

Te Kōpuni Kāinga o Te Tau Ihu
Top of the South Neighbourhood Support
Strengthening neighbourhoods, connecting communities



Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to your 2022-23 annual plan. We would like to speak to our submission during hearings.

Marlborough District Council's Long-term plan has a vision of a strong community that is passionate about participating, connecting with and helping shape our future; a diverse, inclusive, community that is welcoming, and enjoys opportunities to connect, live, learn, work and play in this vibrant place.

Te Kōpuni Kāinga o Te Tau Ihu - Top of the South Neighbourhood Support strengthens neighbourhoods and connects communities in ways that improve the lives of people and whānau. We have over 17,000 registered members. We champion social cohesion and engagement. We bridge digital division by connecting people with locals in their area that share key information in ways appropriate to their needs. We improve safety and resilience through connection. We have memorandum of understandings with NZ Police and Fire and Emergency NZ. We are truly inclusive – everyone in the community can become a member, and our membership, like the events and workshops we provide, is free. We believe that a strong, connected and resilient community strengthens the economy, protects our environment and improves wellbeing.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the adage that it's not what you know but who you know that matters most is still relevant. For success, such as gaining employment, finding housing and accessing services, having a strong network of personal contacts helps more than any website or information sheet. Being a neighbour or friend of a friend holds weight. Top of the South Neighbourhood Support is a real-life social network. We encourage locals to get to know one another, help each other out when needed, and engage with their community. We provide the tools and resources to make it easy for people to connect. We understand and champion the values manaakitanga and whanaungatanga.

Neighbourhood Support had previously been administered by Marlborough District Council, from within the Civil Defence Emergency Management Group. Council acknowledged that neighbours are more likely to be first responders in adverse events, assisting one another when 'official' responders may be overwhelmed, cut-off or delayed. Over time membership dwindled as EM staff focussed on responses with little time for reduction or readiness activities. By the beginning of the pandemic, after years of droughts, floods, earthquakes and fires, activity had become dormant. At a time that hundreds of active Neighbourhood Support road and neighbourhood groups in Nelson and Tasman were able to mobilise to provide a local, street-level community response to support one another during the initial lock-down, Marlborough's inactive network reduced the community capability.

In July 2020, Top of the South Neighbourhood Support Charitable Trust was formed from groups in Nelson and Tasman, and after discussions with Marlborough District Council, in December 2020 took over the responsibilities for Neighbourhood Support in Marlborough with the understanding that we would be receiving funding from council to contribute towards local operating costs while we re-established in the region and built a sustainable funding model. A year later, in 2021 this funding

was restricted to the heavily oversubscribed MDC Community Grant where we received a small grant representing around 5% of our projected annual operating costs for Marlborough.

Top of the South Neighbourhood Support staff are active partners in emergency management. Our staff members have worked across the '4 r's of emergency management' at a local, regional and national level, contributing to national plans, and the development of the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) third edition (currently used).

Our Marlborough area coordinator was actively involved in the response to the 2021 flooding event, working in the EOC supporting the Welfare function, providing a valuable connection to affected local community members. Top of the South Neighbourhood Support's financial contribution to the Emergency Management response in staff hours exceeded the annual community grant we received. The area coordinator was subsequently employed on a now completed, fixed-term, part-time basis by the council in a recovery role, utilising the networks created during her 15 hours per week with Neighbourhood Support.

We are active members of community steering and engagement groups such as Safe and Sound Marlborough. We chair the steering committee for the Harakeke Marlborough connectedness project, a collaborative community-council initiative that aims to overcome loneliness and increase the wellbeing and engagement of people across the region. We lead Neighbours Day Aotearoa activities, provide free resilience training and support people in community-led initiatives.

We have invested in technology to allow members to create groups, record resources and household specific needs or challenges that they would incur during emergencies (e.g., disability, language barriers, living alone) and distribute communications. We've encouraged our members to connect with neighbours or people in their network that don't have access to online services, to provide important information and assist them to access safe alternatives. We continue to provide our members with the option of receiving printed copies of our newsletter to ensure that as many community members as possible have access to our information, resources and support.

In response to community transmission of COVID, we partnered with Community Patrols to provide a free, police-vetted script drop-off service for pharmacies affected by delivery staff disruptions or challenged by rural deliveries. NMDHB noted that 11 out of 14 pharmacies in the region are in Blenheim, saw the challenge facing people living in Havelock, Seddon and Ward without access to transportation or additional support and acknowledged the reach of our membership base and network. We were contracted to provide community level support in Nelson and Tasman by Nelson City Council and Tasman District Council to encourage a local-level response to those struggling to engage with, or outside of the criteria for central government assistance. This contract extended to assisting community members to connect safely in community enhancing activities. Although unfunded, we offered to extend this service to Marlborough District Council. The pandemic, while initially bringing people together under a unified purpose, has over the past 12 months fractured several social connections. Economic pressures have forced a cost-of-living crisis. It's time for us to help our community heal.

Due to increased demand, including from smaller towns and rural areas, we have increased Marlborough area coordination and support from 15 to 60 hours per week. We have relocated from the Emergency Operations Centre in Wither Road to the Marlborough Community Centre, providing an accessible location for members of the public to engage with our services. Increased area coordination hours are enabling our staff to support groups in Havelock, Picton, Renwick, Seddon and the Marlborough Sounds to establish and connect. It will also provide for the implementation of

the Harekeke Connection project. We will be able to bring the voices of our members to more community initiatives, such as the Smart + Connected groups and continue our work with youth, ethnic groups and older persons.

The MDC Long Term Plan 2021-2031 acknowledges that advocating for the needs of the community sector is an ongoing issue and that strengthening relationships with key organisations will build the capacity of the sector.

Top of the South Neighbourhood Support's strategic goals and services align with MDC Community support objectives. Our partnership with Police underpins our focus on community safety. Our participation in community-based events makes a positive contribution to wellbeing and enhances social cohesion. We promote environmentally sound practices in homes that encourage energy efficiency. We support and champion community-led improvement initiatives such as smart and connected communities.

We can support MDC to navigate the emerging issue of changing demographics by establishing, supporting and maintaining local-level, informal neighbourhood and community groups that reflect the demographics of the community, helping them to identify solutions to challenges and supporting their engagement with council.

Partnership with Top of the South Neighbourhood Support not only benefits community members, but it also supports council at a local-level to access people and whānau that might otherwise not engage with local government.

To ensure a sustainable funding model for Marlborough, we need time to engage with local business to build sponsorship relationships, access philanthropy and develop fundraising activities, all while continuing to deliver services. We anticipate that this will take approximately three to five years.

In the meantime, we are at risk of losing our investment of the past 18 months at a time when all of Marlborough most needs the work of Top of the South Neighbourhood Support.

Partnership and contracting of our services will directly support MDC community goals, without the burden of recruitment, training, management or retention in a highly competitive labour market. We will also continue to be a trained, ready source of support when mobilised to support the emergency management group.

We ask that Marlborough District Council invests in the relationship we formed in December 2020 with a three-year funding commitment for Marlborough operational costs, equivalent to the cost of 1.5 FTE. This would be consistent with investments made by Nelson City Council and Tasman District Council for the services provided in their regions and ensure that our services can continue to support the people and communities of Marlborough at a level comparable to the rest of Te Tau Ihu. The balance of operational costs would be met by other grants, philanthropy, sponsorship and fundraising.

We look forward to the opportunity to speak to our submission and welcome any questions.