

## the act of eating together

- **The Canterbury Community Feast** – bringing people together with kai to support community connection, celebration and conversation.
- **The Bowling Club, Ōtepoti** – combining business and community food to create a model where they are a sustainable business, providing accessible, nourishing meals to all people in community.
- **Everybody Eats** – on a mission to reduce food waste, food poverty and social isolation.



### Background

Eating together, whether it be with our whānau each week or at a community event, is part of who we are. It is a way we can celebrate, express love and connect. *Many cultures consider this a sacred act that involves us physically, relationally and emotionally.* The whole process of eating together from growing and gathering, making and baking, to eating and feasting is full of richness with the opportunity to learn while being with one other.

The ability to share kai with others is an integral part of being food secure. Being food secure includes having enough kai to provide a meal for your loved ones and be able to manaaki others coming into your home.

It is an important part of how we form new relationships. It's not just about having enough kai for sustenance but enough to share a meal, with your whānau (born, whāngai or chosen), celebrate, or to show aroha.

Social isolation is a concern in Aotearoa and is more common in older populations<sup>1</sup>. Social isolation negatively impacts our health and wellbeing and can increase the risk of poor health, such as cardiovascular disease and poor immunity. Eating with

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/s/social-isolation/>

others offers a practical way to connect and research shows that people who eat with others are more likely to feel better about themselves and have a wider social network capable of providing social and emotional support<sup>2</sup>, especially during times of hardship.

The [Ka Ora Ka Ako](#) school lunch program in Aotearoa aims to reduce food insecurity by providing access to a nutritious lunch at school everyday. Alongside providing good kai to our tamariki and young people, this is also a time for the students to sit and share the same kai together. A recent evaluation of the program described how this aspect of the meals had positive social impacts through helping students to form new friendships and improving equity.

“In terms of Māoritanga, food is what we do and how we come together. It has been a huge help for kids to participate in those scenarios. They are able to just mingle, not judging each other. It teaches manaakitanga<sup>3</sup>.”

Community feasting can create space for people of different generations, cultures and backgrounds to connect. Community meals are more than just feeding people who would otherwise go hungry, although that can be a helpful reason to begin them. By creating a space where all feel welcome, there is the opportunity to feed people nourishing food whilst also creating space for people of different backgrounds to connect and build empathy to create a more connected and resilient community.

***In this resource, using an interview style, we explore ‘eating together as a community’ as a form of food security. A number of organisations across Aotearoa are working to revitalise the act of bringing people together to enjoy kai and the people before them.***

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<sup>2</sup> Dunbar, R.I.M. Breaking Bread: the Functions of Social Eating. *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology* 3, 198–211 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40750-017-0061-4>

<sup>3</sup> Vermillion Peirce, P., Jarvis-Child B., Chu, L., Lennox, K., Kimber, N., Wang, N., Nguyen Chau, T. And Winthrop, P. (2022). *Ka Ora, Ka Ako New Zealand Healthy School Lunches Programme Impact Evaluation*. Ministry of Education.

## **the canterbury community feast**

The University of Canterbury (UC) celebrated their 150th Anniversary with a number of events including The Community Feast. This feast was run by the UC Sustainability Centre with the intention of bringing people together with kai to support community connection and celebration, and to contribute to kōrero and the extensive mahi done within their rohe to build food resilience and security.

## **the event**

### **What led you to hosting this event?**

The Sustainability Centre wanted to celebrate the anniversary in a way that folded in the United Nations SDG's as a framing that would make a positive difference. They had the idea to host a feast and other groups were very supportive.

### **Leading up to the event**

UC invited stakeholders to partake in a series of hui leading up to the event. This was partly to cover off logistical issues and act as a continual sense-check, as well as helping to build a strong community of interest around the project. "It started to turn into more of a Practitioners discussion, which was awesome."

### **The event**

Kai was hāngi, with seasonal salads and a dessert. The hāngi was put on by Mana Whenua. The salads were prepared by local chefs – all organic ingredients with some contributions from a community farm, the Community Gardens Association and the Food Resilience Network. The hāngi pit was conveniently over the road from the venue where kai was served.

Hosted at a large events centre with a shared dining experience and tables seating around 10 people each, kai was plated in the kitchen and delivered to tables by a team of volunteers. Each received a plate of hāngi meats, hāngi vegetables and two seasonal salads.

There were two eating spaces – one in the main hall and another in a smaller room. This was to accommodate more diners and to be inclusive of those with preferences for a smaller dining space.

## **insights and learnings**

### **What values were central to this community feast?**

The most important values for this event were *inclusiveness, collectiveness, accessibility, collaboration,* and *sustainability*. UC aimed to create an event that was accessible to those most impacted by structural inequalities, as well as in alignment with the sustainable development goals: #1. No Poverty; #2. Zero Hunger; #3. Good Health and Wellbeing; and #17. Partnerships for the Goals.

### **How have you purposefully created space for your values to be present at this feast?**

Weaving inclusion and collectiveness was intentional throughout the planning and hosting of the event. UC wanted this event to be helpful for those working in the kai space so from the planning onset developed an initial stakeholder list and invited insight from key players (including those working with at-risk populations) to co-design the event. The idea was to welcome all within the community, offering connection and sustenance through kai.

“They wanted all people to feel welcome and involved in some way with some of our community experiencing homelessness in Ōtautahi. We wanted them to be familiar with the event and have an understanding prior to the night. Around 60 people from this community attended, which was quite mindblowing. Not only that, but they got actively involved in clean up - that was incredible I thought.”

The kai also reflected these values. UC thoughtfully planned what kai they would offer and how it would be sourced and prepared to ensure the menu was culturally appropriate and modeled sustainable practices. This included certified organic food and foods grown locally at an urban farm.

### **What were your biggest learnings from the feast?**

“Its human nature to want to feel connected and to share kai together. Within the community there are many different groups and initiatives doing incredible work but we found they were all eager to be more connected. This event created space for connection without adding extra work to their already loaded plate. I think it helped that the event was fully funded.”

### **What insights would you like to share with people looking to do something similar?**

Attendees at the event noted how the energy in the room completely shifted once the kai was served. There was an almost nervous energy as people were wondering what this feast would be like, but once the kai was served you could see everyone relax and begin to enjoy the kai, conversations and getting to know those around them.

“A long lead in time is helpful to build trust and momentum through the networks of different stakeholders. As the lead organisation don’t try to control the narrative too much but try to genuinely co-create it. Hopefully we managed to do that!”

### **What do you wish and wonder about the Canterbury Community Feast?**

“My main hope is that this event spurred on some useful discussions that will ultimately help build food resilience in our region. Change is very iterative and takes a long time and I think events like this can help with that. Looking forward to seeing what comes next.”



## **the bowling club, ōtepoti**

The Bowling Club located in Ōtepoti – Dunedin is a ‘bring your own bowl’ restaurant. Jackie and Liam, who started their business in 2022, are constantly learning and evolving. The Bowling Club combines business and community food to create a model where they are a sustainable business providing accessible, nourishing meals to all people in the community.

### **What led you to opening The Bowling Club?**

After returning to Aotearoa from overseas travel, both Jackie and Liam wanted to create a life that was fulfilling, and to create opportunities to live the life they valued. During their time in The United States of America they had been involved with a welfare initiative that provided meals and were curious whether they could create a business that had community as its heart, making food more accessible here in Aotearoa.

Today, people's lives have many demands and costs; Jackie and Liam wanted to help enrich lives through food, challenging the current idea about what a business should be and create a living that was good for the whole community including their own livelihoods. They set out to understand – *can you run a sustainable business that provides accessible food?*

“We wanted to provide good healthy food at an affordable price, bringing people together by fostering community connectedness and community spirit – providing a space for people to feel like they belong. We also wanted to highlight that the current food system doesn’t serve all people and to demonstrate an alternative business model.”

### **How does the model work?**

The Bowling Club started out as a foodtruck selling \$4 meals, two days a week, selling between 600-800 meals each day. After four and a half months operating successfully from the truck, they opened a community eatery in a building, open 3 days a week. They sell \$4 meals and \$3 desserts.

People are invited to bring their own bowl to get their meal. The bring-your-own-bowl concept made it easier to operate in the food truck and was also a sustainable option that they continued in the new premises. For those that don't bring a container there are bowls available although patrons are required to wash after use.

Free food vouchers are also available. Having vouchers gives people something tangible that helps them feel comfortable with receiving free food. The free meals are paid for by the 'pay it forward' jar. Over time there is a natural balance of people paying it forward and those receiving free meals.

Jackie and Liam work as a team with Liam predominantly in the kitchen and Jackie as a general manager also overseeing human resourcing. The Bowling Club has one full-time kaimahi making desserts, one doing kitchen prep and a couple serving kai. All staff are paid the living wage. It is important for them to stay an independent business paying fair wages without reliance on charity and volunteers.

All meals are vegetarian and packed full of veggies, and they also use minimal dairy or eggs which helps to keep costs low. They try to purchase from local growers as much as they can but to reduce costs at times they also source further away. Other food distributors such as [Kaans Catering](#) and [T&G](#) generously donate food. In an ideal model all produce would be localised but the current economy makes purchasing affordable local food difficult.

"We liken ourselves to public transport but instead it's public eating. It's a sustainable model that all people can access."

### **What values are embedded within the business and how are those lived out?**

**Togetherness** – bringing people together, fostering community spirit and creating a sense of true hospitality that feels safe and welcoming for all.

**Accessibility** – many food outlets don't feel accessible to all people because of the aesthetic and food prices, therefore strive to provide affordable, healthy food in an environment where all people feel welcome.

**Generosity and abundance** – the model creates space for generosity and abundance, not just with food but through making others feel valued.

It's the simple things that make The Bowling Club a welcoming space for all. They have an eclectic space with artwork contributions from local artists including school tamariki. They have articulated a tone of voice across communication channels. The menu is made up of foods that people want to eat and are described so people can easily recognise kai selections.

### What are your biggest learnings since opening The Bowling Club?

To remain open. "There are a lot of surprises along the way. Sometimes we have made assumptions such as who will participate and which foods people will like but are often surprised. This has taught us to remain open to different outcomes and to be okay with that. It's easy to become distracted by the grand things but through changing my perspective and valuing the smaller day to day things it's made life great. At the start this was a fun adventure for us but alongside passion it has required a lot of energy and at times has been very difficult. I have learnt to do things because I see the value in it – rather than for the image, and that has helped keep us focused."

### What insights would you like to share with others looking to do something similar?

"If you care about something give it a go. Keep it simple and don't be scared to try new ways of doing things. Being present with others will make you both feel good."

### What do you like, wish and wonder about The Bowling Club?

"I like that it's worked so far! I was unsure at first and we didn't know if we would reach our 300 people but we made it. I like the spirit of it – when you're sharing food with others it makes you feel spirited and alive. I wonder how and whether this business will grow into something more, for ourselves or others? I wish it didn't take up as much time in my life as it currently does, at times it has been tough with lots of challenges starting up. I wish that it would inspire and challenge others to think differently so that this idea could take hold and we could see places like this on every street."





## everybody eats

Everybody Eats operate restaurants in Auckland and Wellington serving 3-course meals for all to enjoy, crafted mostly from rescued foods with only some purchasing when necessary.

### What led to the development of Everybody Eats

Everybody Eats was founded by Nic Loosley in 2017. After studying abroad and working with organisations to reduce food waste and connect people through food, Nic returned home and shaped his own model to fit the landscape of Aotearoa.

Everybody Eats started as a pop-up every Monday out of a restaurant on Karangahape Road in Auckland. This was a huge success with well known chefs coming to help, feeding around 250-300 people each night. It wasn't long before they needed a new site to operate from, moving to Onehunga, then branching into the Capital Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

### The model

Everybody Eats has a mission to reduce food waste, food poverty and social isolation, serving restaurant quality meals each weeknight from their two North Island sites. Working closely with food rescue organisation Kiwi Harvest and other donors, the chefs create delicious and nourishing meals from kai that would have otherwise gone to waste.

The restaurants operate with a pay-as-you-feel model inviting people to give a koha. Each restaurant has a chef, front of house and team of volunteers who, together, create a great experience for all.

### What values underpin your organisation?

**Inclusivity** – it's in the name and about everybody having a seat at the table.

**Sustainable** – demonstrates sustainable food practices and highlights how the food systems can work more sustainably.

**Conviviality** – creating space for social connection in communities.

**Authenticity** – because there is a genuine need to work hard and to understand the communities served, reflecting the needs and preferences of the people.

### How do you purposefully create space for those values to be present?

“What separates a place from being good to being great is the people.” They have a great team of volunteers who help create a welcoming space where people can connect and have a great dining experience. It’s the simple things, like how they communicate.

Adopting the koha model helps them to be inclusive as everyone is able to participate and enjoy a dining experience. At first people can be confused by the pay-as-you-feel model, some in disbelief and others wanting to know true costs to pay their way. Everybody Eats creates a space where people feel okay to contribute by being present.

They are very conscious about investing in whanaungatanga when looking to open in a new community, and that they must first get to know the people and shape how they work to suit the needs and preferences of that community.

### What are your biggest learnings?

“Although I was aware that food waste was an issue, seeing the scale of food waste was a real shock. The fact that there is a whole sector dedicated to this is crazy. It’s important to keep your work grounded in the community you are in. Sometimes you have to take a step back and evaluate what you are doing and whether that is reflective of what is needed in that space.”

The community in Auckland is very different to that of Wellington. Although they have very experienced chefs with some great ideas, sometimes they have to adhere and remember who they are doing it for. Gathering feedback and reflecting on their work helps them to stay authentic and create a great experience.

Everybody Eats gets their best feedback from person-to-person interactions, taking time to be in the space and talk with the community. At times they have gathered more formal feedback through surveys – with the intention to do more through this method.

### What insights would you share with others looking to do something similar?

“Create a community that backs your work. If you have an impactful mission and values, that will create energy and people will want to get around your cause. Communicate your cause through your networks and get out into the community. Everybody Eats talks at schools and business associations to gather support and awareness. Talk to suppliers and support them to invest in the work.”

Be aware that there are lots of moving parts. An important part of this initiative is building awareness and helping to educate people on how to be resourceful and creative with food.

Have a clear mission statement as a base. This is something you can look upon when looking at or being approached with new ideas. “If people offer to donate foods that doesn’t fit with our mission statement, we politely decline and point them in the direction of someone who can take it. For us we found it pretty simple to get support as the mission speaks for itself.”

### What do you like, wish and wonder about Everybody Eats?

“I like how it is uniting people, both practically and on a wider level over shared issues. Highlighting climate change and contributing to uniting people around a common cause with everyday food. I wish that there was less crappy food, I feel frustrated about good food going to waste and bad foods being commonly eaten, contributing to poor wellbeing. I wonder if one day organisations like ours will no longer need to exist in the future?”

