

Christmas From The Heart: 2022

FEBRUARY 2023



Visionwest
Waka Whakakitenga

building hope
together

| *Kia Tūmanakotia*

Introduction

Christmas From The Heart is a collaborative initiative centered on addressing Christmas hardship in Tāmaki Makaurau. In Te Uru o Tāmaki Makaurau (West Auckland) Christmas From The Heart is run by Visionwest Waka Whakakitenga with partnering support from the Auckland City Mission. 2022 was the fourth year of this collaboration. Other organisations run similar events in other parts of the city.

This report provides an overview of the Christmas From The Heart 2022 event and high-level information about whānau who needed support at Christmas, and reveals some of the reasons why that support was necessary.

This report also includes reflections about the current level of hardship faced by many in Aotearoa New Zealand and what needs to change in order for food security to improve so that events like Christmas From The Heart are no longer needed.

Event logistics

Christmas From The Heart 2022 was a seven day event running from Wednesday 14 December to Thursday 22 December (excluding the weekend). The entire event is organised in a way that maximises efficiency while preserving the mana of whānau receiving support.

A few days prior to the event, people in the community who were doing it tough, including whānau already engaged with Visionwest services, were encouraged, primarily through Visionwest networks, social media, and word of mouth, to phone **0800 FOOD00**. There our phone centre staff assigned them a day and time to collect their Christmas food and gifts. This process included the collection of information relating to the number of people within each whānau and whether gifts for children were required.

Each food box contained essential food items, Christmas food to enable a festive Christmas Day meal and, where appropriate, gifts for children.

At their registered time, whānau drove into the Christmas From The Heart carpark – 15 cars in every 15-minute period. By running from 9:30 until 1:00pm each day, 225 cars per day were able to be catered for (though the actual 2022 total was closer to 245 per day).

On arrival at Christmas From The Heart, whānau were welcomed warmly and provided with a BBQ sausage and ice cream. Each car was given a number which corresponded with the food and gifts that had been pre-packaged according to the information provided at the time of registration. Cars then moved through to the pick-up area where Christmas boxes and gifts were placed into the boot.

This pick-up method was initially devised as a way of enabling contactless pick-up during Covid. It has been retained, however, because, although no longer strictly contactless, it is both efficient and preserves the mana of whānau who do not have to openly queue as they wait for support.

It should also be noted that, rather than pre-wrapping gifts, gift-wrapping paper was included with the gift parcels providing parents with the joy and empowerment that comes with wrapping their children's gifts themselves.

During both the registration process and the collection process, people were asked questions relating to their current financial situation. While this was done sensitively and there was no compulsion to answer, most whānau were open and honest in their responses, which are analysed later in this report.

When contacting Visionwest, whānau were also asked if they wished to be assessed for a Special Needs Grant (SNG) from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ).

Christmas From The Heart ♥



1758

**CHRISTMAS
FOOD AND GIFT
BOXES FOR
9035 PEOPLE**



4034

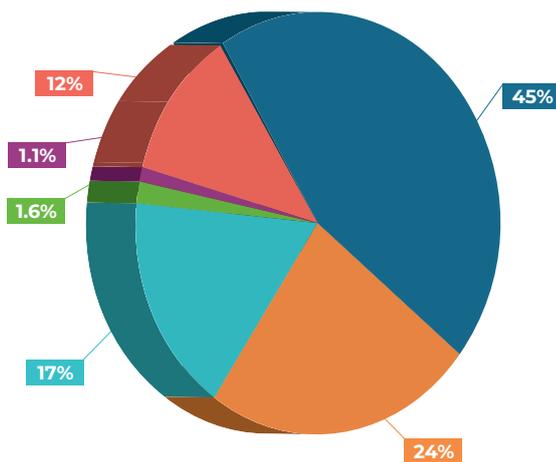
**ADULTS RECEIVED
FOOD SUPPORT**



5001

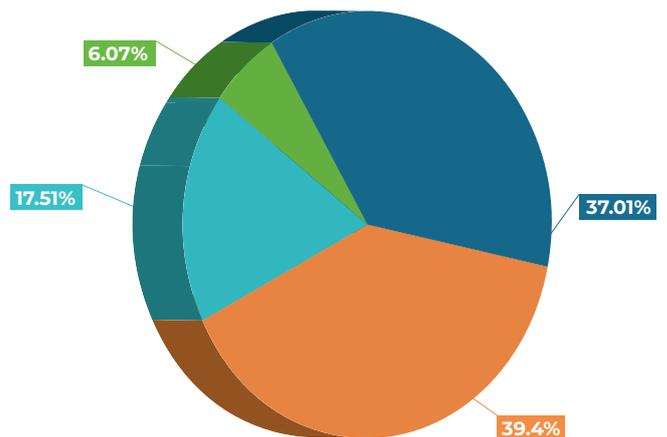
**CHILDREN RECEIVED FOOD
SUPPORT AND GIFTS**

**ETHNICITY OF PEOPLE COLLECTING
CHRISTMAS BOXES 2022**



- 45% Māori
- 24% NZ European
- 17% Pasifika
- 1.6% Asian
- 1.1% Middle Eastern, Latin American or African
- 12% Not recorded

**FOOD BOX / WHĀNAU
BREAKDOWN 2022**



- 1 Solo box (1 person)
- 1 Family box (2 – 4 people)
- 1 Family + Solo box (5 – 7 people)
- 2 Family boxes (8+ people)

Two Surveys

Information was gathered from whānau using two short and sensitively taken surveys. The first was a **“Special Needs Grant survey”** comprising one question which was asked by our call centre team at the time of registration.

The second was an **“Exit survey”** which involved asking whānau three questions as they exited Christmas From The Heart.

Special Needs Grant (SNG) survey

As part of Christmas From The Heart, whānau who registered for a food and gift box had the voluntary option of being assessed by WINZ for a SNG. 66% of people (n= 1,170) collecting a Christmas parcel took up this offer.

Each person assessed for a SNG was asked to pick one of the following options to describe their reason for requesting a Christmas Food and gift box in 2021:

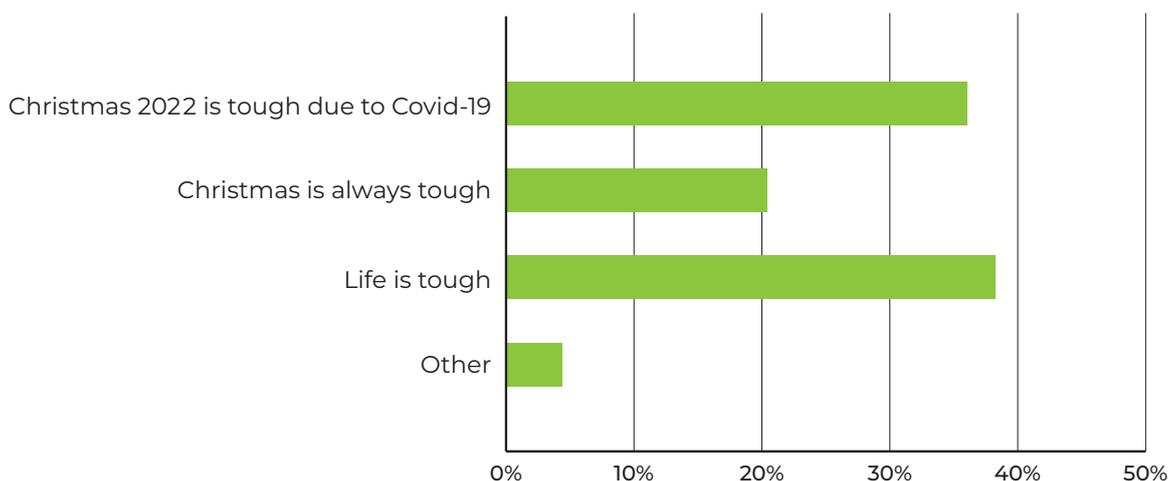
- A. Christmas 2022 is tough due to Covid-19 implications** – as an indicator of the number of people experiencing episodic poverty possibly for the first time.
- B. Christmas is always a tough time of year for us** – as an indicator of how many people find Christmas specifically a tough time, repeat poverty.
- C. Life is tough, and Christmas is no different** – as an indicator of how many people are experiencing entrenched poverty regardless of the Christmas season.
- D. Other** – an option if people didn’t feel like sharing or they reported another reason.

In total, 1,170 people responded to this question. As the graph below shows, well over a third of the respondents (38.6%; n=452) reported that “Life is tough” indicating that they are experiencing entrenched poverty.

Likewise, over a third (36.1%; n=423) responded that Christmas in 2022 was tough due to the implications of Covid-19.

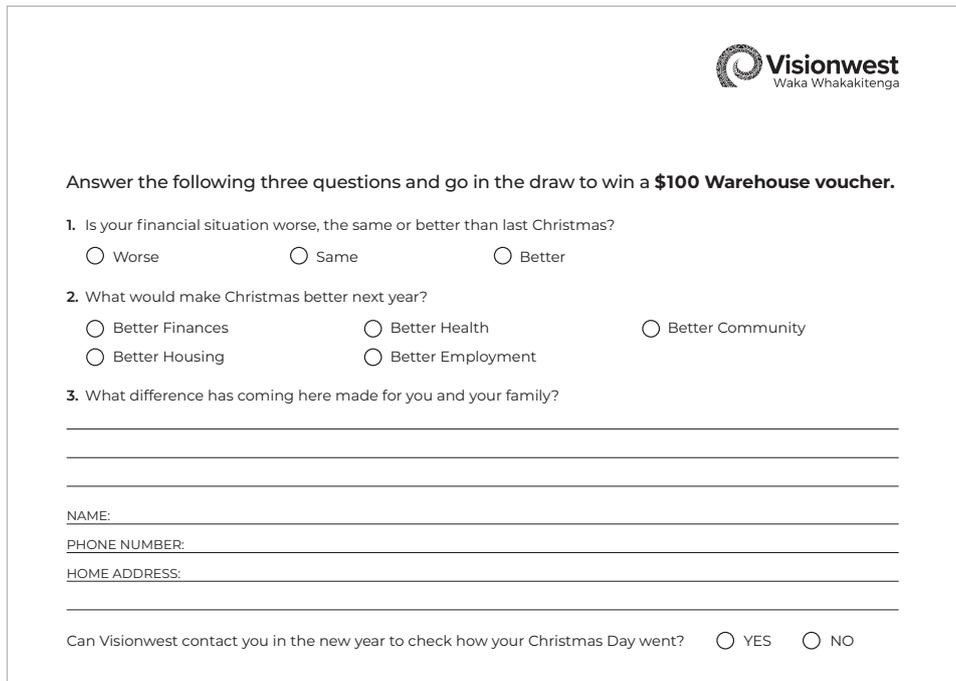
20.9% (n=244) stated that every year Christmas is a particularly tough time of year.

REASONS FOR A SPECIAL NEEDS GRANT



Exit survey

As part of the food box pick-up process, whānau were given a card which asked a series of questions designed to gauge their current financial situation and measure other ways Visionwest and partner organisations might be able to assist them. 1,324 people completed this survey card which looked like this:

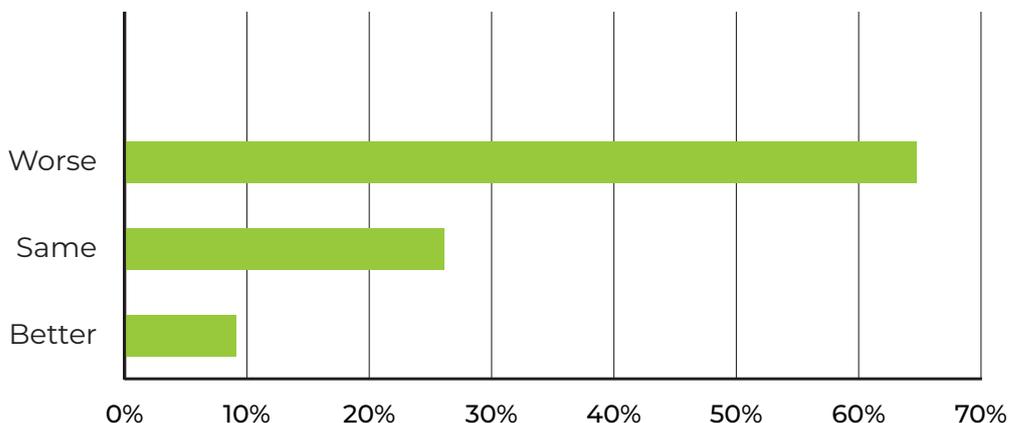


The screenshot shows a survey card with the Visionwest logo at the top right. The text on the card reads: "Answer the following three questions and go in the draw to win a \$100 Warehouse voucher." Below this are three numbered questions with radio button options. Question 1 asks about financial situation (Worse, Same, Better). Question 2 asks what would make Christmas better next year (Better Finances, Better Health, Better Community, Better Housing, Better Employment). Question 3 asks for a written response about the difference made by coming here. At the bottom, there are fields for NAME, PHONE NUMBER, and HOME ADDRESS, and a final question about contact in the new year (YES/NO).

Question 1: Is your financial situation worse, the same or better than last Christmas?

An overwhelming number of whānau – 63.7% (n=843) felt their financial situation was worse than last year. 27.3% (n=361) felt their financial situation was the same as last year and only 9.0% (n=120) felt it was better.

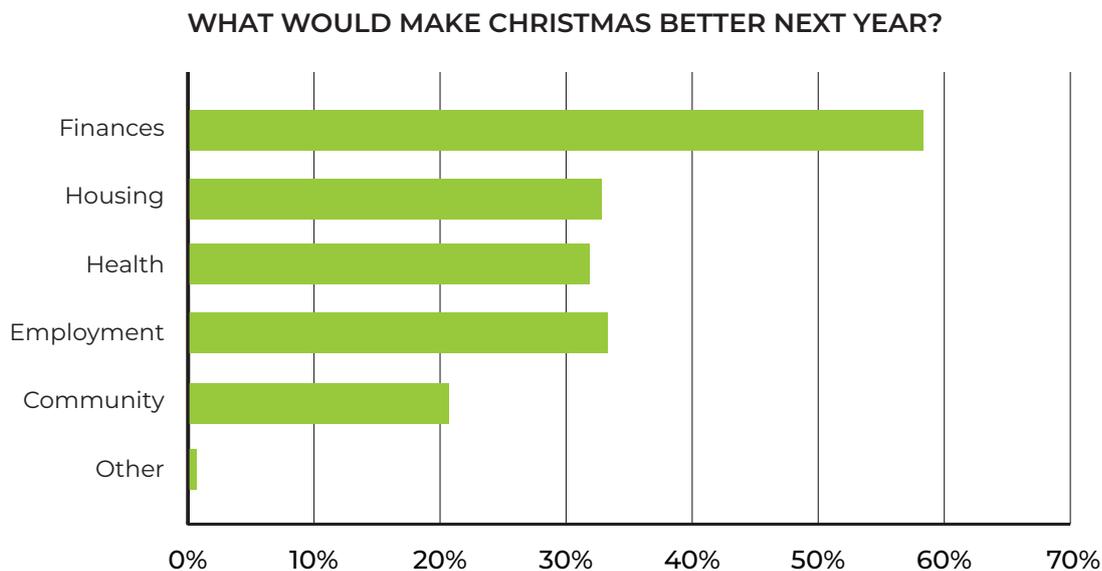
IS YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION WORSE, THE SAME OR BETTER THAN LAST CHRISTMAS?



Question 2: What would make Christmas better next year?

This question goes hand in hand with the previous question. Having seen that the bulk of people stated that this Christmas was worse than last Christmas, it is of no surprise that a significant number of respondents listed “finances” as the factor that would improve Christmas next year (and, no doubt, every day throughout the coming 12 months).

Of the other options, Housing, Health, and Employment were fairly evenly represented with each one being selected by about a third of all respondents.



Question 3: What difference has coming here made for you and your family?

The responses to this question varied with each person and are too numerous to list here. Many responded with simple answers such as, “Huge (or Big) difference.”

Others were more explicit, a common theme being the release of stress that many parcel recipients felt. Typical responses in this regard were, “Big help re stress,” “Taken a load of worry off,” and “Eased the pressure.”



Insights

The first thing to note regarding Christmas From The Heart 2022 is the significant increase in the number of whānau supported when compared to the 2021 event.

- **Parcels provided / whānau supported increased by 30%.**
- **Children’s gifts provided increased by 47%.**

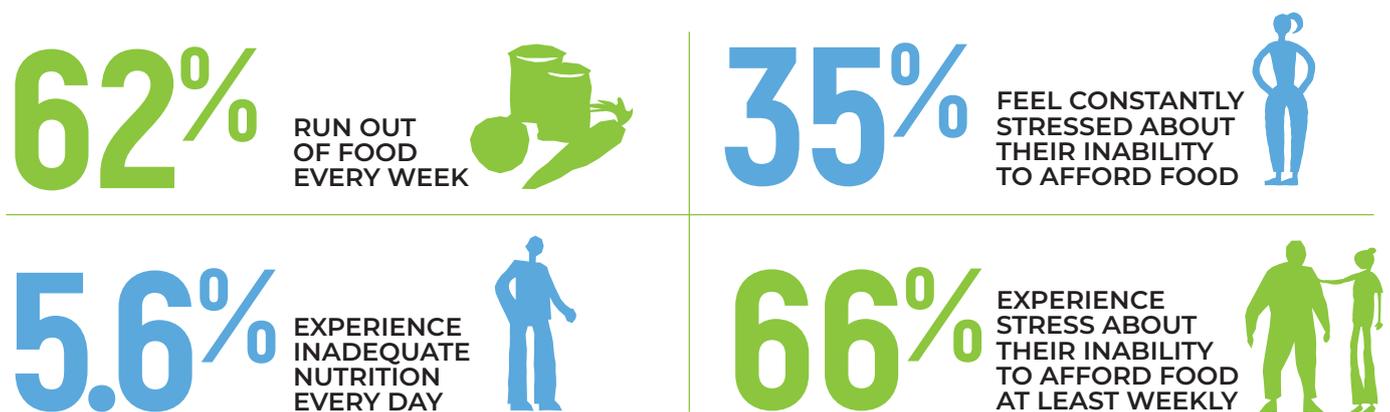
In terms of actual people receiving Christmas food boxes, this represented a **43.5%** increase on the previous year; 8,864 people fed compared with 6,175.

An increased need?

These figures alone cannot be used to categorically state that the need is greater this year than the previous year. Experience gained from previous years has given us a greater understanding of the number of parcels that can be processed each day. Hence, this year the call centre aimed to process 225 registrations each day – with about 245 per day eventuating – which resulted in a significant increase in the number of whānau registered for the event and able to be supported each day.

However, while the overall figures from Christmas From The Heart may not, on their own, support an assertion of increased need, they do corroborate other data, both measured and anecdotal. The measured data comes primarily from the regular reporting of Visionwest’s support services and a Visionwest impact report, *The One Hundred Whānau Food and Financial Hardship Report*, released in December 2022.

The One Hundred Whānau Food and Financial Hardship Report revealed some interesting facts relating to food insecurity and poverty in our local communities. Of 110 people who responded to the survey:



The “New Poor”

This same impact report revealed a new cohort within our local communities who are struggling financially – the report refers to these people as “the new poor.” These are people who have been hit by the challenges of loss of income, often as a direct result of Covid, and/or the recent rapid rise in the cost-of-living. Many of these people were previously managing to survive on their income, albeit, in some cases, only just. Now they are struggling. Some own their own homes but have been pushed to the financial brink by the rise in mortgage interest rates and cost-of-living increases.

While chatting to event volunteers, a number of Christmas From The Heart whānau spoke of their disbelief and embarrassment at finding themselves in a situation where they needed to access food support in this way. Just a short time ago, support services were foreign to them, and it seemed untenable that they would need to contact any social support agency or organisation.

Within Visionwest, this increase has been witnessed first-hand by our Money Mentors (budgeting service) team. In the 2020 – 2021 financial year, the service provided 1,000 financial mentoring sessions. In the 2021 – 2022 financial year, this rose to 1,814 sessions (despite being contracted to deliver just 1,050 sessions). Many of these whānau seeking financial advice were people who had never before required any form of social service support.

The Bottom Line

As stated earlier, in terms of how people are faring in the current financial climate, perhaps the most revealing factor is the responses to the Christmas From The Heart Exit survey.

In response to the first question, “Is your financial situation worse, the same or better than last Christmas?” As illustrated in the graph on page ???:

- Only **9%** of people felt their financial situation was better this year than last year.
- **27.3%** of whānau stated that their financial situation was the same as last year.
- This left over two-thirds (**67%**) believing they are worse off.

When asked “What would make Christmas better next year?” 58.7% of respondents said, “better finances.”

“Christmas From The Heart took so much pressure off me. It was lovely for the kids to get gifts and Christmas dinner, but best for me was that I had enough food to get us through the holidays. Things are hard for me because of the cost of living going up so far. The money I have budgeted for groceries just isn’t enough anymore. What used to get me half a trolley of food now only buys a few items. All my other bills have gone up so, the amount of money I have for food has gone down and it buys less.” Y.T.



What We Do Know

Christmas From The Heart very much confirmed both the anecdotal findings and the tested data from teams throughout Visionwest. Notably we can state:

- Covid and cost-of-living means the number of whānau doing it tough is increasing.
This cannot be proven solely by the increase in the number of whānau registering for Christmas From The Heart 2022. However, coupled with other data available to Visionwest and the increase in demand experienced by most of our support services, it points to a growing number of whānau facing significant financial challenges.
- Some people who previously managed financially, albeit only just, have been forced to seek help from social support services for the first time.
The immediate challenge faced by people who are new to financial insecurity and the challenges of poverty is a lack of familiarity with the social welfare system and lack of knowledge relating to what help is available to them and how to access that help.
- The ramifications of food insecurity go beyond empty bellies. The financial hardship that accompanies it brings social, health and mental health issues.
Not only are people with limited finances unable to afford necessary health and dental services, they often suffer mental health issues, many arising out of the shame and marginalisation they feel from being unable to survive financially. Others live in a state of perpetual stress brought on by the anxiety of being unable to afford food. This stress can manifest in a number of ways including mental health issues and even the extreme of physical violence in the home.
In the One Hundred Whānau Food and Financial Hardship Report,
 - **66%** of respondents experience stress at least weekly about their inability to afford food.
 - **35%** of respondents feel constantly stressed about their inability to afford food.
- The provision of food (Christmas food and longer-term food parcels) is an enormous help to whānau, but it is not a panacea for the underlying issue of poverty in our communities. While providing emergency food frees money up to enable people to afford other necessities such as utility payments, debt repayments and health/dental visits, it does not alleviate the financial challenges they face.

“Christmas From The Heart was such a big help at a time when I needed it most. I had no way to get the extra food I'd need over the holidays, let alone for a Christmas meal. Since Christmas, times are still hard but I get by most weeks. When I have extra bills, I go to the Pātaka Kai and they help out.” N.T.



Where to From Here?

Support services within Visionwest acknowledge that there was a slight short-term easing of the financial challenges faced by many whānau due to various Government initiatives instigated in the past year. These include cost-of-living payments, and fuel and public transport subsidies.

While these were helpful in the short term, they did little to ease the long-term poverty that many Kiwi whānau are facing and the reality remains that a growing number of low-income New Zealanders continue to live with a daily financial struggle and all the challenges that come with it.

In October 2022, the Kore Hiakai Collective, of which Visionwest is an active member, produced their Ka Mākona 2022 Report. A follow up to the 2021 Report, this analysed and commented on a number of household scenarios which were modelled using accessible public information relating to income and expenditure.

The Report's findings mirrored those of Visionwest's various support services and stated:

“Despite benefit and minimum wage increases, most of the households modelled continue to have barely sufficient income to cover their basic fixed household expenses of housing, transport, and utilities. There is little or nothing remaining to cover the variable costs of essentials such as clothing, insurance, debt repayments, childcare, appliances, school sport or cultural activities, gifts, and any unexpected expenses.”

The challenge for support organisations is that food insecurity does not exist in isolation. Behind it are a plethora of issues that act upon an individual and upon families and impacting their lives. Issues such as education, housing, employment, and even cultural biases or social policies are part of the complex mix that can lead to a person being trapped in poverty.

Extensive bodies of research show that the biggest improvements in a person's life, over the longest timeframe and for the least individual effort, can be made by changing these issues. Unless these changes take place, it's unreasonable to expect individuals to change. For example, to insist that a person could escape poverty if they found a better paying job when they have been denied access to an appropriate education system is illogical.

Finding a solution to the issue of food insecurity in Aotearoa New Zealand demands that an understanding that hunger is a result of a complexity of issues that include education challenges, low wages, high cost-of-living and housing costs. In short, it is not hungry people who have failed themselves, it is the systems around them that have let them down.

What is required is a redesign of the food system so that each person who needs support is at the centre of it. Once this happens, we can ask the question, “What needs to happen for this person to thrive?” and we can address the specific issues that are preventing them accessing food or any other essential entity they may be lacking.

¹ Ka Mākona 2022; Kore Hiakai, The Zero Hunger Collective - www.zerohunger.org.nz

The Importance of Wraparound Support Services

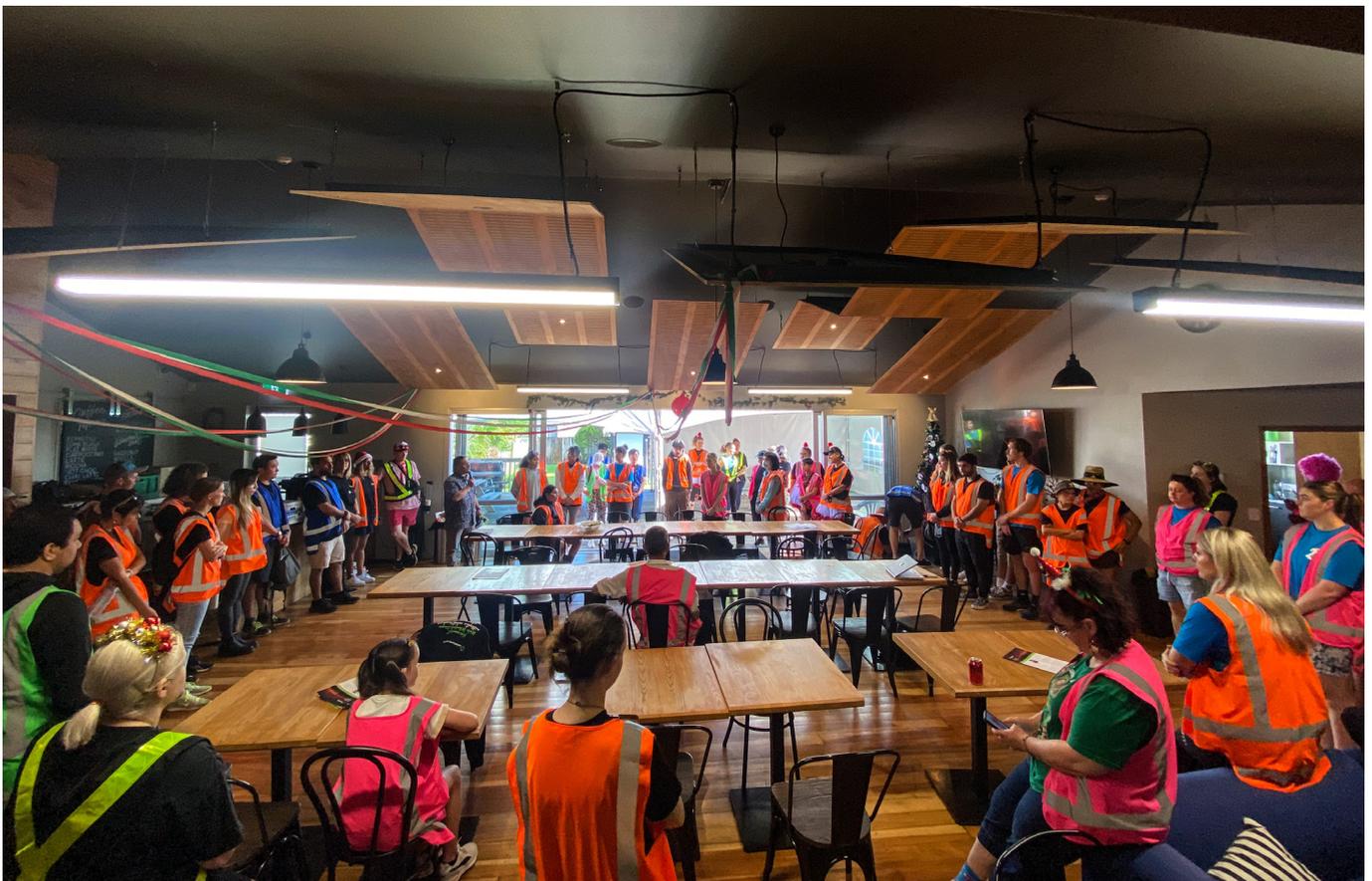
Christmas From The Heart is just one piece in the jigsaw puzzle that makes up adequate and effective support for vulnerable whānau. Closely associated with Christmas From The Heart is the long term food support offered by the Pātaka Kai at Visionwest Waka Whakakitenga. The reason an active Pātaka Kai is vital to a community is that many whānau find themselves financially stretched at times. During those times, emergency food support can make a big difference.

However, Visionwest also recognises the various issues that impinge on a whānau's ability to afford food. To this end, Visionwest offers all whānau who come into their sphere a suite of wraparound services aimed at enabling them to work towards transforming their life long-term.

Wraparound support includes budgeting advice, counselling, housing, education and job training, home healthcare, and culturally relevant support from Huia Mai, our specifically Māori-based whānau services which are designed to meet the needs of whānau Māori and all other whānau who seek our support.

Through this wraparound support we are able to journey with client whānau as they come to recognise and deal with the issues which are impacting their current life. At the same time Visionwest works with partners to influence policy and practice change to shift those factors that adversely impact on people's lives.

Visionwest Waka Whakakitenga – February 2023



For more information contact:

Brook Turner

Head of Services Development and Partnerships

E brook.turner@visionwest.org.nz

T 027 808 5692

Visionwest Community Trust
PO Box 20406,
Glen Eden, Auckland.

visionwest.org.nz