

Enterprise North Canterbury – Amuri Connector Project

Every year Enterprise North Canterbury (ENC) is tasked with identifying the needs of the business community from one Hurunui town and reporting those needs back to the local council.

As part of this process ENC interviewed a number of businesses operating around Culverden and the Amuri Basin, businesses thinking of establishing themselves in the area, key community representatives, iwi, and Maori business interests (particularly Ngai Tahu farming). We also referred to a number of studies and statistics sourced from other documents including studies such as the Hurunui Community Newcomer Profile (June 2014), the Hurunui District Statistical Profile (February 2014), and the Community Response Forum Report – The Hurunui District Community Consultation (June 2014).

One of the key findings of this study was that a number of workers and their partners in the Amuri Basin were experiencing varying degrees of social isolation. Part of this was due to working conditions on some dairy farms, but much of it was around people simply not having the knowledge or confidence in connecting with the community in a meaningful way. This was leading to a number of negative social outcomes which also contributed to a lack of engagement and a high employment turnover rate for local employers. As the Amuri Basin is reasonably remote, social isolation is a community wide issue (as was identified in the MSD Hurunui Community Newcomers Profile) and the employers in the district decided that any solution should be aimed at addressing this issue for the entire community, not just for employees.

While this process was occurring within the Amuri business community, we attended a series of meetings run by MSD for the Hurunui Community Sector. These meetings identified four key areas of concern to be addressed, one of which was social isolation. That means that this problem had been identified as a key concern from both a business and a broader social wellbeing perspective.

We facilitated a series of meetings with stakeholders from the business and community sectors where we addressed a list of issues that had arisen from our research, but the main task was identified as establishing a 'Community Connector' in the area.

The Project

The project was to establish a dedicated 'Community Connector'. The objectives of this role were:

- Enhance community wellbeing in the Amuri Basin.
- Enable people by giving them the resources and information they need to engage with and participate in the community.
- Establish a 'connector' role within the Amuri Basin and ensure that linkages are made to existing services and programmes and followed up.

This would be accomplished by supporting newcomers or those experiencing social isolation in the Amuri Basin by providing a pro-active contact point to connect them to the community and by



working with community groups, volunteers and community champions in the Amuri Basin. This would strengthen networks and build community capability and capacity to meet low level resident needs.

In order to maximise the impact of this role and ensure its ongoing sustainability we established the project in 3 stages

Stage 1 Preparation - 6 months

ENC contracted an expert to perform the following tasks: Community Asset Mapping, Identifying the Need and Setting up Systems and Processes. This established a base for the next stage.

Stage 2 Establish the project - 1 year

We created an advisory group from local community members and business owners and employed a local community stalwart to take on the role of 'Amuri Community Connector' after a robust recruitment campaign.

To achieve this, we raised sponsorship from the local business community which acted as a base to achieve funding from the Ministry of Social Development and the Department of Internal Affairs. This provided wages and operating costs for 2 years while sustainability was being achieved.

Stage 3 Liberate the project

We passed ownership of the project to local community group Connect Hurunui Incorporated. They have since employed 3 Community Connectors for other areas in the district and are planning employing one more. This fits under the ENC modus operandi of establishing, facilitating and then liberating good projects so that we have capacity to continue finding and addressing the needs of the business community in North Canterbury.

Results

The Community Connector roles have had a high level of success in bringing together the local community. This became particularly important in the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake which was epicentred in the Hurunui District. The ability of the connectors to pull together resources and community proved essential to a fast response and recovery. The community connector role has also facilitated the establishment of several community resources that did not previously exist.

Sally Latham from the Department of Internal Affairs has stated that this project was one of the best examples of community led development she has seen, and she uses our project as an example around New Zealand.

Connect Hurunui Incorporated are still looking at ways to futureproof this role and make it fully financially sustainable. We are assisting them with this and are confident that sustainability can be achieved.