

Community Food Provider Fund 2023

- Review of funding impacts

This report provides a review of the impacts of the Community Food Provider Fund 2023 as well as the experience of whānau receiving the food support, and some of the challenges the community food sector is currently facing.

Background

The Community Food Provider Fund 2023 provided contributory grant funding to support community food providers to meet current food demand as they transition away from reliance on government funding. The grants were in place for 11 months from August 2023 until June 2024.

199 providers received funding totalling \$9.1¹ million. Grants varied from \$3,500 to \$922,442², with an average grant of \$45,000. These providers predominantly used the funding for the purchase of essential food supplies. Funding also contributed to operational costs such as transport, rent, packaging, and other overheads.

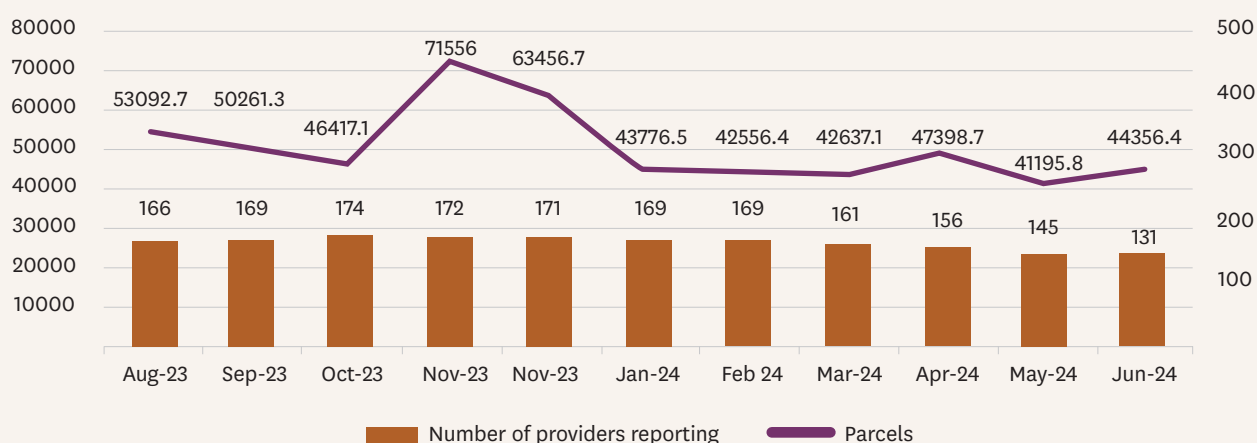
Providers were required to report monthly on food parcel distribution numbers and provide six-monthly narrative reports through MSD's SORT online reporting tool. This data was analysed to produce this report.

Total food distribution over the 11-month period

From August 2023 to July 2024 MSD funded community food providers reported distributing 546,705 food parcels. The reporting data shows an average monthly parcel count of 49,562 with a significant spike leading into the December holiday period.

MSD funding contributed approximately \$16 to the cost of distributing each food parcel. Note this is only 9% of the value of providing a standard, nutritionally-complete food parcel which we estimate to be around \$180.

Reported food parcel distribution over 11 months



¹ Note this includes \$8.3m included in Budget 2023 and an additional \$800,000 that was sourced from underspends across the programme and returned grant funds.

² Note this was a grant for The Salvation Army which has foodbanks throughout the country. A link to the full grant list is available here <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/what-we-can-do/community/food-secure-communities/community-food-provider-fund-2023.pdf>

The demand for food and who is seeking food support

Most providers reported the need for food support is increasing.

A regular reporting trend was providers experiencing ongoing increases in demand for their services. A wide range of reasons were given for this, including the impacts of COVID and natural disasters, but the most common was increased cost of living pressures.

Some providers have noticed a shift in the types of people seeking support

Another emerging trend is the number of people seeking food support who have one or more adult in fulltime employment within the household. This includes a growing number of people seeking support for the first time.

“We are helping families who have both parents working (minimum wage) and still find it difficult to make ends meet particularly with the cost of rental accommodation and when unexpected bills occur.”

Providers have noted an increase in the complexity of clients' needs

A number of reports have noted that people seeking support have increasingly complex needs which take time and resources to provide adequate support. In some cases, this is creating health and safety issues for community food providers.

“Whanau and individuals at high risk of food insecurity that often face other hardship issues such a housing instability (whanau at risk of losing a tenancy due to eviction, people living with family facing personal issues/ arguments etc) financial insecurity due to the impact of high cost of living.”

The impact of MSD's funding for community food provision

Community food providers were able to feed more people in need/hardship

This funding responded to the increased need within communities for essential food supports and enabled community food providers to offer their community food service to more people than if they didn't have this funding. In some cases, the funding has enabled providers to continue to offer any community food service and meet the increased demand.

“In the past six months, we have experienced a 22% increase in demand for food and groceries, reflecting the growing need in our community. The funding has been instrumental in meeting this demand by expanding our food stock and enhancing our services”.

“Without this funding we could have been facing closure. Demand outstrips our ability to supply and we have cut back our weekly budget to enable funding to take us through to financial year end”.

Grant funds have enabled community food providers to reach more at-risk demographics and people with more complex needs

Community food providers have regularly reported to us that people seeking help often have increasingly complex needs which requires more pastoral care and more in-depth needs assessments. This funding has helped enabled support to reach more at-risk demographics. In some cases, the funding may have helped reduced crime as people who are in desperate circumstance are more likely to turn to crime to feed their families.

“In the post-COVID-19 era, food security grants have become even more vital. They provide crucial support to vulnerable groups, including the elderly with disabilities, individuals living alone without support, victims of domestic violence, and those affected by migrant exploitation. The availability of these grants has significantly strengthened community connections and cohesion.”

“One recipient desperate for food was seriously contemplating doing a trolley run, which means filling trolley and running out of a store, the man, had kids in the car and we could sense his desperation, we were glad we were able to help that day it could have become a very different situation. ”

The community food sector has become more resilient and better able to respond to times of crisis, including natural disasters

Food Secure Communities (FSC) investment has increased the capability and capacity of the community food sector and has provided surge capacity which is able to respond in times of crises.

Providers are working more collectively

Funding has feed up capacity within providers to work more collaboratively across their communities. This collaborative approach has ensured that people and families are getting access to the complimentary support services they require.

“We have seen the benefits of working with other supporting agencies eg budget house, Family & Financial Services, Pinnacle Health & MSD to offer a collective approach to supporting the community. We have built good relationships with these organisations to ensure food support is understood and acts as a hand up rather than a handout.”

“We have been able to respond to families through a bespoke process that is mana-enhancing, but also supports the families through wrap-around support - identifying families through a streamlined and consistent needs assessment process and referring on to other services.”

Providers have been resourced to work more flexibly

One way that this funding has enabled providers to work more flexibly is to give more choice to their clients. They have also been able to adapt services to tailor to clients various living situations.

“We changed our service so that people picked what they would like to eat rather than getting a premade box. This encourages Tino rangatiratanga and people will use everything they take away from our centre.”

“There have also been several individuals who are homeless and have no fixed abode of cooking facilities. This makes storage of meat or other perishables non-existent. Being able to adapt what we can give and having a variety of kai is very impactful.”

Community food providers are able to offer a more nutritious food service and provide other essential household items

One of the biggest expenses for foodbanks is fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as animal protein. As budgets tighten, this type of food is often the first to be sacrificed in favour of cheaper shelf-stable goods. Community providers reported that this funding often enabled them to source fresh food and provide more nutritious food support and cater better to people's dietary needs.

This funding also supported community food providers to source essential household items that some at-risk families might have otherwise forgone such as cleaning, hygiene products and nappies.

“We have also been able to purchase meat, cheese, pasta, vegetables and other ingredients to create healthy meals.”

“We have managed to purpose-fit as much as possible, identifying individual needs when sorting out parcels, such as vegetarians, gluten-free, newborn babies, under ten years, teenagers, and standard parcels.”



Funding has continued to contribute to the transition towards longer-term approaches to food security

Community food providers are continuing to explore transitioning to longer-term approaches to food security. This funding has provided some extra capacity to work in this space. This includes exploring social enterprise models which are more financially sustainable and offer more choice to clients.

“The expansion of community gardens through local collaboration has significantly improved food security and sustainability. These initiatives have ensured a consistent food supply and reduced the community’s dependence on foodbanks.”

Feedback from those receiving food support showcases some of the impacts of this funding

“I have always worked and been able to provide for my family, but I found myself in a situation where my hours at work was reduced to 16hrs a week and was not on any government assistance, so money was very tight. I had not been accustomed to this level of hardship prior, so this was a mentally challenging time. It was at this time, I received food parcels from ... (provider)... and it took off a big load of pressure. I wasn’t sure how I was going to feed my children for the week... I have now got full-time work and so no longer require this support, but I will be forever grateful to ...(provider)... for this support through the tough times.”

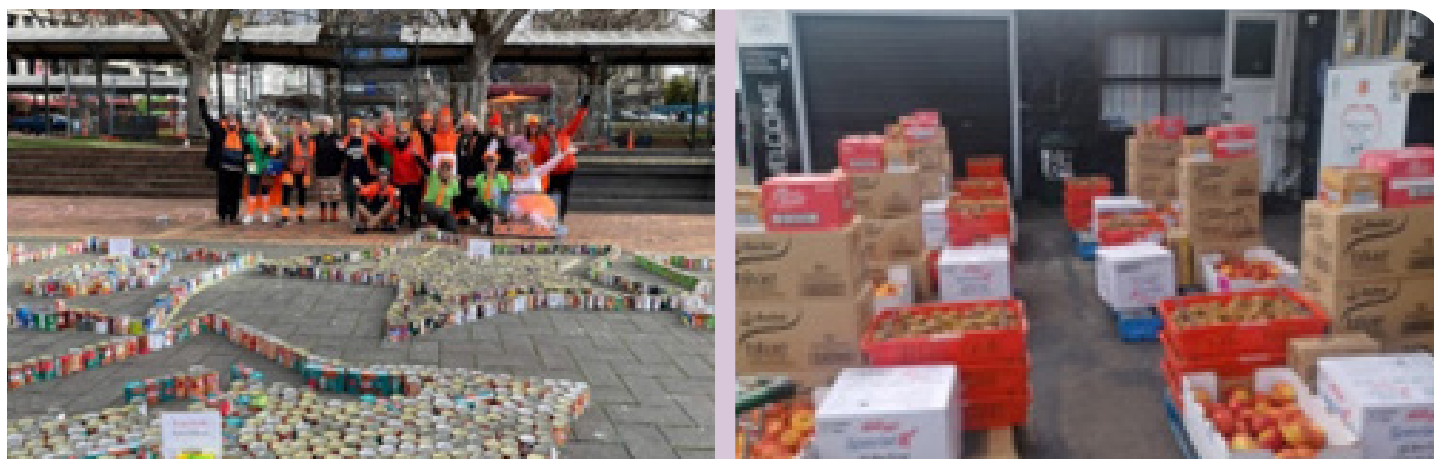
“Thank you so much for the Mahi and the kai. I honestly feel very grateful for this awahi to feed our mokopuna, nieces and nephews. At this moment of time during the holidays and the unforeseen situation and circumstance that have happened my goodness. You have no idea how much pressure that has been lifted off my hinengaro”

“My children and whanau got to experience the feeling of being loved. The smiles on everyone’s faces means the world”.

Providers have identified some challenges delivering their services

Food rescue and community donations contributed to community food provision

Providers reported having to rely on a wide range of different options for sourcing their food, including from rescued or recovered sources. On average providers reported 22% of their food provision being sourced from rescued or recovered food sources. Provider were also reliant on donations from the community, including from food drives and community gardens.



Many community food services are experiencing increased demand

Due to the current economic challenges community food services have reported that demand continues to increase over time and never returned to pre-COVID levels. This has resulted in many providers needing to manage demand by restricting food parcel distribution.

“The demand for emergency support has risen sharply and continues to grow. With rising financial inflation and fixed costs that families cannot adjust, food often becomes a lower priority on their list of expenses.”

“We encountered a significant challenge in managing the increasing demand for our food service programme. A key issue was the recurring requests from previous recipients, which necessitated a careful reassessment of eligibility criteria. We found ourselves in the difficult position of having to determine which families were most in need of continued support, given our limited resources.”

An additional challenge has been increasing price of food and issues with restricted food supplies

While food price inflation has slowed, the significant increases since 2020 have led to difficult decisions for providers. There have also been constraints in the food system which has made food supplies difficult to source.

“This economic pressure has also affected our ability to purchase food, as the higher cost of supplies means that we can acquire less with the same budget. Consequently, the financial constraints are intensifying the demand for our services while simultaneously limiting the amount of food we can provide.”

“Our biggest challenge continues to be our food supply - reliant sources that can provide the volume and variety of food we need to ensure that our parcels meet the standard food parcel measure, particularly with regards to dry/staple goods; cans, rice, pasta etc. We are now at the point where we will have to revisit how our parcels look.”

Providers have also seen increasing referrals from other agencies

Other support agencies refer to foodbanks to help support their clients placing additional pressure on the food providers.

“Demand outstrips our ability to supply. Clients may have travelled into town, at cost they could not spare, in the expectation that they will be able to get food from us, but with referrals through agencies (Plunket, schools, police, WINZ, Mental Health, health coaches, hospice care etc) we have fewer available for drop-in distribution on our current budget.”

Conclusion

Funding for community food provision has made a significant impact on the ability for community food providers to distribute food support to people experiencing food insecurity. It has enabled them to serve more people who are in need, offer more nutritious food, provide a better range of essential household goods, and reach more at-risk communities.

The funding has helped the sector face challenges, enable better collaboration, strengthen capacity and capability to continue transitioning to longer-term approaches to food security and support seamless surge capacity in times of crises.

Community event hosted from the community gardens in Woodville, Pahiatua and Eketāhuna. Represented agencies in the photo include Women's Refuge, Pahiatua Foodbank, Hāmua Ora Heartlands, Pahiatua Help-n-and/ Bush Supergrans, Tararua Community Service, and Tararua Kai Collective.; Bream Bay Spring Gardening Workshop

