



The realities and aspirations of people experiencing food insecurity in Tāmaki Makaurau

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Introduction

Food insecurity continues to affect significant numbers of people in New Zealand, threatening physical and mental health and the ability to thrive or fulfil wellbeing. Following a survey engaging with over 600 food-insecure people, this study presents the analyses of open-ended survey responses about participants' food insecurity experiences and their future goals and dreams.

The research shows that many people experiencing food insecurity aspire to fulfilling employment, financial security, and a good life for their whānau. Findings highlight how aspirations persist in the face of significant challenges and how those experiencing food insecurity are systematically constrained in their ability to achieve these. These findings indicate that current welfare policy settings are at odds with the Government's focus on wellbeing, formalised in the [Treasury's Living Standards Framework](#) and consecutive 'Wellbeing Budgets'.

Key Contributions

- Addresses the experiences of food insecure people on a large scale, conveying the magnitude and impact of this for policy
- Research findings that shift beyond the realities of those who are food insecure to examine their aspirations
- Findings that counter neo-liberal claims that people experiencing poverty lack ambition

Aims

This project aimed to surface the experiences of individuals with extreme food security needs, exploring the relationship between food insecurity and wellbeing. The research uses a collaborative and anti-deficit framework and asks, 'What are the realities and aspirations of people accessing food assistance through the Mission?'

Acknowledging the lived realities of food insecurity, the research considers the information provided by participants to be invaluable expertise, underscoring the responsibility to represent their knowledge with integrity, highlighting the power embedded in food insecure communities and opportunities for policies to overcome food insecurity.

Findings

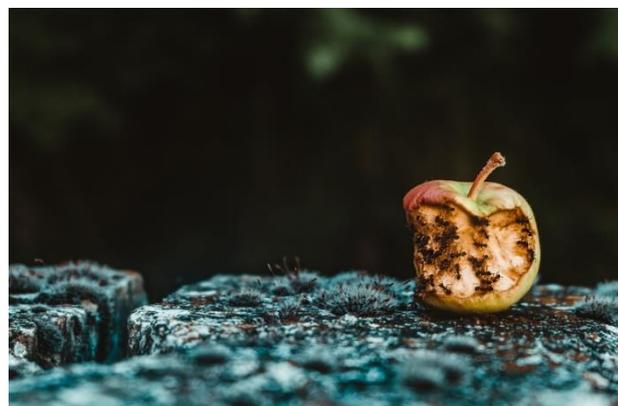
"What are the main reasons you do not have enough money for food?":

- **83% reported the cost of living exceeded their income.** Main costs mentioned were bills and rent, providing for children, or inadequate government support resulting in not having enough money for food.
- 14% listed food insecurity as due to **unsatisfactory employment circumstances**, such as precarious employment, inadequate work hours available, low or minimum wages, or being unable to find work.



Figure 1. Domain summary themes for respondents' main reasons for food insecurity.

- 13% reported **challenging relationship circumstances**, including a lack of support from a partner, bereavement, or social obligations to share resources including childcare.
- **7% provided responses concerning medical, physical or mental health** conditions preventing engagement with full-time working hours or adequate work availability, while **5% reported institutional barriers** preventing them from accessing benefits.
- **5% identified unexpected life events** leading to sudden loss of income, and the **impact of addiction listed by 3% and financial literacy by 2%.**



“In your own words, could you please share three goals and dreams in your life?”:

- **53% sought improved employment circumstances:** finding work or achieving specific career aspirations.
- **36% had goals to improve financial circumstances:** either having enough money to get by, gain wealth, accumulate savings, maintain stability or reduce debt.
- **31% had improved wellness aims:** improving general health, resolving medical conditions or feelings about themselves or their lives.
- **30% wished to see their whānau fulfilled:** bettering the circumstances of children or grandchildren or to provide for whānau. **16% sought improved relationships:** re-establishing connections, having a family, retaining care of children, maintaining friendships.
- **21% sought to have basic needs of survival met:** securing food for themselves and whānau, essential clothing for children, or to be able to afford housing and utilities.
- **17% sought material asset ownership:** a house or vehicle, often linking this to their children’s wellbeing.
- **15% sought further education or new skills,** 13% personal development goals: learning and higher education, upskilling, gaining a driver’s licence, ensuring children were in education, being a positive role model.
- **12% sought an improved sense of home:** of belonging, security, a warm home or safe and stable future, while **6% wanted to contribute to a wider community,** reciprocate care or support.
- **8% wished to pursue personal interests:** engage in activities, hobbies, and interests, including getaways with whānau or growing their own food.

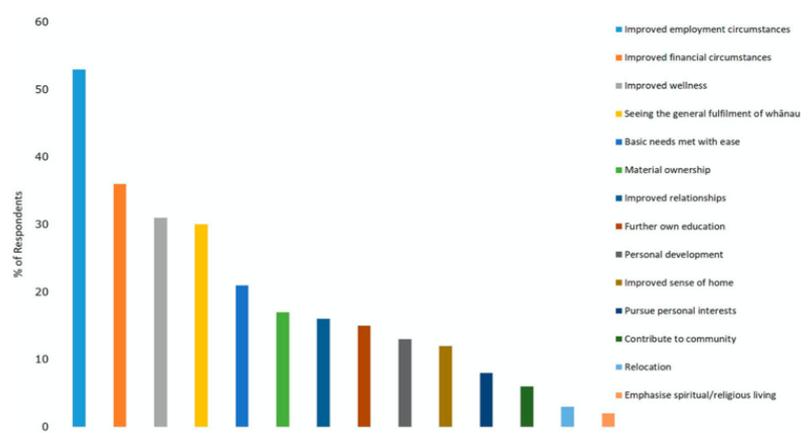


Figure 2. Domain summary themes for respondents’ goals and dreams.

Key Policy Recommendations

- A more holistic approach to welfare support – consider the conditions of paid work in relation to an individual’s circumstances
- Apply the Living Standards Framework to welfare policy by extending the definition of wellbeing to more than just employment
- Raise core benefits, rather than relying on supplements
- Shift welfare policy away from a baseline of distrust and sanctions to one of trust
- Make childcare more accessible
- Simplify bureaucratic processes for accessing welfare

To find out more about this research, please visit [Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online](#)

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