



WEST *Auckland* **TOGETHER**

*How a network of networks collaboratively
mobilised to support West Auckland
communities during COVID-19 alert level 4*

November 2020

THE ASK

West Auckland Together is a collective that was activated during the COVID-19 lockdown to respond to the needs of their local communities. Healthy Families Waitākere, with the support of Auckland Emergency Management, have commissioned a report to capture the perspectives of the West Auckland Together (WAT) collective.

This report aims to record and display how WAT accelerated collective action during the lockdown and may be used as a case for change within communities across Tāmaki Makaurau.

‘There is something about being able to sit around the table, no matter what your experience is, and still feel equal’

THE BACKGROUND

West Auckland Together is the name given to a collective that formed in March 2020, particularly in response to COVID 19 lockdown. West Auckland Together is an iteration of the Community Marketplace.¹

West Auckland has a long history of networks. Previously in Waitākere City Council days, there was a focus on being an eco-city; the Wellbeing Collaboration Project and an emphasis was put on the ‘Waitākere Way’, particularly around partnering, and this approach is still very much the lifeblood of the community in Waitākere.

‘I found myself asking the question - are we recreating? Can we broker a better outcome outside of our own organisation?’

In more recent times, local leaders worked together to establish a collaborative marketplace. This marketplace has seen team members from different organisations, in an open space forum, identify projects where there is commonality and energy, then working together to further these. There are currently five focus groups, with collaborative marketplace members working towards a shared goal across placemaking, youth leadership, kai, social enterprise and community wellbeing.

The goal of the collaborative marketplace is to promote and enable collaboration and innovation amongst community organisations in West Auckland – leading to collective impact and sustainable change for local communities.

When COVID-19 lockdown hit, this group of leaders were well positioned to organise and form a needs based collective, this response is known as ‘West Auckland Together’. The leaders and people from organisations in West Auckland would zoom regularly and share information, using their networks to respond to immediate needs across the whole of West Auckland. They moved away from their standard business as usual tasks, instead using their united resources to respond to the needs of West Auckland. For instance, Vision West runs a foodbank and many staff from other organisations helped deliver that food across Auckland. This collaborative environment saw initiatives extend organically - when other organisations were contacted to see if they could help distribute food, they immediately went to Vision West. The possibility of a competitive environment gave way to a collaboration.

1. See terms of reference: https://drive.google.com/file/d/16ccrzmHgDaNQrIE6JufsFga_pKc08CRc/view?usp=sharing

THE PROCESS

Post lockdown, Cissy Rock from Community Think was commissioned to capture the collectives' process during this time. Holding twelve in depth interviews with the leaders of organisations: The Western Initiative, Sport Waitākere, Healthy Families Waitākere, Eco-Matters, MPHS, WEST, Vision West, Massey Matters, Community Waitākere and the Local Board Services of Auckland Council. Additionally, she ran a focus group session with the teams from these organisations and sent out a survey to organisations that contributed during the COVID-19 lockdown: Neighbourhood Support Waitakere, the Community Empowerment unit of Auckland Council and Family Action.

'It is important to create the space, the time, to lift your head up and talk to each other - this is something you have to get intentional about. Before COVID, sometimes people didn't feel like going to meetings but they know that it is important to stay engaged'

Main themes identified



Trusted relationships



Leadership



Funding



Time



Convening function



Communication




Permission

Almost everyone interviewed identified established, **'trusted relationships'**, as key to be able to move quickly and respond. When people are known to one another and have pre-existing working relationships, they understand how to work collaboratively and who best to work with for each task. Because there is a high degree of trust they are able to take risks and work in innovative ways. Many of these trusted relationships stem back to Waitakere City Council days when there was an investment in working collaboratively; the mechanisms in the region weren't setting people up to work in competition, rather they were encouraged to work cooperatively and collaboratively. These strong trusted relationships form the heart of a group of people being able to work swiftly together. However, these trusted relationships also could form a barrier for other people to come in and find their place in this relationship group. To use the analogy of being the new kid at school - it can be hard to find a way in. This requires the core groups to be intentional - seeing the relationships around them, how they work and seeing who else they need to have relationships with and how to make space for them.



'It was amazing, we would have a Zoom and update each other on the state of play - then people would take that information and activate their own relationships - like some people had direct access to Ministers'


 Strong **leadership** with a vision: being very clear is essential here. The leadership allows for there to be drive, momentum, and provides security knowing there is someone captaining and creating a shared vision. While the role of leadership was acknowledged there were also reflections around who was at the table. How do we enable everyone who needs to be at the table to be there? Sometimes an invitation is not enough.


There needs to be an opportunity for people to make decisions, influence and change the direction. Strong leadership also needs to know how to stand aside and allow other leaders with different views or differing priorities, to be part of the mix. We need to be thinking about the people we are serving being in positions to shape and lead; this is where leadership sits.

For any group there needs to be a clear **convening function** of the administration and organisation, gathering people, organising meetings, sharing minutes and keeping things moving. There is something about this function being overt that aids the group in coming together. To know who, how and when - the administrative organisation assists a group of people being able to focus on the business rather than the details.

‘People put aside their own agendas’

There needs to be **permission** at all levels to be able to be able to participate. The people sitting around the table and the leaders need to give permission in order for their staff/team to work with high trust; to be able to identify where, when and how to respond. This permission also needs to come with resources eg; **time**, capacity, and the understanding that business as usual will stop.

 Strong **communication**, clear and consistent internal and external messaging. The hub² is an example of success with external messaging, this group of people could create messages for the whole of West Auckland that were consistent and easily accessed. In terms of internal communication, it was felt that it needed to be more joined up. This would see the leaders sitting around the table to communicate a shared picture of what was happening to their staff/team. The strength of two-way communication.

 For many having **funding** to do this work, and working collectively to obtain funding was very important. For others, funding was seen as getting in the way; it was a distraction. They believed the work could be done within the scope of business as usual, it was about prioritising your time (and this leads into

 **permission**)

However, funding of a convening role would relieve the pressure put on any one partner. Seeking collective funding was identified as a strategy using a collaborative process to meet West Auckland outcomes via social procurement and participatory budgeting processes with WAT as the umbrella.

‘What worked well was there were no expectations, you could dip in and out’

‘Sometimes I thought it wasn’t the best use of my time but it is really important because you have an obligation to belong to something bigger than yourself.’

THE EXPERIENCES

Influence

People used their spheres of influence to maximise the influence of networks, for instance - on a zoom there would be discussion that a zoom attendee could use to directly inform a minister of parliament and influence needed outcomes.



Social Capital

Many people found themselves using their own social capital to build trust and engagement in collaborative processes. This does mean that people put their own relationship and reputations on the line for the sake of the kaupapa, and this isn't necessarily overt or acknowledged.



Informality

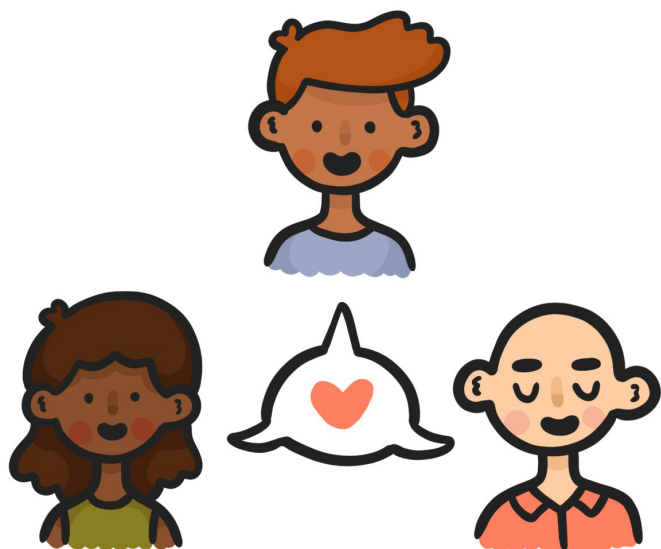
The strength in being informal enough that people can dip in and out, the freedom from expectation allowed people to more easily participate.

Shared vision

People put aside their own agendas and responded to the bigger call of the wider community; it felt like the future was in their hands.

Relationships

It was the power of relationship that meant people found the energy to keep going; feeling as if you are part of something bigger than yourself.



Meeting regularly

Looking back people can still feel the effect of Waitākere City Council - the culture of spending time together. People felt that meeting regularly assisted with not just forming, but strengthening relations - and meeting as part of the rhythm of community life.

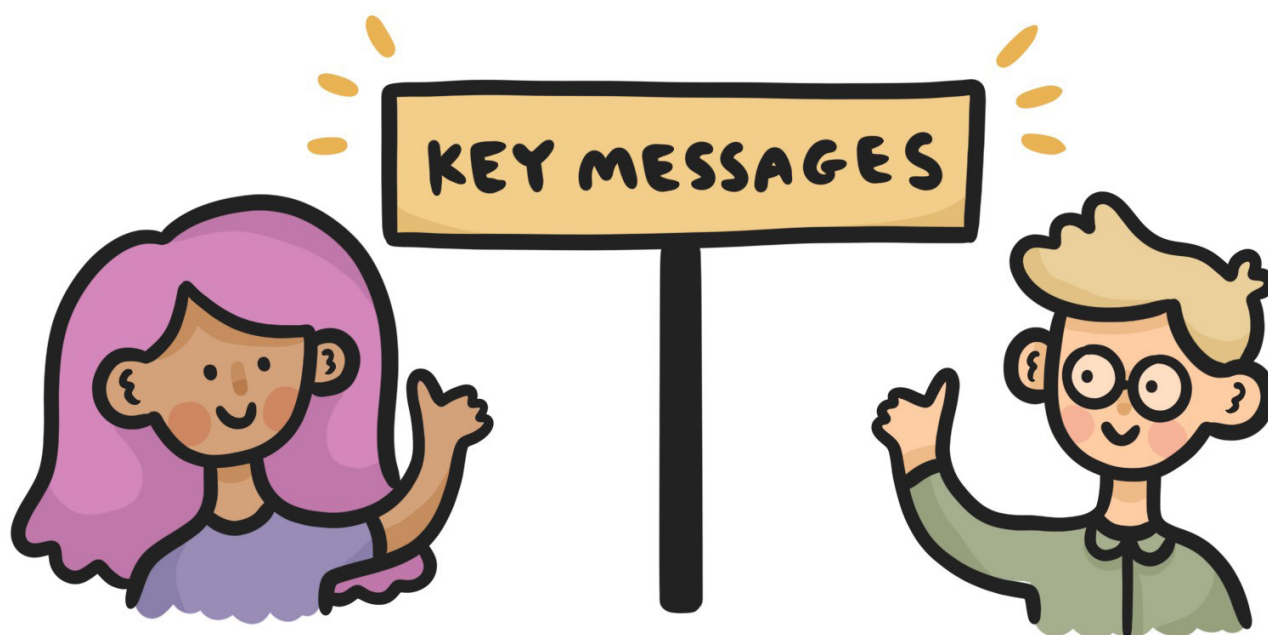
Communication

The key for people was the joined up communication - hearing the same thing from many different places added to a sense of security.



Not everyone at the table

The ease that those established relationships came together was also a barrier at times. Some found it hard to fit in, and others felt there wasn't the right mix at the table. The depth of the relationships were a plus but it also blinded the group to who was missing and how to get clear around what to do about that.



Putting it all together?

This document identifies the critical conditions needed for collaboration. These will look different in every community. A starting point is to map out using the 'Reflection Questions'- how do these look in your community? Get a group of keen people together, read the 'Ponder' section together. I used the word ponder as it captures the essence of taking care and time when making a decision. Being clear about why you are collaborating and how you want to work is key - this is values based work. The reflective questions are prompts and may lead to other questions. We recommend listing as many questions as you can think of, and sit in your 'inquiry' before you seek a solution or way forward.

To **Ponder...**

- Be clear about where and why you have a collaboration; if it is a springboard from an existing collaboration make that clear. Ensure the people on the ground in organisations and the CEO's are connected - this means having a clear mandate and reciprocal relationships.
- Māori and Pasifika engagement needs to be authentic - this means involvement from the get go and with organisations and not just counting team members who happen to be Māori and Pasifika from Pākehā organisations.
- Be clear about who is in your community and how their experience shapes their approaches and what being engaged means for them.
- How to explain the benefits of collaboration in ways that are relevant for Local Boards?
- Getting clear about whether funding is a driver for this project.
- In times of crisis we can respond quickly and meaningfully - how do we keep this practice alive when it is business as usual?

Reflective Questions



Trusted relationships

- How to welcome and include all people?
- Making overt the unwritten rules?
- Are there other groupings of trusted relationships in the local community?



Convening function

- Where does this best sit?
- Can this be funded?



Communication

- Is our communication reaching leaders and people on the ground?
- Are we using multiple channels of communication?



Leadership

- Are the communities we are serving around the decision-making table?
- What worldview structures are we upholding?



Time

- Relationship building takes time, over time
- Creating something new often means stopping something current



Permission

- Is it clear to people on the ground what is expected of them?
- Are people working in high trust and being backed?



Funding

- Are we doing the work we need to be doing or the work that will get funded?
- Are we being strategic with our funding?

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HEALTHY FAMILIES WAITĀKERE
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