Pantry as a pilot for 12 months on very limited staff time of a Project Coordinator employed 2 days a week and a Team Leader providing support and oversight. We have used this pilot project to work to secure three year funding so that we can take the Community Pantry into a full project to achieve or desired outcomes.





## Indicators of Progress

On to our outcomes model we have mapped the evaluation questions and indicators that measure success. The indicators we have identified on these models will be recorded throughout the life of the project.



Each of these indicators were monitored through the pilot where practical. Due to limited staff time in the pilot we have not recorded all of these indicators but will set up processes to do so in the coming years.

### *Kilograms of produce grown and Amount of food distributed*

Although we tried, our model of giving out food ad hock and encouraging people to harvest produce themselves made it difficult to monitor what was grown and what was given out. We found that instead of formally harvesting the

produce it was better for the project and for relationship building to invite people out to the garden to pick some fruit and vegetables with us for their food parcel. This introduced people to the garden and provided opportunities for us to have relaxed, natural conversations with people about their circumstances. It was often the case that people who had come one day and picked

some vegetables to add to their food parcel came back later that week to help in the garden.

We also noticed a lot of produce being harvested out of office hours which means that people were picking vegetables to eat without asking a team member. When we started this pilot we often heard the comment “but if you grow it there people will just eat it!” This has proved to be the case but as we responded to

### Participant Survey

The participant survey will be carried out by Wesley Community Action staff other than those directly working on the project and will involve a written questionnaire and interviews with participants. The peer review process will be carried out by an external expert, such as the manager of another food access project, and will be based on a reciprocal offer of peer assessment of their project by Wesley Community Action staff.

these comments at the start of the pilot, this is the point, as having more healthy food available in our community is part of our vision and the food is grown to be eaten. In contrast to some community gardens we have talked with who have the problem of people not harvesting all of the produce and it going to waste, we have found that our produce does get picked and doesn't go to waste.

### *Amount of land in production*

We now have a good amount of land in production on our property - 110<sup>2</sup> meters. There are also several new gardens in production at our participants homes which we have not been able to measure due to limited staff time – approximately 14 gardens have been set up in people's homes with support from the Community pantry.

### *Hours of volunteer time contributed*

We recorded 353.5 volunteer hours and know that there are an even greater number than this as for example, on the weekend people came to water the garden or save seedlings from extreme weather but these were not able to be recorded as often we didn't even know about it until much later. This is in addition to the average of 24 hours per week continuing to be given to the running of the food bank. We also took on several Community Workers who were doing hours as part of a court order and contributed more than 300 hours to the Community Pantry. This was a very successful part of the project as we were able to work one on one with these people to provide support to help with their rehabilitation. Two of our three Community Workers have since become volunteers with us.



### *Number of participants in training sessions*

We only held two garden trainings, one cooking session, and one field trip. We had six people at our compost building workshops (run by a Porirua City Council employee), two adults and two children at our sunflower planting afternoon, two people working with us to make marmalade, and six on a field trip to other inspiring gardens. Although these are small numbers they are appropriate for these workshops and we are confident that future workshops will also be valued and well attended.

## **Success Story Two: from receiving to giving**

One couple who live nearby has been accessing our services to work on some issues they were experiencing. They are now coming to our service as part of the team. Once or twice a week they come and work in the garden. They are taking real ownership of their work by identifying tasks and carrying them out. They recently joined us for lunch with a visitor to the centre and when introducing themselves, rather than saying they were clients of ours they said "we are here because we want to help the community". They now can feel that they are part of the solution to community problems.



### *Number of school visits*

We have not yet had any schools visit us but have had a request from the local Girl Guides group who had to cancel because of bad weather. This is definitely an area for potential work.

### *Amount of compost produced*

We have made compost from trees that we mulched from our site, our own food scraps and the food scraps of some of our volunteers. Some of this material is still composting and so our

conservative estimate is that we will have turned it into 2<sup>3</sup> meters of compost

### *Responses from participants on food consumed, self-esteem, on giving and receiving, and change in local environment*

We have not yet carried out the survey to answer these questions but are planning a survey for 2012.



## **Lessons learnt**

Our first year of working in this way on the Community Pantry pilot has led us to learn several, sometimes unexpected, lessons.

### *Ownership*

People taking ownership of the food bank garden is great and one of the things we want to achieve. The people who do take ownership, however, don't stay static. We experienced that previous 'owners' sometimes lose interest when others



begin to take ownership. Although this is not necessarily a problem, it is an issue to be aware of so that all people involved in the garden have a place that they feel comfortable and stable in.

### *Chaos*

Opening up our food bank to encourage reciprocity has been very successful. It also, however, has increased the level of chaos in our centre. As the families and individuals accessing our food bank started becoming part of our team we had more visitors, more cups of tea being made, and more things happening all over the house. The lines between team members and clients became blurred and so these relationships needed a significant amount of management to ensure that everyone could interact in a healthy and happy way.

The project has also seemed to have an effect on our service in that it is just generally busier. As we create a welcoming and cooperative environment people like to come here more and so we become busier. Our team has had to work hard to adapt to this and make sure that families coming to see us are getting the support that they need in a busy service.

### *Encouragement*

As people came to help regularly in the garden we

## Success Story Three: responding to vandalism

In January we had our first piece of vandalism in the garden. On the weekend someone snapped our corn plants and pulled out some silver beet. This however is actually a story of success for us as, when the staff arrived to work on Monday, the volunteers had already cleaned up the garden and replanted the saveable plants. Also, importantly, conversations amongst gardeners and staff were centred around how great it was that we had not had any more damage and that although we were disappointed we were not angry or discouraged but more sure about including others in the garden.

noticed that some were starting to receive food parcels more regularly. This is an interesting issue that we are working to overcome. We have created a system for reciprocity but do need to continue to examine if we are fostering dependence on food parcels as well.

### *Flexibility and open ears*

The community told us what they wanted out of this project. At the beginning of our pilot we thought we would be concentrating on growing food on our site and that home garden support was to be a future plan. But the people coming to see our garden kept saying "I wish I could have a garden at home." We then asked for donations of tools and were inundated with them. Being open to what our whanau were asking for meant that



we were able to adapt our emphasis and go and help people at home with gardens, rather than being stuck in our original ideas.

Another flexibility we had was to take on workers doing their community service as required by the District Court as part of their rehabilitation. We were able to provide them with a supportive

environment to do their hours and contribute to their own community in a way they could feel proud of. Several of these people became volunteers after they finished their court ordered hours.



## Future activities

We have set a range of milestones to achieve in the next 12 Months

- Recruit project coordinator
- Sign up ten families to receive support to have gardens in their homes
- Complete planning for five training events.
- Plant rest of orchard
- Set up a system to receive regular contributions of food waste to our compost system
- Establish a mentor group to work with gardeners at home

These milestones will help us to monitor and measure the progress of our project. But a more important and less tangible aspect of the project will be to encourage and identify positive change in project participants.

In addition to these milestones, we have identified a range of activities that would be valuable future additions to the Community Pantry. These have been brought up during our pilot phase, through Wesley Community Action's experience working in New Zealand communities, and from international examples of community food security initiatives. These initial ideas form the basis of the opportunity

assessment where we will work with the Pantry users to identify which initiatives are best suited to Cannons Creek. Additional funding for these activities will be pursued as the proposals are

developed. Some of them will be able to be carried out within our existing resources as the food growing becomes more self-sufficient and requires less of the Pantry Coordinator's time

### *Systemic change*

The Community Pantry views food as not only an end in itself but also a means to achieving broader goals of empowerment and health. With long term support we will be able to be a community-connected vehicle for policy implementation on food system issues and health promotion activities by giving policy makers real world examples of problems and opportunities to address

Campaigning for better policy would be an area of strength for the Pantry. Through taking local action the Pantry will continue to gain experience that will provide a valuable contribution to debate about national policy barriers to food security. The Cannons Creek Community Pantry could also be used as a model for replication across the country leading to increased food security around New Zealand. More locally, the Pantry could work with residents and Porirua City Council to develop a food strategy for the region

### *Community meal services*

Some meals in Cannons Creek could be prepared and served more communally to promote community linkages and increase the emphasis on healthy eating.

*Meals on wheels* service for those in the community that need meals delivered. This would also provide a demand for produce from the gardens and skills development through work experience for those preparing the meals.

*Drop in centre* where food could be made available to be eaten on site. This would allow Wesley staff to build stronger community connections.

*Community meals* for all the Pantry participants to get together and celebrate their achievements, practice their food preparation skills, and build community links. These could be regular meals once a month or once a season that would utilise produce from the gardens.

### *Business support*

There are opportunities for increased viability of businesses providing healthy food in Cannons Creek if the Community Pantry ran activities to assist them.

*Commercial kitchen hire* made available to new and small businesses that need access to a certified kitchen to process their products.

*Support for local food shops* to purchase and display fruit and vegetables and other healthy products. This could take the form of workshops or visits from Wesley staff to their premises to give advice.

*Community Café* as a social enterprise to provide employment opportunities in Cannons Creek as well as providing healthy food.

that would utilise produce from the gardens.





### *Obesity reduction*

The current high rates of obesity in communities like Cannons Creek around New Zealand require a range of solutions. The Pantry could play a part in obesity reduction in collaboration with local health centres.

*Green gyms* could be developed that increase the amount of exercise people do. Green Gyms are exercise programmes that are developed for outside and often involve gardening or landscaping as an exercise as well as a useful activity.

*Healthy diets program* will allow health professionals to refer their patients to a community run diet programme.



### *Good food access*

The current food bank model favours the consumption of foods that are packaged, processed and imported. The Pantry already increased the amount of fresh produce available to our users and volunteers but more could be done to allow greater access to lower cost healthy foods.

*Low cost food market* could be established in Cannons Creek to provide access to well priced fruit and vegetables. This could be connected to the other community markets in Wellington region including Waitangirua.

*Food purchasing cooperative* would bring residents together to purchase bulk products such as rice and flour at a discounted price.

*Identify and map fruit trees* in Cannons Creek to compliment vegetable gardens and increase the availability of free fruit to residents.



# Acknowledgements

Wesley Community Action, with contributions from partners including the Tindall foundation, Mana Community Trust, and the Methodist Church, have been funding the Community Pantry Coordinator for the last year. We are very excited to have confirmed funding for the next three years to take this pilot and use the lessons learnt and relationships built to create a good food community in Cannons Creek.



Tawa Union Parish, Commonsense Organics, Porirua City Council, Department of Corrections, The Rock Church, Regional Public Health, and Home Harvest have all contributed to the project in ways that have helped us grow food and help others to grow food at their homes. Thank you for your help.

We are proud of the work we have done over the last year to form the foundations of a community food centre in Cannons Creek. Our volunteers and partners have all helped us make this work so far and we look forward to continuing to work with them in the future of the Cannons Creek Community Pantry.

# References

<sup>1</sup>The Stop Community Food Centre. 2010. *In Every Community a Place for Food: The Role of the Community Food Centre in Building a Local, Sustainable, and Just Food System*. Toronto: Metcalf Food Solutions.

<sup>2</sup>The New Zealand Network Against Food Poverty. 1999. *Hidden Hunger – Food and Low Income in NZ*. Wellington: The Downtown Community Ministry

<sup>3</sup>Smith, C., W. Parnett & R. Brown. 2010. *Family Food Environment: barriers to acquiring affordable and nutrition food in New Zealand households*. Wellington: Families Commission.

<sup>4</sup>Duignan, P. 2010. *Duignan's Outcomes-Focused Visual Strategic Planning for Public and Third Sector Organizations*. *Outcomes Theory Knowledge Base Article No. 283*. (<http://knol.google.com/k/paul-duignan-phd/duignan-s-outcomes-focused-visual/2m7zd68aaz774/162>) or (<http://tinyurl.com/otheory287>).



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