



Neighbourhood Support New Zealand / Te Kōpuni Kāinga o Aotearoa

# COVID-19 Response Report

30 June 2020

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to outline how Neighbourhood Support responded to the COVID-19 emergency between March and June 2020, to share what we learned and to help us plan for the recovery phase. The information is based on anecdotal feedback from our member organisations and two surveys carried out over May.

Neighbourhood Support organisations throughout New Zealand began to experience increased demand in late February, as people began to realise the impacts of self-isolation and the importance of knowing and supporting our neighbours. This demand multiplied as soon as the Alert levels were announced and it became clear that the country would be going into Alert Level 4.

## About Neighbourhood Support New Zealand

Neighbourhood Support New Zealand is a national body made up of 67 independent member organisations that coordinate Neighbourhood Support networks in their communities. Our goal is to create safe, resilient and connected communities by encouraging neighbours to reach out to one another, look out for one another and help each other out when needed.

- Nationally there are more than 18,000 neighbourhood groups.
- Most of our 67 member organisations employ at least one paid staff member, and at the moment there are 83 paid coordinators.
- They are supported by 9329 active volunteers.

The majority of our member organisations are charitable organisations. Most are either Incorporated Societies or Charitable Trusts but a small number have no legal entity and are informal community groups. They are all run by and for their communities. 12% of our member organisations are District or City Councils who run Neighbourhood Support from within Council.

Neighbourhood Support NZ has an Outcome Agreement and a national Memorandum of Understanding with NZ Police but most of our member organisations have no funding contracts with any central government agency. They are funded by grants from local government and philanthropic organisations.

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## Increased Demand

Neighbourhood Support came into its own during the COVID-19 response. Enquiries to National Office increased by 138% during this time, and many of these enquiries were forwarded on to our member organisations to follow up with locally. As well as dealing with this increased demand almost half (47%) of our member organisations were actively involved in their local Civil Defence Emergency Management response.

In a survey carried out in the week of 13 May members told us that their main activities during Alert Levels 4 and 3 were:

<b>98%</b>	Keeping people informed through newsletters, social media etc
<b>65%</b>	Undertaking welfare checks (e.g. phoning people on database lists)
<b>42%</b>	Coordinating volunteers to support people in the community
<b>40%</b>	Undertaking activities in the community (e.g. food distribution, shopping assistance)

The majority of our members said that they worked collaboratively with other organisations to support their communities during the response. The most significant partner was NZ Police, with 77% of members saying they had worked with their local Police. Other partners included local Councils, iwi and health care providers, local foodbanks and supermarkets.

## Support for Our Members

Our NSNZ National Office team of three staff worked from home during lockdown and had to quickly adapt and reprioritise our work programme so that we could be a conduit of information and support for our members. This included regular emails, social media updates and Zoom meetings with our Board, District Reps and Coordinators.

We were invited to participate in weekly meetings with the NEMA Welfare Pillar Network of Networks where we were able to share what we were learning from our communities with representatives from government agencies.



*Local Police out and about helping Mangere Connect NS deliver their care packs to local whanau.*

## Local initiatives

NSNZ members undertook a range of local initiatives, including:

### 1. Community safety initiatives

- Beach and rural communities monitoring breaches of lockdown rules, including during Easter/ANZAC Day.

### 2. Supporting people who needed assistance

- Shopping, food and household supplies
- Identifying welfare needs of stranded tourists

### 3. Communications and information

- Increased newsletters and communications
- Using Gets Ready to pass on information from Civil Defence and to trace vulnerable people living on their own.

### 4. Successful collaborations with the local community

## Information Resources

When the Alert Levels were announced, and it became clear that the country would be moving into lockdown, we began to experience an increase in interest about setting up Neighbourhood Support groups. To meet this demand and to support our Members we created a set of flyers, posters and social media posts.

The focus for these was to promote getting to know your neighbours and to provide accurate information about the Alert Levels and COVID-19. The resources had a positive and reassuring tone and used graphics so that they were easily understood and accessible. They were widely shared on social media by our Members and other community organisations and agencies.

The resources included:

- Know Your Neighbours
- Neighbourhood Plan Template
- Reach Out, Look Out, Help Out
- How's Everyone Doing?
- Posters to explain changes in Alert Levels.

We also created a COVID-19 pop up landing page on the website so that visitors could quickly find the information that they needed.

**Happy Easter Aotearoa!**  
Stay safe by staying at home.

**Keep physically distancing safely**  
2 metres is a recommended minimum. This is the equivalent of about 4 brown kiwis or 18 pieces of Mānuka toast put end-to-end.

**Only travel for essential purposes**  
Your bach will still be there for the next long weekend. Help keep our roads safe and free-up checkouts by staying home.

**Have fun! Find creative ways to still celebrate**  
Easter isn't cancelled just because we're at home. Hide treats for family to find, do the #Egggiant, decorate, bake or dress up!

**Check-in on neighbours, family and friends**  
Anyone who usually spends Easter at church or with family may be feeling especially lonely. Give them a call or text.

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**Our Neighbourhood Plan**  
REACH OUT | LOOK OUT | HELP OUT

Use this template to put together a plan with the neighbours who live around you. Things to consider:

**Who's in isolation nearby?**  
(i.e. those 70+ years old or those with health conditions)

**Who doesn't have internet or a mobile phone?**

**What is the best way to keep in touch?**  
(i.e. letterbox drops, email, text, Facebook, Whatsapp)

**Does anyone need help?**

Name	Lives at:	Needs help with?	Who can help?

**Register Your Group with Neighbourhood Support!**  
We can keep you up to date with advice, resources and support.

**How's Everyone Doing?**  
REACH OUT | LOOK OUT | HELP OUT

**Reach out, check-in and offer your support**  
Sometimes it's easier to ask help when someone offers their support first. Help out the bakers by asking if they're OK.

**Look out for signs of activity**  
A lack of activity could be a sign that a neighbour needs assistance. Pay attention to courtyards, lights, noise and rubbish collection.

**It's OK to not be OK, just don't go at it alone**  
Need to talk during the lockdown? Call or text 1737 anytime or anywhere to speak with a trained counsellor for FREE.

**Domestic abuse and family harm is never OK**  
During stressful situations, family harm incidents tend to rise. We can help change that! Report abuse and seek help if needed.

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## Good Neighbour Awards

During Alert Level 4 we introduced weekly Good Neighbour Awards to recognise the people who were going above and beyond to support others. The awards were run on social media and we received 165 nominations over 4 weeks. The winners were announced in the media and on Facebook.



*Brooke and Kauri Thompson, from Hamilton, who were the winners of the week two Good Neighbours Award.*

## Foodstuffs Partnership

We were very grateful to Foodstuffs who contacted us after we had run the Good Neighbour Awards to offer us \$20,000 worth of New World and PAK'nSAVE vouchers to distribute to people in need in our communities. They were distributed through our members, many of whom partnered with other community organisations, such as iwi, migrant centres and Women's Refuges, to ensure that the vouchers were going where they were needed most.



## Be Collective Partnership

42% of our Member Organisations were coordinating volunteers as part of the COVID-19 response and experienced an increase in people offering to volunteer. We partnered with Be Collective to set up those members who wanted to join their volunteer management platform. This will have ongoing benefits as we look to progress our Youth Engagement Strategy.

Cambridge Neighbourhood Support was contacted by a group of young people from their local high school who wanted to volunteer and support their community. They are using the Be Collective platform to manage volunteer opportunities. This gives the young people the opportunity to build a social resume as they undertake volunteer activities.

## Highlights from our Members

### The value of partnerships

Our member organisations worked closely with a range of agencies and other community organisations during the COVID-19 response.

- **Napier NS** were contacted by Napier City Council when they were unable to contact some older citizens during routine welfare checks on those over 70. They asked Napier NS to see if there was a group or contact that may know or have sighted the people in question. Napier NS conducted over 200 phone calls and were able to confirm the welfare for two thirds of the people on the list.

The City Council partnership has kicked off another initiative to help prepare the community for a natural disaster. It is estimated that approx. 15,000 people will ascend Napier Hill if an earthquake or tsunami was to occur. The Hill Host Meeting brings NS Street Contacts who live on the Napier Hill together to discuss and plan for natural disaster emergencies. The aim is to prepare the Hill community, increase communication and build resilience. This is an ongoing initiative.

- **Nelson NS** were invited by Nelson City Council to work with Volunteer Nelson to develop a coordinated approach between Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and community organisations working with vulnerable clients. Their role included:
  - Being the conduit for EOC messages out to the sector;
  - Sharing information with EOC, such as establishing what community organisations' (who work with vulnerable people) operational needs were & passing these on to EOC;
  - Matching up organisations who needed assistance with volunteers from other organisations who had the capacity to help.



*Bertha is one of the people who were supported by **Mangere Connect** and local Police with a donated phone during lockdown. The initiative was kicked off by Constable Katie Perkins, who asked Mangere Connect to assist her in finding unwanted phones for people who were unable to stay in contact with whanau and services. Mangere Connect sent out the call and the community responded, donating phones which were collected, wiped and fitted with a Vodafone SIM card. Phones were distributed to people in the community who needed them including homeless people and people at risk of family harm.*

*Bertha, a grandmother of four, had her phone stolen prior to Alert Level 4 and was unable to stay in touch with her family. The team also arranged for a food parcel to be delivered to her as well.*

- **Otago NS** worked with a local supermarket and the Saddle Hill Foundation Trust to get groceries delivered to over 70s in Mosgiel/Taieri who did not have any one to help them. They set up payment systems, two delivery vans, and organized training for volunteers, who had previously been Police Vetted, to handle the EFTPos transactions.
- **Otara NS** (run by the Otara Health Charitable Trust) worked with Auckland Emergency Management, Auckland Council and MSD to activate an emergency food bank as a response to the COVID lockdown. As a result they have provided well over 2000 parcels of food to close to 5000 family members predominantly in Otara/Papatoetoe/South Auckland.

At every opportunity they found ways to keep neighbours safe in the knowledge that they were not alone and that there was help available. Their method was to support the need first, then do a welfare check 48 hours later and offer wrap around support where the family indicated they might need it. Now during level 1 the food bank still continues to operate and they are now seeing a new trend where households are contacting neighbours who are struggling and referring them to the foodbank.

### Government Assistance

Only 6% of our member organisations applied for the Government Wage Subsidy and 11% applied for the MSD COVID-19 Community Awareness and Preparedness Grant.

Most Neighbourhood Support organisations continued to work during lockdown and were dealing with increased demand. The MSD Grant criteria excluded applying for assistance with wages and the biggest need for our members was the need to increase the hours of part-time staff.



*A Neighbourhood Support group checks in with one another, while observing distancing rules, during Lockdown Level 3.*



## What we learned....

### Good data is essential

Neighbourhood Support databases were community assets in terms of the COVID response. We were able to identify vulnerable people, undertake welfare checks, and circulate information to households and streets. Those of our member organisations who use the Gets Ready database, which was developed following the Christchurch earthquakes, found that they were quickly able to organize themselves, provide support to government agencies and maintain good communication with Neighbourhood Support households.

We would like to see all our members using this database. This would increase their effectiveness in an emergency and enable our partners, such as NZ Police, FENZ and Civil Defence, to utilize our networks in communities. Cost is a significant barrier for many of our members and we require funding assistance to achieve this. The investment is approximately \$150,000 per year.

### Partnerships with CDEM need to be maintained

Approximately half of our member organisations were actively involved with their local CDEM response. This included being part of Welfare teams, coordinating volunteers and organizing local activities. This experience was not consistent. In some areas local authorities, government agencies and community groups coordinated well and in other areas our members expressed a high level of frustration. Frustrations largely stemmed from poor communication and feedback loops, duplication of effort due to CDEM being unaware of community activities and a lack of recognition that there is a cost for community organisations who assist in emergency responses.

Where the response worked well there were functioning existing community networks in place, and a good understanding between local authorities, government agencies and community organisations about each other's purpose and roles.

### The costs of supporting emergency responses are hidden

Increased demand and assisting with local CDEM responses meant that a number of our Neighbourhood Support Coordinators were working extra hours during Alert Levels 3 and 4. In most cases there was no extra funding available to cover increased wage bills. The nature of funding for community organisations means that income does not come in evenly throughout the year and it was difficult for most to meet the criteria for the Wage Subsidy.

The majority of our member organisations rely on operational funding from local government and philanthropic funders, and indications are that funding levels from both will be reduced due to the impacts of COVID-19. A recent survey of our members found that 50% are not confident that they will be able to generate enough income to fund their operations this year. This comes at a time when demand is high and the need for community connectedness is critically important. We are concerned that without a support package for community organisations they will not have the capacity to respond in the same way should we need to go into lockdown again.

