

Community-Led Development Programme Impact Evaluation

Featherston 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 - Featherston's Fab Feathy.

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. A total of 17 Featherston community members, including five steering group members/facilitators, participated in individual and group discussions. 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 ō 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.



Fab Feathy

Background to Featherston CLDP

Featherston (Pae Tū Mōkai) is a town in the South Wairarapa District. Featherston boasts a population of 2,780 residents and is experiencing steady growth, marked by an approximately 11% increase in population over the past two census periods, from 2013 to 2023. The town's geographical location positions it as a commuter hub, with a significant portion of its working population commuting to nearby Wellington or Masterton for employment opportunities.

Featherston is celebrated for its rich historical heritage and picturesque landscapes. Notably, it enjoys close proximity to Wairarapa Moana, the third-largest lake in Aotearoa, surrounded by extensive wetlands of ecological importance and holding cultural significance for mana whenua. However, Featherston grapples with socio-economic challenges. It is identified as more deprived compared to neighbouring towns within the district. Moreover, the influx of newcomers to Featherston has brought about cultural shifts within the community. With rising demand for housing, there is increasing pressure on house prices, making affordability a pressing issue for both existing residents and newcomers alike.

Unlike neighbouring towns such as Martinborough and Greytown, which are undergoing extensive gentrification and tourism development, Featherston has largely been excluded from these trends. This exclusion has fostered a sense of underinvestment and institutional neglect among some residents, leading to calls for revitalisation efforts and inclusive development and investment.

The Featherston CLDP partnership

Featherston's 2018 CLD partnership emerged from discussions at a Wairarapa Community Networks gathering, where the Hāpai Hapori lead advisor introduced the program. Initial interest was expressed by key community figures and over the following 12 months this group engaged with the community to gauge interest in applying for the CLD program and to gather

input on desired community developments. Funding for this consultation was provided by the local Primary Health Organisation.

Identifying aspirations

The successful community visioning process, supported by Inspiring Communities, culminated in the creation of the Future Featherston Community Plan [2017] with the vision: "To fully realise the potential we can see Featherston is bursting with, while retaining and enhancing what makes our town and community distinctive and great". The plan outlines aspirations across five key areas: nurturing community, becoming a destination town for visitors, preserving the natural environment, enhancing infrastructure to support creators and businesses, and ensuring Featherston is a great 'liveable' town. Under these aspirations, there are 15 themes addressing various community needs and goals.

Following the completion of the plan, the partnership was established, and staff members were recruited to support initiatives. However, despite the enthusiasm for change, there were challenges. There was a decline in community energy and changes in leadership post-plan development, and the process of employing facilitators and achieving momentum took time over this transitional period.

Evolution of aspirations

The aspirations articulated in the community plan remained constant over the course of the partnership; however, the themes and associated projects shifted and changed, guided by community priorities and energy. Some projects outlined in the plan were ambitious and beyond the capacity of the partnership and the community to achieve on their own. Over the course of the partnership there was therefore a process of reframing some of these areas of work into more achievable initiatives. In 2022 as it reached the end of partnership, Fab Feathy surveyed the community to test the relevance of these aspirations and "refresh understanding of what is working well and what should come next" to provide direction for the remainder of work.



Supporting transformational change

Fab Feathy, guided by the community plan and CLD principles, has empowered the community to initiate and drive change. They have actively facilitated and supported community-led ideas and initiatives, enabling projects to move from conceptualisation to implementation and potentially scale and become more sustainable. This approach has garnered widespread agreement across interviewees that Fab Feathy has led to many positive changes for the Featherston community. According to one community member:

We've got such a better community for having had Fab Feathy. There is no doubt about that... if we go back seven or eight years ago, this was a fragmented community. It was unhappy people... the business sector was struggling. So little things, like the things that Fab Feathy were able to introduce. They turned it around. (Community member)

This section outlines the primary areas of transformative change resulting from Fab Feathy's CLD efforts in Featherston.

Enabling contribution

Fab Feathy has become a catalyst for empowering community members to actively engage in their community's development. Rather than taking a leading role, Fab Feathy has positioned itself as a supporter and champion, empowering individuals to initiate change. Community members have highlighted the importance of having an accessible entity to approach when seeking to contribute, connect with like-minded individuals, and receive assistance in turning ideas into action.

Furthermore, the community's visioning process, coupled with facilitator support, has fostered a collaborative problem-solving approach. This method encouraged individuals to come together, discuss challenges, and find collective solutions. By leveraging each other's interests, skills, and strengths community members have developed a sense of shared responsibility and capability. Additionally, there is a growing confidence within the community to take initiative and explore new ideas, reflecting an evolving mindset towards innovation and community-driven initiatives.

And people are encouraged to give things a go, I think. Like if you've got something that you're thinking "Oh, let's try and do that," there's sort of a confidence to go for something. (Community member)

Fostering leadership

Fab Feathy enabled community members to contribute and helped foster a new generation of leaders within the community. While there was not a shortage of leaders in Featherston, as is often the case in small communities they were often the same people stepping up, being shoulder tapped and initiating projects, and were often overstretched. Fab Feathy cast their net wide beyond the "movers and shakers" or "loud voices", extending invitations for people to lead projects, regardless of their background or experience. In doing so, they created opportunities for individuals to showcase their leadership potential and space for new perspectives and ways of doing things.

It really brought out the champions of the community, including allowing those that had not yet been seen as community leaders, to step forward. (Community SG member)

The two people who I would say would lead [project name] are both new community members, who have got an incredible amount of skills, that will benefit this community for a long time. But they have to be given the opportunity to get involved in something... and from the very beginning, even though they were new. (Community SG member)

Connection and cohesion

Fab Feathy's impact on fostering connections within the Featherston community was widely acknowledged by residents, often being the first aspect highlighted when discussing the changes brought about by the partnership. Through its initiatives, Fab Feathy facilitated increased opportunities for interaction and collaboration among individuals, groups, and community projects. The partnership's success in bringing together diverse members of the community has been noted by residents, who credit Fab Feathy with fostering connections that might not have otherwise occurred.

It's made Featherston a better community, helping bring people together who usually wouldn't really talk to each other. (Community member)



Facilitators fostered connections

The facilitators played a crucial role in fostering connections and ensuring the success of collaborative efforts within the community. Leveraging their interpersonal skills and deep community knowledge, they facilitated introductions, communication, and provided essential support, thereby enhancing community cohesion. By offering assistance with knowledge gaps and specific tasks, they alleviated the burden on volunteers and ensured the sustainability of projects. Additionally, facilitators helped maintain momentum and held the community “accountable”, particularly in the early stages of projects, preventing them from faltering.

The collaborative environment cultivated by Fab Feathy allowed community members to better understand each other's activities, leading to increased collaboration and a shared sense of purpose across groups. This approach also helped reduce siloed working, fragmentation, and duplicated effort. Furthermore, Fab Feathy's inclusive approach engaged a diverse cross-section of the community, while its partnerships with key entities such as schools further strengthened engagement.

There are lots of good people in Feathy that want to do lots of different things and they [Fab Feathy] pulled them together... and helped them navigate as a group through different things... There were lots of good things about that. (Community member)

Events enhanced connection, engagement and project support

Community members highlighted the positive impact events for Featherston, which brought people together and fostered connection, engagement and celebrated and utilised local strengths and assets. While some events were already established and revitalised by Fab Feathy and others working together, others were initiated through the partnership. First Fridays, a recurring event mentioned by many, breathed new life into an underutilised public space, the Squirle, with monthly festivals featuring art, music, and more. Similarly, the Matariki festival gained prominence, drawing people from afar to celebrate the occasion in Featherston. Whilst Fab Feathy was instrumental in the Matariki Festival of 2020, in following years they took a side-line role and the community ran these successfully by themselves with minimal support required. The impact of events on community cohesion and participation appears to have been profound. For example, a newcomer to Featherston shared their experience of the Matariki event:

We had a fabulous community hangi that over 100 people turned up to eat, but also to help dig the pit and light the fire and get the food out and so on. Lots of opportunity for the whole community to come together and contribute what they can. (Community member)

Events provided avenues for sharing experiences and offering support. Feed and Fund, ran in collaboration with the Community Centre, expedited connection-building and collaboration by offering a platform to showcase initiatives to a wider audience. This garnered interest and facilitated offers of assistance, enhancing project success and sustainability. The steering group perceived Feed and Fund as optimising CLP facilitation by fostering connection, highlighting strengths, and bolstering community energy.

Building community capability and skills

Fab Feathy clearly played a role in upskilling community members and enhancing their capabilities. This capacity-building effort encompassed various aspects, combining formal workshops with personalised, hands-on support from facilitators in a wide range of areas including project planning, system setup, meeting facilitation, and navigating online platforms, empowering community members to take charge of their initiatives.

In the final phase of the partnership, Fab Feathy organised a series of well-attended workshops conducted by local experts and external trainers covering a range of topics such as governance, fundraising strategies, and effective communication through social media. These workshops aimed to equip community members with practical skills and knowledge to continue to sustain and lead out new community development initiatives. The emphasis was on both imparting new skills and building confidence among community members. As one steering group member expressed:

We were keen to put as many skills into community [as possible].. so that the loss of Fab Feathy isn't too much ... I mean they [skills] were always there, I think it's always been about confidence in this community but everyone's always had the skills. It's just people thinking their voices aren't as relevant. (Steering group member)

Pride and confidence

Fab Feathy's impact extends to influencing how community members perceive their community and their role in its ongoing enhancement, with a palpable sense of growing confidence and pride. For many, this transformation has been about recognising and celebrating the positive aspects of Featherston's history and culture, despite challenges facing the region and past traumatic events.

I think it was about trying to draw on the positive that came out of that. Like it's always been quite an amazing community. But I think it was about building, finding those treasures and really drawing those together, really pinpointing where they were. It's like whanaungatanga. That's how I would put it. Building that whanaungatanga and the manaakitanga. And that was already there but bringing it even more together. (Community member)

Initiatives like Feed and Fund have played a role in fostering pride by highlighting strengths, assets, and champions. Tangible assets, such as the community garden, dog park, and bike track contribute visual enhancements while evoking a sense of community pride and achievement. One community member noted how the dog park has become a symbol of placemaking, located strategically in the heart of town and serving as a visible testament to the community's proactive spirit. A further example highlighted is a noticeable shift in the community's tourism profile and sense of identity more generally, with residents embracing their town's unique identity and diverse offerings.

There's just like a lot more confidence in groups and confident people doing stuff. (Community member)

Trust in government and community advocacy

Community members have highlighted the importance of feeling heard and valued by both Fab Feathy and government entities, emphasising the positive impact on community confidence. The partnership was seen to have provided a platform for recognition and validation, fostering a sense of self-esteem, and belonging within Featherston. Some community members felt that the approachable and knowledgeable DIA representatives have played a role in building trust between the community and government institutions. Their accessibility and support were seen to have facilitated connections and

accessibility and support were seen to have facilitated connections and encouraged community members to engage more actively with funding opportunities and processes.

I think it's been really good for the community to feel seen and loved. (Community member)

While relationships with the local council have historically been complex, Fab Feathy were seen to have gradually fostered a more positive and supportive dynamic. By advocating for community needs and serving as a constant voice for Featherston, the partnership looks to have increased the town's visibility in the eyes of local authorities and encouraged community engagement in council consultations and activities. Facilitators have acted as conduits, facilitating the flow of information between the council and residents. Despite ongoing challenges, such as the presence of derelict buildings on the main street, this collaborative approach has strengthened the relationship between the Featherston community and local government, fostering cooperation and mutual understanding.

Table 1: Fab Feathy CLDP Projects and Outcomes

The following table presents a range of Fab Feathy supported initiatives and their board outcomes and is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

Aspiration area	Activities / Projects	Outcomes
Nurturing community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Fridays • Feed and Fun • Dogs in togs event • Community Garden • Food and firewood deliveries to whanau during Covid-19 outbreak • Matariki event • Capability development (facilitator support and workshops) 	<p>Opportunities for community members to gather and utilise public space.</p> <p>Community gathering showcasing local initiatives and distributing community koha</p> <p>Community fun and gathering utilising key amenity</p> <p>Gathering, sharing knowledge, biodiversity and beautification</p> <p>Meeting material needs of vulnerable residents</p> <p>Community gathering, celebrating mātauranga Māori</p> <p>Upskilling of community leaders to lead sustainable CLD initiatives</p>
Valuing and protecting the natural environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for now Pae Tu Mokai o Taurira nursery • Bucks Road Campsite planting and upgrade support • Donalds Creek Science Table 	<p>Restoration of the wetland ecosystem, celebrating mātauranga Māori</p> <p>Restoration of natural environment and preservation of important community amenity</p> <p>A space for local school children to continue their monitoring of the waterways</p>
Being a destination town for visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BookTown support • Wai Wheels car show 	<p>Support for ongoing well attended events enhancing the unique character and profile of Featherston</p>
Amenities, services and infrastructure to be a liveable town and support creators, innovators, and businesses to invest in Featherston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windy Wheels bike and skills track at Featherston School • Moana trail feasibility study • Ā Mua resource centre support • Foodbank investment in containers and refrigeration • Dog park development 	<p>Asset for school and wider community use, providing access to bikes and to act as a “nursery” for eventual Moana Trail</p> <p>Scoping study to enable another more resourced organisation to lead implementation of trail to increase access to Wairarapa Moana and connect this important site to Featherston</p> <p>Supporting resource recovery and redistribution</p> <p>Increased capacity to meet community need</p> <p>Development of under-utilised public space into community asset</p>



Sustaining outcomes and impact

With Fab Feathy concluding in February 2024, many community members felt the longer-term impacts of the partnership remain to be seen. Some expressed concerns about the potential loss of momentum and initiatives losing steam without Fab Feathy's support. Additionally, there were apprehensions about individuals in other CLD-related roles becoming overwhelmed.

People have been upskilled through Fab Feathy, so there's hope that it will continue and be sustainable. But the risk is that without the support, things will slowly go "oh it would be nice to happen, but no ones' really got time and it's too hard." (Community Member)

However, another perspective was that it was a natural progression, viewing Fab Feathy's departure as an opportunity for the community to step up and sustain the progress made. They believed the partnership had fulfilled its mission of empowering the community to take charge of its development.

Fab Feathy were only set up to set everyone else up and get things going so that they can find a way to be sustainable. That's what their mission was, and I think they did a really good job of it. (Community Member)

An embedded way of working

Many community members acknowledge that CLDP principles and approaches have become deeply rooted within the community. Relationships formed during the partnership persist through shared goals and ongoing collaboration. This collective effort instils a sense of belonging and purpose among individuals involved in community projects and validates their contributions.

Well, it has made Feathy a lot nicer, it has actually. There's still groups carrying on that they helped facilitate, like there's a number of garden groups ... the knitting groups and the meet up, all those kind of things. (Community member)

One example is the events that are continuing to "bubble up" in the community such as the Friday Night Food Truck events, some of which are not connected to Fab Feathy. Community members talked about the powerful role modelling that took place during Fab Feathy's tenure, and how community members saw others taking on leadership roles and identified this as a possibility for themselves.

I think people seeing that normal people can run events like that, has given a little bit of confidence that maybe we could run an event... (Community member)

Community centre as a hub of CLD

Despite Fab Feathy's exit, its legacy is present in the invigorated Community Centre, now regarded as a nexus for community development. The Fab Feathy facilitators were based at the community centre, and a new manager who worked in close collaboration with the outgoing facilitator has injected fresh energy into the Centre, embodying Fab Feathy's collaborative spirit. Despite the partnership's conclusion, the Community Centre remains a site of innovation and connection. One example of this is its current role as a fundholder for a dozen community initiatives. Reflecting on the Community Centre's transformation, a community member noted:

This Community Centre is thriving... [and] it's a shame that Fab Feathy is no longer here. However, it's left this legacy of a thriving Community Centre, connection with Council, community development... And that's awesome. (Community member)

The place-based nature of Fab Feathy appears to have enhanced the visibility of the Community Centre, extending its reach to a wider segment of the community. People now see it as an accessible practical resource to support community action. However, there is a concern that assuming the responsibility for CLD for Featherston may place an unsustainable workload on the centre manager.

The good thing about Fab Feathy being at the Community Centre is people knew they were here so whether they know it's still around or not, they will still come here and ask and [centre manager] and they will be able to help them out I reckon. (Community member)

Physical assets are an important, tangible legacy

Physical assets and infrastructure, such as, the Windy Wheels cycle track and community garden stand as tangible legacies of the community's collaborative efforts supported by Fab Feathy. These assets serve as visible reminders of the positive changes brought about by the partnership and are frequently cited by community members when discussing its sustained impacts. While the Featherston partnership primarily focused on facilitator resources, the significance of physical assets is notable. Some community members expressed that the lack of tangible structures may have affected certain residents' perception of the partnership's impact. However, these assets are valued for fostering a sense of community ownership and have the potential to attract additional activities and events while enhancing the overall wellbeing and enjoyment of community members, the Foodbank chiller infrastructure being one such example:

And those investments... these are ongoing things that don't have an end of life as such. Foodbanks will always be a requirement. So, the assets that we were able to procure enable us to keep that operation ticking over for perpetuity.
(Community member)

For instance, the bike track both provides a physical amenity and serves as the first phase in a series of ambitious projects involving other community organisations, such as a bike repair hub in partnership with Ā Mua and ongoing events. There is also aspiration of eventual connection to wider Wairarapa cycling infrastructure, including the proposed Moana Trail. A community member that led this project described it as a “nursery” for broader aspirations for cycling in Featherston. Additionally, the track infrastructure funded through Fab Feathy is designed to be low maintenance to prevent it from becoming a financial burden on the school or community. Looking ahead, community members stressed the importance of sustaining annual events to commemorate achievements and showcase ongoing initiatives. These events were seen to be important as platforms for recognition, fostering community pride and maintaining momentum.

Impacts on wellbeing of the community

Community wellbeing, as defined by the interviewed community members, is fundamentally rooted in relationships, connectivity, and a sense of belonging. It encompasses having a robust support network to lean on in times of need, thereby mitigating feelings of isolation and ensuring that nobody feels unsupported. Moreover, it involves avenues for active participation and contribution within the community fabric. The initiatives facilitated by Fab Feathy, which fostered cohesion, pride, and a sense of belonging, were consistently associated with the overall wellbeing of both individuals and the community at large.

Relationships are so important for community health and individual wellbeing.
(Community member)

The residents unanimously attested that the collaborative efforts spearheaded by Fab Feathy have significantly enhanced wellbeing in Featherston. They particularly underscored Fab Feathy's support for essential community institutions such as the Foodbank and Community Centre, which serve as vital pillars for nurturing individual and collective wellbeing. Support for karakia mornings led by health centre staff was a further example highlighted. Many residents highlighted Fab Feathy's role, especially during the challenging periods of Covid-19 lockdowns, in forging connections with vulnerable or isolated members of the community who may have otherwise gone unnoticed or underserved. Noteworthy efforts during the pandemic included upgrading the Foodbank's infrastructure to enhance its capacity, orchestrating the delivery of food parcels, actively reaching out to individuals to extend assistance, and providing and distributing firewood during winter months.

We got seven loads of firewood delivered to seven of our families in one day - incredible. And that's what I mean about that community, they just looked after themselves. Well, they didn't look after themselves, everyone looked after each other. (Community member)

Community members articulated how Featherston has evolved into a more resilient community over time, attributing this resilience to strengthened connections and an amplified awareness of each other's needs and

circumstances. They recounted forging enduring friendships through projects and how residents have transitioned into becoming "familiar faces" within the community landscape.

Realisation of aspirations

Fab Feathy's partnership has clearly supported good progress towards some aspiration areas. For example, building community is clearly well realised and good progress also looks to have been made in valuing and protecting the natural environment through collaboration with and support of several local groups. However other aspirations, such as having the amenities and infrastructure to be a liveable town are significant and complex goals, and community members reflected that they were difficult to achieve with the timeframe, resources, and expertise available.

In reflecting on achievement of aspirations, residents noted shifts in energy and action over the partnership period, with high energy and expectations of what partnership with Hāpai Hapori might achieve for Featherston in the early phases of work. For some this was followed by frustration when barriers were encountered, and progress did not meet expectations. However, there was frequent reflection that even when initial goals were not met, there were lots of positive "spinoffs" and "self-seeded initiatives" because of those early conversations and energy. When asked to reflect on the communities' achievement of their aspirations, one community member used a numerical scale:

I would say eight [out of ten]. It's quite realistic to the conditions [of what's achievable]. I think they gave it a really good go and achieved a lot of things and other things are still petering along slowly, but I think they'll get there. Yeah, it's pretty good. (Community member)

A range of factors were seen to have influenced Featherston's achievement of aspirations. Success factors include facilitator resource with the right mix of abilities, soft skills, and commitment to community-led development, and events were valuable at delivering 'quick wins' and building momentum. Furthermore, Fab Feathy's partnership with the Community Centre enabled much valuable skills-sharing and a physical home for CLD in Featherston

which is continuing to bear fruit. Challenges have included the time it took for CLD to be socialised within the community, and therefore a lack of clarity among some community members about Fab Feathy's role. Shifts in community energy during the partnership period and the disruption brought by the Covid-19 pandemic were also seen to have impacted the community reaching its aspirations.

Conclusion

Fab Feathy's inclusive approach reached and engaged a diverse cross-section of the community and fostered a sense of belonging and community pride. While Fab Feathy as an entity has come to an end, there is little doubt that a clear legacy remains in the tangible outcomes of its initiatives, and in the lasting connections and sense of community it cultivated within Featherston. Fab Feathy has also contributed to a thriving Community Centre that is continuing to nurture CLD approaches and initiatives. The challenge will be how the community maintains the clear sense of momentum that was achieved into the future.



