

Christmas From The Heart: 2025

February 2026



 **Visionwest**
Waka Whakakitenga

Christmas
From the Heart

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Christmas *From the Heart*



Introduction

Christmas calls to mind a host of nostalgic imagery.

There are the timeless scenes of stars and sheep, herdsmen and wisemen, Mother and Child. Or perhaps more familiar modern snapshots: the bustle of shopping centres, travel plans carefully coordinated, calendars filling quickly as the year draws to a close. For many, the Christmas meal looms largest in the imagination – jubilant faces surrounding tables overflowing with food. Ornately adorned Christmas pines standing in a forest of perfectly wrapped gifts.

For others, like the whānau we serve at Visionwest, these images clash sharply with their realities of hardship. These realities don't disappear in the holiday season. In fact, they amplify.

For whānau facing the persistent challenges of poverty, Christmas can intensify the fear and whakamā (shame) of not having enough to go around, not being able to provide for their children, and not having the means to celebrate. Loneliness can feel heavier when joy appears to be experienced by everyone else - everywhere else. Tragically, anxiety grows when families are confronted with having to choose between Christmas expenses and essentials like rent, power, transport or kai. Joy just won't fit in the budget.

These pressures do not exist in isolation.

Recent surges to the cost of living, barriers to accessing safe and affordable housing, and an economic environment where minimum wage is not enough to manage the basics, compound feelings of hopelessness, dejectedness and



exclusion. Beyond these broader systemic pressures, many encounter unexpected events like injury, illness, bereavement, or redundancy which can abruptly shift a family's trajectory, leaving them facing challenges that feel overwhelming and impossible to reverse.

Christmas From The Heart is Visionwest's way of responding to hardship at a time of year when we all need aroha and manaakitanga. Each year, the event creates a space where whānau are welcomed, resourced with practical assistance, and reminded of their innate value.

This report is produced to inform and encourage all those involved in that shared effort – Visionwest kaimahi, volunteers, partners, donors, and supporters. It offers:

- A picture of how Christmas From The Heart was experienced by whānau, volunteers, and kaimahi (staff)
- High-level indicators of the support provided during the event
- A closing reflection connecting Christmas From The Heart to Visionwest's work throughout the year

A Campus Decked With Care

Christmas From The Heart 2025 ran across five weekdays, from 11–17 December, marking Visionwest’s seventh year hosting the event.

As in previous years, large quantities of food and gifts passed through the site each day. Pallets of goods weighing in the tons rolled in across the 5 days and were made ready for the 4352 human beings who would come through the site. Quantity, however, was never the only thing that would count. From the earliest planning conversations to the final pack-down, the focus remained firmly on the quality of care and connection experienced by every person who came through the gates.

The use of a pre-event booking system meant that the experience didn’t involve crowding or long queues, but maximised timely support, fun, joy, and a relaxed pace. Guided by a Visionwest kaimahi or a volunteer “Christmas Elf”, whānau moved through six festive stages:

1. Welcome, Hospitality and Activities.

Whānau are welcomed into the church cafe area where they can grab a coffee, sausage and a snack, and enjoy fun activities like face-painting, games, and a photo booth.



- 2. Check-in and Elf Assignment.** At their scheduled time, whānau check-in and meet their personal “Christmas Elf” who will accompany them around the site.
- 3. Kai from the Heart Supermarket.** Whānau select Christmas food and essentials to create their own special meal.



- 4. Gifts from the Heart Toy Store.** Parents choose age-appropriate gifts and stocking fillers for their children.



- 5. Fresh Produce Station.** A variety of fresh foods compliment the pantry staples.



6. Gift Wrapping and Exit Survey. Gifts are beautifully wrapped for Christmas morning by our volunteers. Whānau can fill out an exit survey while they wait.

Nearly a thousand families came through and enjoyed a welcoming and joyful environment with a fun playlist on the PA, free haircuts, Mr. Whippy ice cream, Donuts and a pop-up op-shop offering free items of clothing. Small details mattered. Thoughtful touches across the campus, like the intricately crafted nativity scene featuring burlap kiwis heading to the stable.



Previous reports have described Christmas From The Heart as an invitation into a transformational support relationship, rather than a one-off, transactional encounter. That intent continued to shape the event in 2025. The space was deliberately and carefully curated – physically, relationally, and

culturally – to embody Visionwest's values of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, aroha, and mana.

- For whānau experiencing loneliness, the event offered a generous welcome. From the first greeting to shared conversations over kai, people were received not as numbers in a queue but as guests; as whānau.
- For whānau carrying stress and pressure, it offered moments of joy – laughter at the photo booth, parents choosing gifts, familiar faces reconnecting.
- For whānau facing the scarcity of bare pantries, it offered generosity – good food, thoughtful gifts, and a sense of abundance rather than rationing.
- For whānau accustomed to having choices limited, it offered dignity – choice in kai, choice in gifts, and opportunities to give feedback and shape the experience.

Based on feedback from kaimahi, it was striking how closely the original intentions for the event aligned with how whānau described their experience – carefully planned structures meeting real human need in tangible ways.

Renee Manga, Kai Services Director says:

I loved being part of Christmas from the Heart. It was such a success because of the generosity of our supporters, the strength of our community, and the awesome mahi of our kaimahi and volunteers. Seeing whānau leave with full trolleys, smiles, and relief, knowing they could create joy and magic over Christmas for their whānau and Tamariki, it was the perfect way to end the year. Love our kaupapa

Nathan May, Head of Organisational Development writes:

“Christmas From the Heart 2025 was an incredible display of our Visionwest values in action. Manaakitanga was visible everywhere as community members, partner organisations, schools, local businesses, volunteers, and our own

Christmas From the Heart

staff came together to make the event possible. From the joy of free donuts and ice creams to gifts wrapped with care and conversations shared with aroha, the whole event reflected a community united in generosity. It was a privilege to see so many people contributing to create something truly encouraging.”

This atmosphere was carefully managed. Each morning began with briefings that grounded volunteers and kaimahi in the kaupapa of the event. The amazing volunteers were keen not only to help, but to lean into the reason why they were there. Over the five days, this shared understanding ensured a calm, respectful, and relational tone on site.

Christmas From The Heart was also a deeply collaborative effort. Volunteers, corporate partners, donors, churches, schools, local leaders, and community groups all contributed to the life of the event.

- No less than 57 organisations (businesses, community organisations, schools and learning centres, churches, and other volunteers) collected and donated toys.
- Event staff were incredibly grateful for the enormous mahi of volunteers from partners that included: Fonterra, 2 degrees, Barfoot and Thompson Glen Eden, Westpac Treasury, Canon, Westnet Accounting, Office Products Depot, Fair Food, NZ Food Network, Fleetpartners, Strachan Group Architects.
- The event and positive impact could not be possible without our generous supplier partners, Hellers, NML produce, NZ Food Network, Whittakers Chocolate Lovers, Kindness Collective Foundation, House of Fine Foods, Pepsico – Bluebird NZ, Primor and anihana.
- Finally, a word of thanks to our two event sponsors: The Trusts and Foodstuffs North Island! Without them, Visionwest could not make this event happen in the way it did.



The culminating power of this partnership, support, volunteering and collaboration reinforced a simple but powerful message to whānau:

You are not alone, and your community has shown up for you.

Christmas From The Heart works best when everyone – whānau, volunteers, and staff – can stand alongside one another in a shared space, where care becomes something experienced, not just delivered.

Another notable feature was the voting system alongside the exit interview, where each whānau was given eight green voting chips to distribute across eight bins labelled with existing or potential activities or initiatives run by Visionwest. Parents, caregivers, or sometimes even tamariki, could put as many chips as they wanted in any of the bins, thus telling us what areas of service they think are most needed. This year, these results will feed into the upcoming Visionwest Five Year Strategic Plan. The intent behind this is one of embodying our commitment to a relational way of working which prioritises whānau voice and lived experience in the way we design and deliver our services. The ideas and voice of whānau matter most.

And the experience of whānau is really what it was all about. Here are some responses in their own words when asked what difference Christmas From The Heart would make for them.

“

Helped me so much. Being a solo mama of three costs of living is crazy.

A much less stressful Christmas. Thanks for the wonderful food for my family.



Ensure my tamariki don't see the struggles that exist as a mama on maternity leave.

I couldn't even begin to describe the difference coming here today will make to our whānau. I'll just say any tears shed will be happy tears now. Thank you so much.

Before coming to Christmas From The Heart I didn't know whether I would be able to provide a Christmas for my kids.

This gave me and my whānau a little breathing area, especially before Christmas.

Very happy because I couldn't provide for three years after my accident.

It'll enable me to get some clothes and get a swimming pool card.

It's just me and my 6-year-old son in this world; we have no family. Nobody to buy us gifts or take us shopping. Coming here and getting a family environment will give us hope and faith to look forward in life with happiness.

It will help me a lot as I am a single mum of two now; third baby on the way.

Honestly, unexpected love from this place and these humans who have convinced me to volunteer in the near future.

Will make Christmas feel like Christmas!

It will make a big difference to my whānau as I have three Mokos living with me as they lost their mum to cancer and their dad is in prison.

”

Christmas From the Heart

“

Everything, it has been such a tough year, and you have brought the joy back into our hearts.

Being able to do more with whānau instead of using it all on food.

The love and generosity they give to someone who lives with PTSD and is alone.



Awesome. Mum is in wheelchair and this will really help, excellent.

A massive difference. It helps to relieve the financial pressure and allows me to give my mokos a gift.

Your team made this year Christmas so special for us. My kids are so happy, and we will have a heartfelt welcoming the baby Jesus in our lives through good people like you.

Free up some money to allow for gas to attend whānau reunion after Christmas.

Big difference, as unexpected things happen along the way, things out of our control.

After a very stressful few years following the Auckland anniversary flooding - this event restores my faith - people, kindness and love - giving hope. Thank you.

”



Indicators of Impact

Christmas From The Heart is a relational event, but it is also a significant logistical undertaking.

Each year, we track key indicators to help us understand the scale of support provided and to ensure accountability to our partners and supporters.

The following high-level data offers a snapshot of the reach of Christmas From The Heart 2025, including whānau numbers, demographic information, engagement across Visionwest services, as well as food and gift distribution amounts.

While these figures cannot capture the full human impact of the event, they provide important context for understanding how Christmas From The Heart contributes to whānau wellbeing at a practical level.

Statistical comparisons will always be difficult between a 5-day event in West Auckland and year-on-year trends across larger geographical scope. Nonetheless, as the extended reflections in last year's Christmas From The Heart report showed, there are sufficient parallels between the patterns in data, particularly in the areas of ethnicity, source of income and household composition.

Support overview

4,352



TOTAL PEOPLE SUPPORTED

2,352



CHILDREN SUPPORTED AND PROVIDED WITH GIFTS

985



TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES SHOPPED

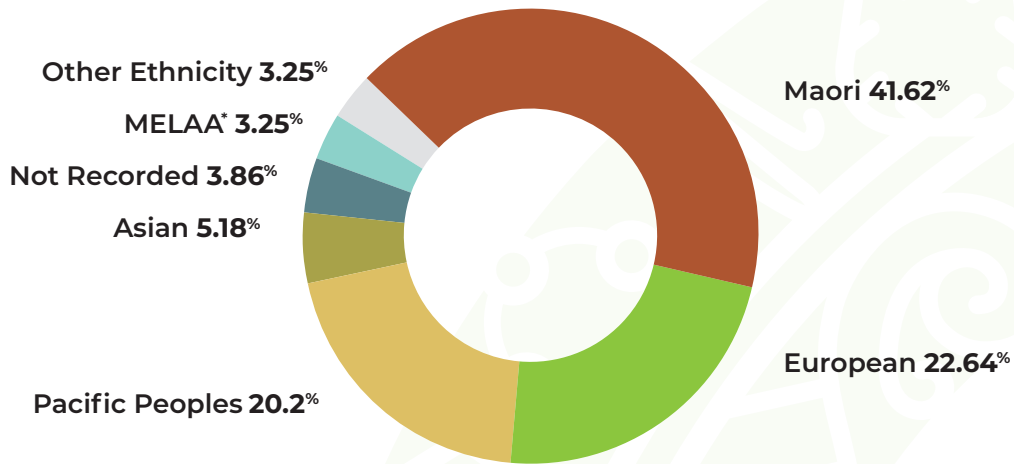
169



TOTAL NUMBER OF SENIORS REACHED

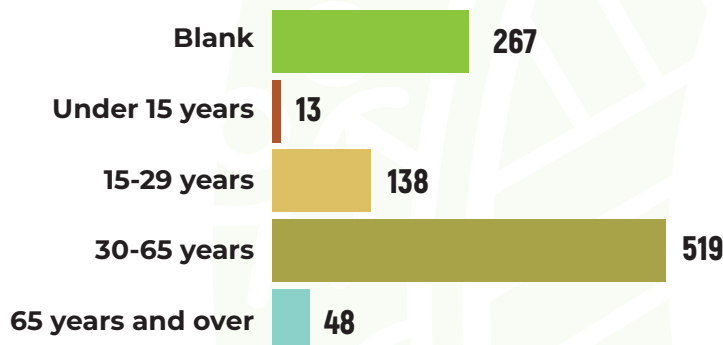
Demographic information

Total Number of People Shopped by Ethnicity

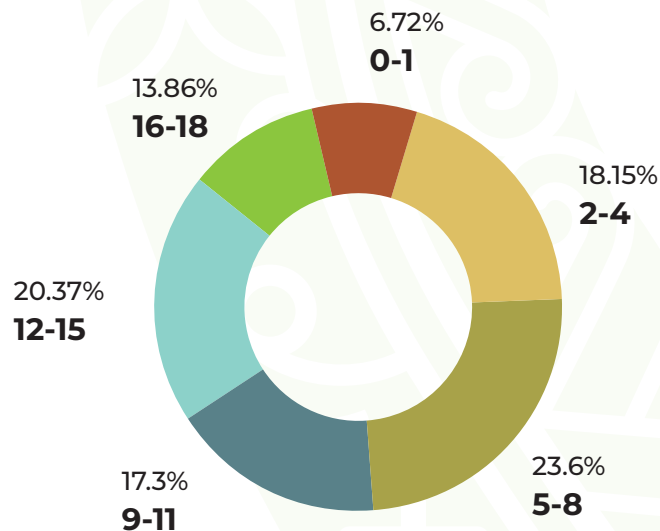


* Middle Eastern, Latin American, African.

Number of people shopped by age group

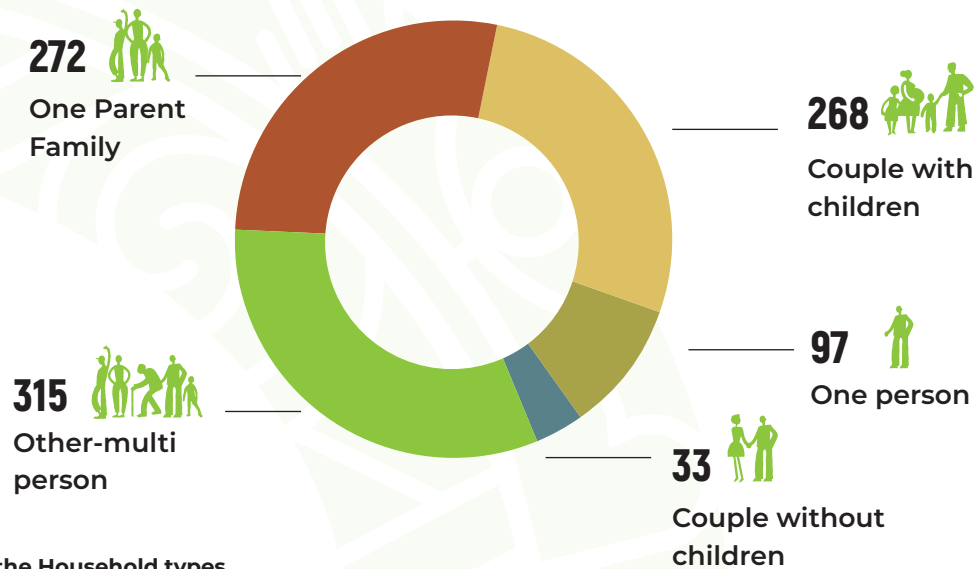


Number of children reached by age



Household Analysis

Total number of household shopped by household type



Notes on the Household types

There are five distinct household categories:

One-person: A household containing a single adult or senior usually living alone

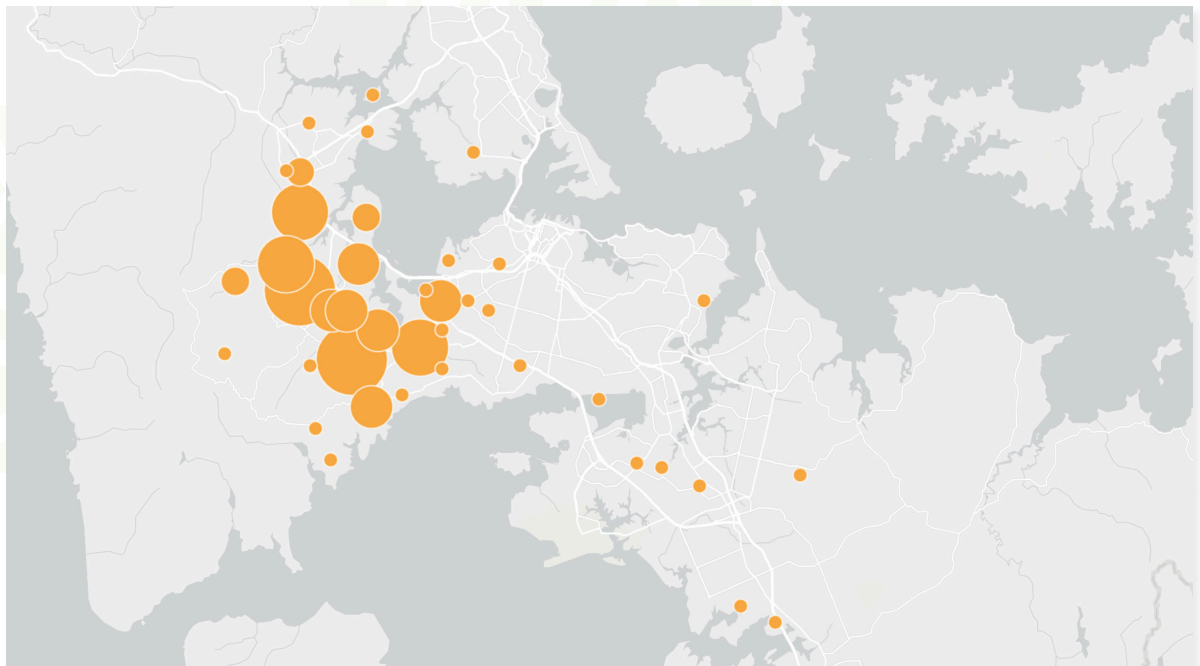
One parent family: A household containing either a single adult or senior, along with children

Couple without children: A household consisting of either two adults or two seniors, with no children

Couple with children: A household containing either two adults or two seniors, with children

Other-multi person: A household containing more than two people, with a possibility of individuals living independently within the same residence.

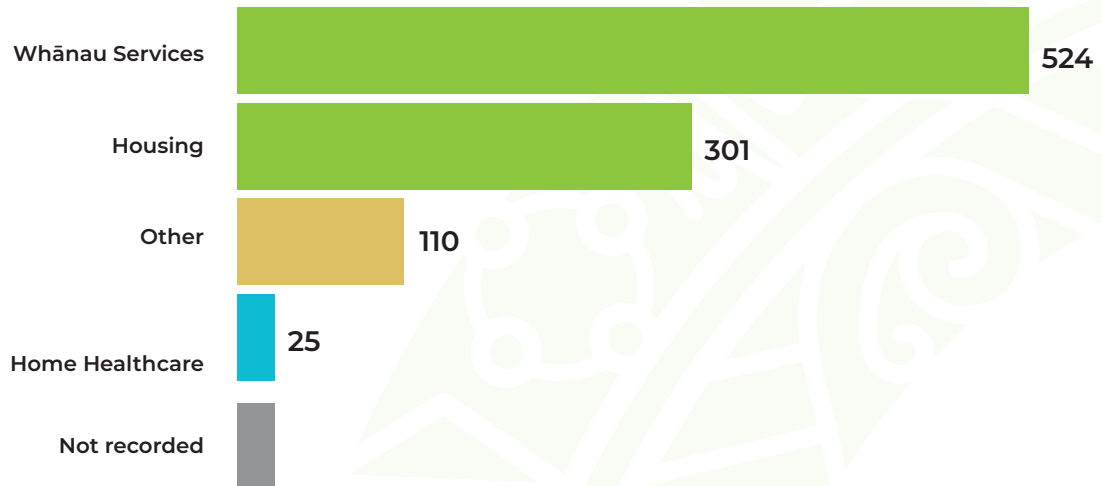
Geographical Analysis



Service Analysis

Number of People Shopped by Service

(This shows the service that whānau already journeying with Visionwest are primarily using).

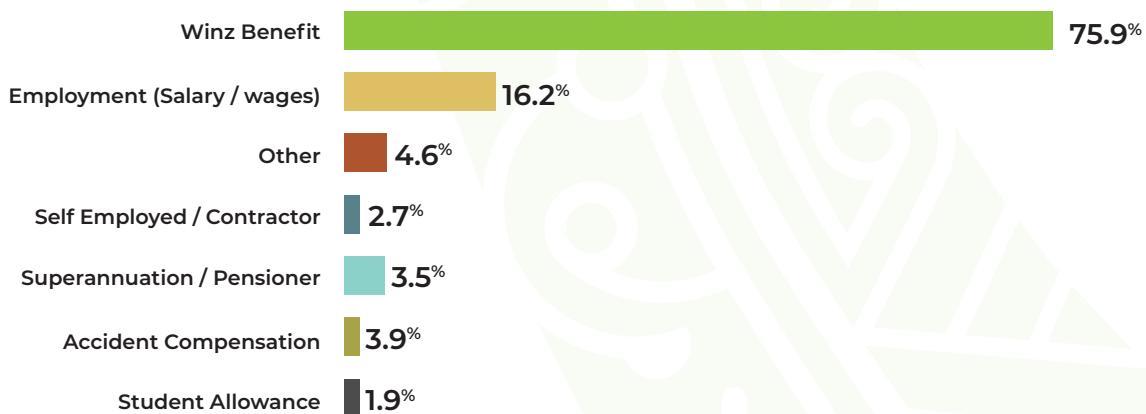


Is your financial situation better, the same, or worse than last year?

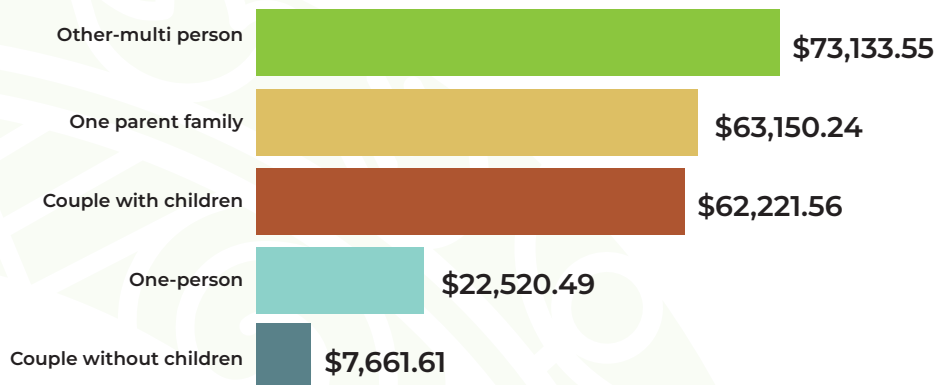


Note: Respondents could choose more than one option.


What is your main sources of income?




Value provided to people shopped.



Amount of Specific Items Supplied to Whānau

 **1,271** CHRISTMAS BOXES CONTAINING ESSENTIAL FOOD ITEMS. INCLUDING 150 GIVEN TO HOME HEALTHCARE CLIENT WHĀNAU; 110 TO WHĀNAU LIVING IN OUR TRANSITIONAL HOUSING UNITS; AND 11 TO ELDERLY WHĀNAU BEING HOUSED.

1,000 PACKAGES EACH OF CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES, JELLY, TINNED PEACHES, TINNED FRUIT SALAD, PAVLOVA, UHT CREAM, MILK POWDER, MARSHMALLOWS, MALTY HOT CHOC, ETA RIPPLES CHIPS, DORITOS, DELISIO CHIPS, MEXICANO CORN CHIPS, ICE CREAM CONES, PANCAKE MIX, MAPLE SYRUP, CHOCOLATE, LOLLIES, FROZEN MIXED VEGGIES, FROZEN PEAS AND CORN, ICE CREAM 

2,000 PACKAGES OF POPCORN **2 tons** OF ONIONS 

1,000kgs OF MINCE  **1 ton** OF MANDARINS 

1,000kgs OF SAUSAGES **450kgs** OF TOMATOES

2,000kgs OF CHICKEN  **450kgs** OF KUMARA

2 tons OF POTATOES  **300kgs** OF GRAPES 

2352 CHILDREN RECEIVED A MAIN GIFT AND STOCKING FILLERS 

Value of full Christmas From The Heart food parcel **\$232.17** 

Christmas Every Day

Feedback from whānau is clear: being supported by Christmas From The Heart can quite literally determine whether they are able to have Christmas at all.

For many families, the event removes an immediate burden and replaces it with relief, practical assistance, dignity, and hope. Yet the realities that bring whānau to the event do not disappear when the decorations come down.

It's not just Christmas meals that whānau struggle to get on the table. Hardship at Christmas time only reveals the underlying problems all year round.

Food security is a complex and lingering problem. Living costs, especially for low-income families, have risen faster than income. In this economic context, adequate or healthy quantities of food on the table become a secondary priority after paying rent or keeping the lights on. Statistically, this means, around "25% of people in Aotearoa New Zealand experience moderate or severe food insecurity as part of their daily lives."

The Impact of Community Food Support (Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective - <https://www.zerohunger.org.nz/the-impact-of-community-food-support>)

For tamariki, the number is "27% of children in food-insecure households"

(<https://www.zerohunger.org.nz/kamakona>)

This means that organisations like Visionwest must show up for whānau all year round. Christmas From The Heart is a moment within a much wider story of support.

Food support alone has been shown to have a multidimensional impact even when not connected to other services such as housing



or counselling. The report by Kore Hiakai – Zero Hunger Collective, The Impact of Community Food Support observes:

“Community food support has significant impact on emotional and mental wellbeing... access to adequate food improves physical health, emotional wellbeing, and overall independence.”

<https://www.zerohunger.org.nz/the-impact-of-community-food-support>

But the challenges faced by whānau are rarely isolated to one factor alone. An unexpected redundancy, the loss of primary earnings, or a sudden illness can quickly ripple outward, affecting one's housing, food security, mental health, and financial stability. These pressures are interconnected, and they require responses that are equally holistic.

Considering the interconnected nature of these needs, it is simply not enough to respond only to a single issue. Progress in one area often strengthens outcomes in others. Research and policy discussions increasingly acknowledge this reality.



The Ministry of Health’s 2025 report Determining Our Future notes:

“although the impact of multiple, negative determinants of health can compound, the positive impact of solutions can too. ...it is critical to look at the likely compounding positive effects across health and wellbeing outcomes.”

<https://www.health.govt.nz/publications/determining-our-future>

Our services span housing, food security, health and wellbeing, financial mentoring, and community connection. We work with the whole person, recognising that flourishing involves mind, body, relationships, and a sense of belonging across generations.

How support is offered matters just as much as what is offered. Advocacy, policy engagement, and efforts toward fairer social arrangements are always vital. But our vision is not limited to changing systems alone, important as that work is, we also hold firmly to the value of recognising each person’s own journey. Transformation is not something done to or for people. It happens in the midst of, and as a result of collaborative relationship. Transformation is not simply about placing

people within idealised systems of support, but instead, by walking alongside one another in partnership, becoming people who can thrive in communities together.

The vision set forth above seeks a middle ground between harmful blame and unhelpful rescuing that ignores individual agency. Lilla Watson, an Aboriginal (Murri) thinker, captures this shift from rescue to partnership in her well-known quote:

“If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Lilla Watson

The deeper hope is that whānau are supported to participate in their own flourishing—to build confidence, capability, and connection, and to collaborate with others in shaping a more just future. That is the heart of the mission of Visionwest: Kia Tūmanakotia – Building Hope Together.

Christmas From The Heart offers a glimpse of that vision made visible. It is a reminder that care, dignity, and belonging must never be merely seasonal. It is a hope everyone deserves to feel at Christmas – and a hope Visionwest seeks to build with whānau every day of the year.





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Read the latest Visionwest impact reports:

[visionwest.org.nz/impact-reports](https://www.visionwest.org.nz/impact-reports)

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