

Community-Led Development Programme Impact Evaluation

South Invercargill Community Case Study

Introduction

Hāpai Hapori, within the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) commissioned an impact evaluation of the Community-Led Development Programme (CLDP). Focused on the experiences of four partnering communities transitioning from the programme, a report presented summative findings examining the CLDP's outcomes and impact, including transformations in community, sustainability, wellbeing enhancement, realisation of aspirations, enablers of success and challenges, and recommendations for future activities.

This case study provides detailed reflections on the impact of CLDP partnership on one of the four communities - South Invercargill's South Alive.

Data collection and analysis

The selected case study communities represent diverse characteristics, including partnership duration, community initiatives, and demographic factors.

This case study draws insights from data collected during a two-day site visit in April 2024, involving observations of activities and interviews with community members. The Hāpai Hapori lead advisor was also interviewed. Data collection was supplemented by document analysis, including quarterly and results reports provided by Hāpai Hapori.

Community-led development programme overview

The overarching intended goal for the CLDP is “strong, resilient communities, hapū and iwi achieving locally owned visions and goals.” The two key aims of the CLDP, set out in its purpose, are:

- The CLDP supports communities of place, as well as hapū and iwi, to achieve their collective vision using a community-led approach.
- The CLDP is a partnering approach by the Department to invest in communities, hapū and iwi through intensive advisory services and, where appropriate, the provision of funding to help New Zealand build strong communities.

The DIA CLDP offers a flexible model of funding that supports community goals and needs as they change and develop. The programme emphasises community and partnerships drawing on the CLD principles. The programme shifts the focus away from small grants for individual projects and/or organisations, to an approach where communities have access to flexible funding that contributes to overall community wellbeing. DIA offers expertise as needed to communities, with a programme focus of supporting new and emerging community development. The CLDP began in 2011 with five pilot communities, with piloting and evaluation undertaken to 2015.

Te Aka Taiwhenua Strategic Framework outlines DIA's commitment towards Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The framework is underpinned by the following mātaḗpono that guide DIA's work:

- **Whanaungatanga:** A relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging.
- **Manaakitanga:** Hospitality, kindness, generosity, support, the process of showing respect, and care for others.
- **Kotahitanga:** Unity, togetherness, solidarity, collective actions.
- **He Tangata:** It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

Te Tiriti has become more central as the programmes have progressed and with the exploration of hapū-led development.



South Alive

Background to South Alive CLDP

Invercargill (Waihōpai) is New Zealand's southernmost city, and the capital of Southland, with a 2023 population of 57,900. Although Invercargill is the only city in the region and the biggest urban centre, it is still much smaller than the major centres of New Zealand with a total area of 389.92 km². It is possible to drive from any urban area of Invercargill to the city centre within 12 minutes.

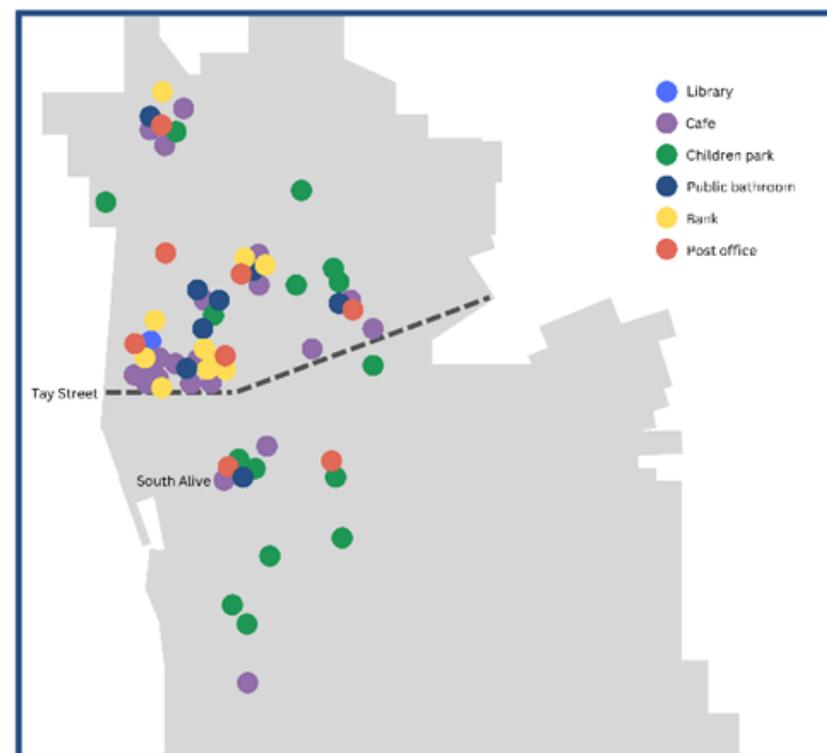
Despite its small size relative to other New Zealand cities, Invercargill experiences clear geographic and cultural divides between the northern and southern areas of the city's urban/suburban areas. This divide is referred to in common parlance as beginning "South of the tracks" or "South of Tay Street". South Invercargill, with a population of approximately 18,000 people, has been defined as stretching from the south to west Invercargill City Council boundary, south of SH1/Tay Street.

South Invercargill experiences high levels of deprivation in a number of different areas. For example, the community experiences many of the same housing issues that the broader region continues to struggle with. Invercargill has been recognised as having a particular problem with substandard, cold, and damp houses. Invercargill City Council housing strategy report found that the quality of housing arose as an area of widespread concern, especially given the age of the existing housing stock, with most built prior to minimum insulation standards, and given the southern climate.³

The housing here is more run down, you could drive past some houses and think 'does someone live there?' But they do. There is a huge amount of poverty in South Invercargill. (Community leadership)

Access to infrastructure is a concern for residents of South Invercargill who report feeling under-served when compared with those who live north of the boundary. Publicly available data shows that South Invercargill houses only one public bathroom facility, two post offices (one of which is set to close in early 2025), no banks and three operational cafés.

Image 1: Rapid review of assets, google maps



³ Southland Community Housing Strategy Report. 2017. Invercargill City Council

The Westpac Bank was the only bank in the South City shops and that closed when COVID hit, and it never reopened. Last week it was announced that the Post Office was going to be closing. (Community leadership)

About South Alive

Established in 2012, South Alive is a community-led, urban rejuvenation project operating in the South Invercargill area. The group formed as a result of the Invercargill City Council's (ICC) focus on urban regeneration at the time. The council established a small steering group and held the first public meeting in February 2012, where the community provided feedback on their hopes for the regeneration of the South Invercargill community. Ten months later, South Alive became an incorporated trust and gained charitable status in October the following year (2013).

Since its establishment, South Alive has developed into a well-recognised part of the South Invercargill community. The formalised governance structure includes thirteen board members, each selected for their representation of a certain aspect of the community. At the heart of the organisation is a multi-disciplinary volunteer network, the structure of which has developed over the last decade to ensure there are a variety of ways that community members can contribute. At present, South Alive has a register of over 100 community volunteers and a social media following of over 6,000 people.

As a community-led development organisation, South Alive prides itself on its community consultation processes and the work of its Volunteer Action Groups – who are responsible for their own idea generation, event planning, coordination, project development and delivery. Over the last decade, these groups have planned and delivered a range of projects, including planting out orchards and community gardens, developing Invercargill's first dog park, and creating the heritage trail.

The organisation has supported community advocacy and knowledge generation activities in commercial infrastructure, housing quality, and air pollution. There are also several activities facilitated and maintained through South Alive community groups such as local beautification initiatives, school holiday events, sustainability workshops and food security supports.

The South Alive team of board volunteers, formal volunteers and 2.5 FTE employees are based in the South Alive headquarters on Ness Street. This building also houses infrastructure that attracts community members across South Invercargill and beyond. This includes a café, a retail store which distributes local produce and displays local artists work, a commercial kitchen for hire, a basketball court, green space, and a community garden. The space also houses a range of meeting rooms which enable community volunteers and action groups to plan and lead projects and activities and are also available for business and communities to hire.

CLD partnership with South Alive

South Alive became a Community Led Development Project Partner with the Department of Internal Affairs in 2019. By this time, South Alive had been operating for seven years and had established governance and organisational structures in place.

We were quite well established before the DIA funding came along. (Community leadership)

The DIA partnership was seen as an opportunity to promote and develop existing and new programmes and enable the South Alive team to focus their energy on working in the community, rather than seeking funding. The partnership was also seen as an opportunity to network with other community groups and leverage DIA connections, contacts, and knowledge. Of particular interest for South Alive was the advice and expertise that DIA could provide to enhance and strengthen Community Led Development Governance capability.



Identifying Aspirations

This section discusses the ways in which the structure of South Alive has enabled communities to identify their own aspirations and how needs and aspirations have evolved over time.

South Alive aspiration as community aspiration

South Alive, as an organisation, provides the infrastructure to enable communities to uncover, develop and deliver their own aspirations. The board, a selection of community members from different areas, deliver strategic oversight that is guided by ongoing formal and informal consultation processes. The board describes itself as having “an upside-down structure” and focuses on developing “strategy that is community-led”. Each board members’ own subject matter expertise and connections are leveraged to support a strategy that will serve the entire community.

We’ve got thirteen Board Members and that’s quite a large Board. We’ve got people connected with church organisations, with housing, we’ve got a school principal and people involved in the health sector. They’re able to reflect back what they’re seeing and observing and that helps build a picture. (Community leadership)

The South Alive team have two formal consultation streams, the annual survey which is sent to residents each year and a public meeting which provides an opportunity for residents to talk about developments they would like to see in their community. There are also a number of informal consultation tools used, for example setting up stands at local markets, attending education orientation weeks and keeping a record of ideas and requests from members of the public.

At market days a couple of us will go round with the survey and you watch the Chair, she will just get everybody, she’s determined to get everybody’s say. We want to know, I mean it’s pretty arrogant to think that we know what the community wants if we haven’t asked them. (Community leadership)

In addition to strong consultation processes, South Alive is able to understand and support community aspirations through its engine room of Volunteer Action Groups. These are comprised of local volunteers with a commitment to a particular area of interest. These groups self-form and operate under the umbrella of South Alive, which gives them access to funding and support to plan, promote and carry out activities and events.

If the community want to do something, they often will say “Well can you just do this,” and we’ll go “No, we won’t do it, but we will help you do it.”. We can start to connect them, or they may have already connected elsewhere and they’re looking for support. We go okay “let’s make you an Action Team and give you a bit of a budget [and support] so you can get going on these things. (Community leadership)

Table 1: Examples of South Alive Projects and Outcomes (next page)



Project area	Activities	Outcomes	
Beautification	Maintaining community gardens and general tidying and beautifying of local areas and assets so that spaces feel safe and inviting.	Increase use of public spaces as they feel more inviting and safer.	Engender pride in South Invercargill.
Fruit and Nut	Plan, deliver, and manage fruit and nut orchards that communities can care for and access.	Educate local communities about growing local produce. Contribute to local food security.	Make open spaces productive and useful. Opportunities to socialise and build community around mutual interests.
Sustainable Living	Focus on safe, sustainable housing and encourage creating healthy, energy efficient homes.	Support local residents to make their homes warmer and dryer. Education around sustainable practices.	Contribute to research about air quality and improve quality of air in residents homes.
Pay it Forward	Connect those who have something to offer with those that could do with some support, through food/essentials boxes, and knitted goods.	Provide food packages and knitted goods to those who need extra support.	Opportunities to socialise and build community around mutual interests.
Youth Action	Inspire and support young people in the community to have a voice and be active participants in their community.	Inspiring young leaders in the community. Actively involve young people in South Alive events, discussions, and vision.	Help the South Alive adults understand young people's wants and needs around their community involvement.
South City Transformation	Transforming the South City shopping centre into one that local residents are proud of, and which meets their needs.	Aesthetic and safety improvements to the local shopping area creating accessible and pleasant places for local people to do their shopping.	Engender pride in South Invercargill.
Arts	Provide the South Invercargill community (and beyond) with a space promoting local artistic and cultural activities.	Engender pride in South Invercargill. Fostering talent within local artist communities.	Opportunities to socialise and build community around mutual interests.
Dog Park	Establish and run a dog park and agility course facilities.	Created a space where dogs can safely socialise away from busy roads and residents. Engender pride in South Invercargill and encouraged residents from elsewhere to visit.	Rangatahi and whānau feel valued
Events	Develop or assist events and projects which promote community identification and local pride.	Promote community identification and engender pride in South Invercargill.	Create safe events for local residents to socialise and connect.



These groups are formed by and comprised of members of the South Invercargill community. The community's desire for assets, resources and events can result in the formation of a new Action Group or be reflected in the types of initiatives that groups deliver. Therefore, looking at the patterns of Volunteer Action Groups provides a suitable proxy measure for understanding how the needs and aspirations of the community have changed over time.

For example, the Dog Park Volunteer Action Group was formed to create an off-leash area for dogs to socialise. The group aspired to develop the park with full perimeter fencing, rubbish facilities, rain covers and seating areas for pet owners, and they worked closely with council to secure the land and develop facilities. When the assets were ready for the community in 2013, the group disbanded, feeling that their job was done, but have recently reformed to consider upgrades to the park.

There's always been ebbs and flows of focus and drive from the community. There was a group that was formed to work with Council to get the dog park established on Council land and then once it was established, it was kind of like well... it didn't need a group anymore, so it petered off. But now there's been this renewed interest in developing a kind of playground for dogs within it. (Community leadership)

The Pay it Forward Action group is another example of community aspirations being mirrored through the formation and actions of a Volunteer Action Group. The team developed during the COVID-19 lockdowns to link those who wanted to lend a hand with those who needed support. The group produced pay it forward boxes of essential items to those who needed them in the community, using schools as a way to identify families.

Pay it Forward was started by a former principal. She was a principal at the time of the secondary school and so she is connected with all the other principals in the other schools in our area and so we kind of identified that was through the school networks that need support and that's how we deliver our stuff. (Community leadership)

The end of COVID-19 did not mean the end of this programme, which continues to provide essential boxes to those who need them and now includes a team of knitters producing hand knitted blankets, beanies, and singlets to families of newborns in need of support. This signals the ongoing need within the South

Invercargill community, as well as the drive from within the community to continue to contribute to and meet its own needs through this mahi.

Outcomes and Impacts

The South Invercargill community have delivered on aspirations across a number of areas, resulting in positive outcomes and impacts within the community. This section highlights some of the broader impacts that South Invercargill's contribution to South Alive has had for the community.

Pride

The core mission of South Alive is to “build a place to live and work that engenders pride” and so it follows that pride in the community of South Invercargill is an essential outcome that the organisation seeks to achieve. The team at South Alive have collected data through community surveys - averaging between 150 and 200 responses each year - which has shown an increase in the proportion of residents who feel proud to be a part of the South Invercargill community.

Our whole vision is about building pride in South Invercargill. When we started, 35% of people felt a sense of pride in South Invercargill and now it sits in the late 80s, and 90s. (Community leadership)

General beautification of the community has played an important role in changing the way that residents and the broader Invercargill community feel about South Invercargill. Planting out communal areas, providing adequate lighting to frequented facilities and generally keeping the community clean and tidy has contributed to the feeling that local areas are safe and vibrant places to be. The community also hosts events which attract thousands of attendees from across Invercargill, further contributing to the feeling that South Invercargill is a positive place to spend time.



There's been a lot of work to beautify South Invercargill, but we also run a lot of community events and I think seeing cool things happening helps build that pride. There's still a bit of that stigma coming south of the tracks but it's not so much, North Invercargill people will come and eat at the café or shop and come to events. Perhaps ten years ago you wouldn't have had that.
(Community leadership)

It was clear, through speaking with members of the broader community, that while there is always more work to be done, residents are proud to be a part of the South Invercargill community and proud of their contributions to making it a better place to live and work.

It's just making that difference and just wanting to improve things, tidy things up, making it a better place for people to live. And it is a lovely place to live.
(Community member)

South City was not considered the place to be when we were growing up. It was the riffraff area but over the years people have moved in and they've really tried to look after it. It's such a nice feeling [now], I like the community feel. People actually feel that they can come here. (Community member)

Purpose and contribution to the community

South Alive volunteers spoke about the sense of purpose they get from being part of, and giving back to, the community of South Invercargill. One volunteer explained that volunteering with South Alive gives her a reason to get out of bed in the morning and described her volunteer work as her anchor, providing her with a purpose and sense of value:

We're the old farts but we're still really quite valuable. I think that's the thing that resonates is I feel valuable, I feel valued as a person and not just like a volunteer. I don't actually feel like a volunteer because my rewards are probably greater than any other job I've ever had, and this is the tail end of my life because I'm 73. So, it's just at the tail end of my life I've found something really good and worth putting my energy into. (Community member)

Feeling valued for their unique contributions and particular skills is noted as a support factor for community members making impactful contributions to their community. Giving community members a number of ways that they can contribute and a number of areas they can work in has made the impacts of volunteering feel meaningful. One participant spoke about calling South Alive in 2020 after completing a degree in Museum and Heritage Practice, unsure of her next steps, but willing to volunteer her time and expertise in some way. Her skills were quickly put to use researching and developing a heritage trail that explores and tells South Invercargill local history:

My biggest highlight was the first panel that we put up. The memorial itself was just kind of on a grassy patch of land and it was a little bit unkempt, but we did some work with the Council, they beautified the whole space. We had a soldier's story as part of the panel and his whose family was from South Invercargill and we invited them to the unveiling. It was just... when I came down and actually had a look at it, it was very like, I felt very proud. I was like oh... this is actually doing a really positive thing for the community. (Community member)

Social cohesion and connection

Another outcome of the South Alive kaupapa is providing the infrastructure for meaningful connections and relationships to form and be sustained in the community. Creating opportunities for residents to be together and make connections is central to the organisations' way of working. Inclusivity is at the heart of making this happen, which is why most events and activities offered through South Alive are free of charge.

On Saturday, it was a festival, and everyone was happy. The sun was shining and there were people smiling everywhere. It didn't cost anything and there were free kids activities, there was a good turnout. It's really worth it when you see that kids are happy, and parents are connecting with other people. (Community leadership)

We've done heaps of different things like arts and crafts, and they have Lego, they do the active play as well. We've been to a couple of their like craft day things; they do free music and all sorts of cool stuff. I really enjoy it because I'm a solo mum and I'm on a low income, so I love the free activities and they're always good fun. (Community member)

Opportunities to build connections between people and groups is also created through the volunteer groups that form and meet at the South Alive facilities. Having a space and shared values within volunteer groups has meant that volunteers have formed close relationships with each other, celebrating milestones like birthdays and wedding engagements together, and supporting each other with house moves and personal struggles.

We had a group member, she wasn't well, but she said that made her week. She just loved coming here and that was only a few days before she passed away. That day, I said are you alright and she said no, not really, and I said you shouldn't have come in, but she just loved it so much. That was her week, and it was good for her. Good therapy, she had a good laugh, and she was enjoying the company. (Community member)

A place to belong

South Alive has two primary hubs that provide a physical space for people to gather: The Pantry and The Pod. The Pantry and The Pod were developed as a way to generate funding for South Alive and evolved out of the communities desire to have a space to meet and connect. Prior to the building of the Pantry and the Pod, it was felt that there was nowhere in South Invercargill that community members could gather and spend time without feeling that they had to spend money. The majority of Invercargill's cafés are concentrated North of Tay Street, along with the Invercargill library.

There's no real free community spaces just to go, so yes that can be here. There's no expectation to buy anything. If they want to sit in The Pantry they can. We're happy people sit in there all day. (Community leadership)

During the evaluation period, The Pantry café was buzzing with activity. The facilities are warm, well-lit, and inviting with modern amenities and spaces for people to gather or quietly enjoy a morning coffee. Outside, a basketball court was utilised by individuals of all ages throughout the day and children played with the activities laid out on the grass. Next door in The Pod, the meeting rooms were well-booked. Volunteer groups came and went during the day and in the evening the Sustainability Volunteer Action Group held a seminar on keeping homes warm and dry in the winter.

The rooms are used for such a variety of stuff from sign language to knitting. We have a lady who's doing tap dancing lessons. We've got businesses that use it and patch workers who make their quilts and give them away to charities. It's just so well used. (Community leadership)

A cornerstone of the setup of both The Pods and The Pantry has been creating inclusive spaces that are welcoming to everyone. The team have recognised the differing needs of the community and flexed to make sure that amenities can meet their needs. For example, the team offer mobility scooter group members a free coffee every Monday, which encourages members to come in on the café's quietest day so that they can relax without noise and "if they want to be here for three hours then they can be here for three hours."

Creating safe spaces where all members of the community want to spend time and connect with others comes down to having team members who care about the community and want every person who comes to South Alive to feel like a part of it. As one staff member put it: "Anybody could walk in here and feel welcomed, you're not judged at all."

I come in here just about every day for coffees and just to meet people and talk. I used to go round all the different cafes around town trying them, but this is really just down the road and people talk to you, they don't ignore you. (Community member)

When I chose our chef, I chose her not for the cooking skills, but for her ability to interact with people. We are community space, that should be number one priority. (Community leadership)

Sustaining realised aspirations

There are a number of ways that South Alive have built sustainability into the ways they work, outside of traditional measures like funding. This section discusses the three cornerstones of South Alive's way of working with the community that will support aspirations to be identified and delivered on from now into the future.

A sustainable volunteer structure

South Alive provides a variety of ways that members of the community can volunteer. Individuals can start or become a part of a Volunteer Action Group, or a volunteer group, they can volunteer in The Pantry or provide back office support. They can also join a register of volunteers that can be called on for one-off events to contribute in ways like directing traffic. This flexible approach is all about providing residents with a range of ways that they can give back to their community, and it works well because people can find ways to give back that interest them and fit in with their lives. This way of working has meant that South Alive has a large, diverse, and engaged network of volunteers – creating a sustainable foundation for aspirations to continue to be identified and worked toward.

Sometimes we have to wait till it fits in with their schedule obviously, because a lot of people still work and that's the thing, everyone has to work a little bit harder these days to get ahead. With Volunteer Action Groups, there's a little bit of something for everyone and you can make it so that there is. We had an 80 year old say, "I'll go and paint that wall." I'm like "Okay, that would be great, thanks!"
(Community leadership)

Community collaboration

South Alive partners with a number of different organisations in the community, including schools, community groups, and the city council. Maintaining positive relationships and partnerships built on mutual respect with these organisations has allowed South Alive to deliver on aspirations with high complexity. For example, delivery of the local dog park asset was heavily reliant on the strong relationship that South Alive hold with the local parks department. The team is also able to deliver large scale events such as the recent Children's Day event by drawing on local resources and relationships.

The role that South Alive plays in connecting important groups together and the quality of the relationships that have been built are key in delivering sustainable outcomes into the future.

That children's day event was us pulling it all together, but we had about eight organisations that came along and each ran a different activity for the kids. We were able to run this free event for tamariki for a few thousand dollars and we had a few thousand people there, but we were able to do that because we used all these other organisations in our community.
(Community leadership)

South Alive is South Invercargill

For South Alive, the reason that the community of South Invercargill continues to articulate and work toward its own aspirations is simple. South Alive is a part of South Invercargill.

Council had tried lots of different initiatives to try and revitalise the area, but nothing really worked because it was the Council coming in and doing what they thought should happen. (Community leadership)

We're South Alive. We're Team South Alive and we work as a team.
(Community member)

