

Foodstuffs North Island

IMPACT

FINALIST



THE STORY

Poverty and financial hardship can have a massive impact on people's ability to get to a job and engage effectively at work, home and in their communities.

By setting up, partnering with social supermarkets and providing ongoing support, Foodstuffs North Island is giving mana to people facing food insecurity and removing a barrier that prevents them from improving their own financial situation and making a positive contribution to the New Zealand economy.

Foodstuffs North Island is a New Zealand-owned co-operative with 323 owner operated stores in communities across Te Ika-a-Maui operating under Four Square, New World, PAK'nSAVE, and Gilmours brands.

Traditional food banks have been around for decades, says Head of Social Supermarkets Willa Hand, but with a pre-prepared food pack it may not always meet a family's nutritional or cultural needs.

"Those seeking help are excluded from the dignified, social experience of going to the supermarket and choosing their own groceries."

To provide access to food in a more supportive way, Foodstuffs has partnered with community organisations to set up 12 social supermarkets across the North Island.

Social supermarkets are designed to look and feel exactly like a supermarket, so customers get the same experience. Items are ‘purchased’ using a points-based system which is set up to mirror relative prices in store, so when customers go back into retail shopping, they won’t get a bill shock.

“We’re an active partner, but we do not own social supermarkets – they are owned by the community organisations we partner with,” Willa says.

These include Wellington City Mission, Te Kahu Oranga Whānau (a collective of iwi and Māori organisations) in Te Hiku o te Ika (the Far North), Buttabeen Motivation in Tokoroa, 155 Whare Āwhina in Whangārei, Linkt Community Trust in Tauranga, Visionwest and Māngere Budgeting Services in Auckland, Palmerston North Methodist Social Services, Nourished for Nil in Napier, Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki in Paeroa, Ngāti Toa Rangatira in Porirua and Waireki Whanau mentoring in Whakatane.

The benefit of partnering with community groups is that they understand where there is the greatest need and can provide social supermarket users with access to additional services and support.

“We look for existing foodbank organisations because they understand about the food chain and supply, and we work with them to find a suitable location if they don’t already have one,” says Willa.

“Often our discussions take months to ensure we are setting our partners up for long-term sustainable success and they truly understand the operating model and what it means for their community.

Each partnership is formalised through a three-year agreement. Foodstuffs North Island leads the fit-out and store build, donating the equipment for and tailoring the social supermarket look and feel to meet the needs of the community. The co-op also trains the community partners team, sets up their point-of-sale system and provides business-in-a-box resources to support the partner to operate like a supermarket.

The partner is also provided with a buddy store, a local New World or PAK’nSAVE, who commits to providing ongoing training, support and advice at a local level. Foodstuffs connects the partner with suppliers and stages product donations over three years.

“We fully stock the supermarket to begin with and heavily subsidise products in the long-term.”

“In a country like New Zealand, no one should be going hungry.”

Foodstuffs also promotes the social supermarkets to their suppliers and makes it easy for them to get involved, although there is no pressure to do so.

Since the first social supermarket opened in March 2018, more than 34,000 whānau have been supported to fill their trolley and cupboards, putting about \$4.8million dollars of value straight into the hands of those who need it most. On average, shoppers buy 29 items and spend \$160 in value (using a points-based system).

A recent Impact Lab Report on Wellington City Mission’s Social Supermarket concluded that every \$1 invested generates \$3.40 of measurable good to New Zealand.

For the people using the service, the impact is life changing.

One of the clients at the Ōtūmoetai Social Supermarket in Tauranga says, “I am so grateful for the services and help that is run by these amazing people. Always look forward to my visits as you are welcomed with open arms and a positive, happy attitude!”

Another anonymous client says, “I am blown away by your generosity. Sorry for crying but you made my day. I have worked all my life and have always been able to provide for my family. But due to health issues, I have been unable to work. I never thought I’d be in a position to ask for help... we are so grateful.”

The initiative also resonates with Foodstuffs employees, with one commenting, “I’m proud that Foodstuffs North Island has an initiative like social supermarkets. It makes me feel proud to work here and to know we are always doing everything for those that are doing it tough.”

There are now six team members working fulltime on the social supermarkets initiative and Willa says Foodstuffs goal is to get to 25 supermarkets by 2026.



‘Ideally there won’t be a need for social supermarkets in future, but we’ll continue to grow this initiative if there is. In a country like New Zealand, no one should be going hungry.’