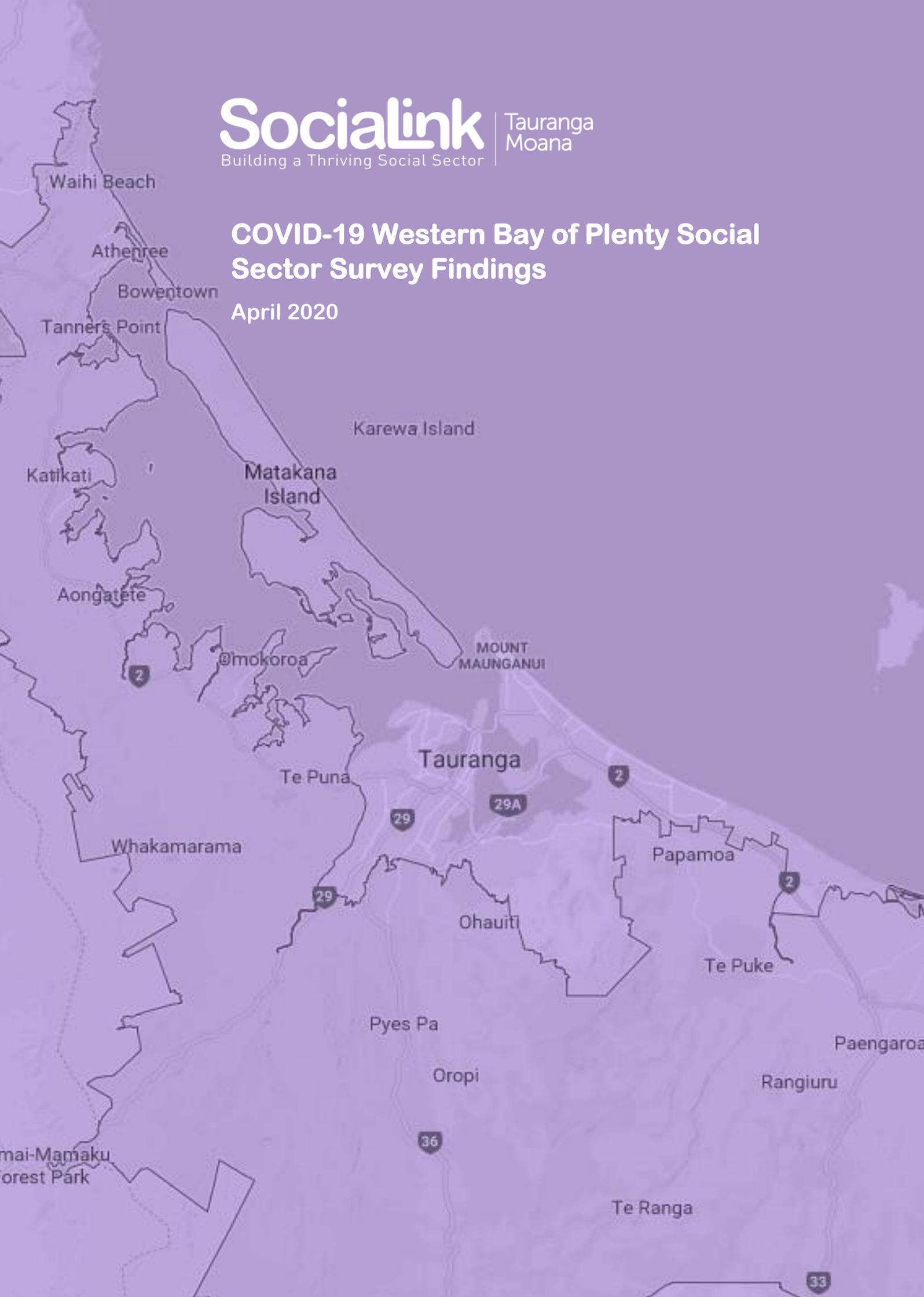


COVID-19 Western Bay of Plenty Social Sector Survey Findings

April 2020





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INTRODUCTION

SocialLink wished to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on Western Bay of Plenty community and social service agencies and the communities they work with, in order to inform and advocate to government and funders. To achieve this, SocialLink developed, distributed and compiled the findings of a survey investigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency response.

SocialLink is an umbrella organisation that serves to support and empower the social and community sector in the Western Bay of Plenty. We provide one-on-one support to organisations, capability building, support organisations to collaborate, undertake research and advocacy and manage a co-working space for not-for-profits, The Kollektive. For more information see www.sociallink.org.nz.

The following sections of this report outline the methodology and findings of the survey, including summarising qualitative responses into themes.

METHOD

SocialLink staff developed an online survey, piloted the survey with 5 organisations and then emailed the survey to 168 social sector agency manager contacts. An electronic link to the survey was also made available on SocialLink's Facebook page and shared via SocialLink's newsletter. The survey was open for responses between the 14th – 28th April 2020 (Weeks 3-4 of New Zealand Level 4 Lockdown).

Response

104 responses were received - 55 responses from organisation managers emailed a survey, 48 through weblinks to the survey. At least 85 individual agencies were identified as responding¹.

1.

¹ Providing the name of the organisation was optional for respondents – 12 respondents chose not to provide the name of their agency, so the number of additional agencies these responses represented is unknown.

RESULTS

Profile of Agencies

A wide variety of community sector agencies were represented in the survey responses received including health and disability support services (33%), services for children (30%), education services (31%), community development (30%), counselling/therapy (27%), mental health and addiction issues (25%) and provision of food/kai (16%). Responses were received from 11 respondents delivering Kaupapa Māori service (12% of responses)².

Fifty-five percent of organisations (n=50)¹ provided services that were available to all, 30% were services targeted to people with disabilities or particular health conditions, 19% were targeted to children, 12% to seniors, 8% provided services targeted to Māori.

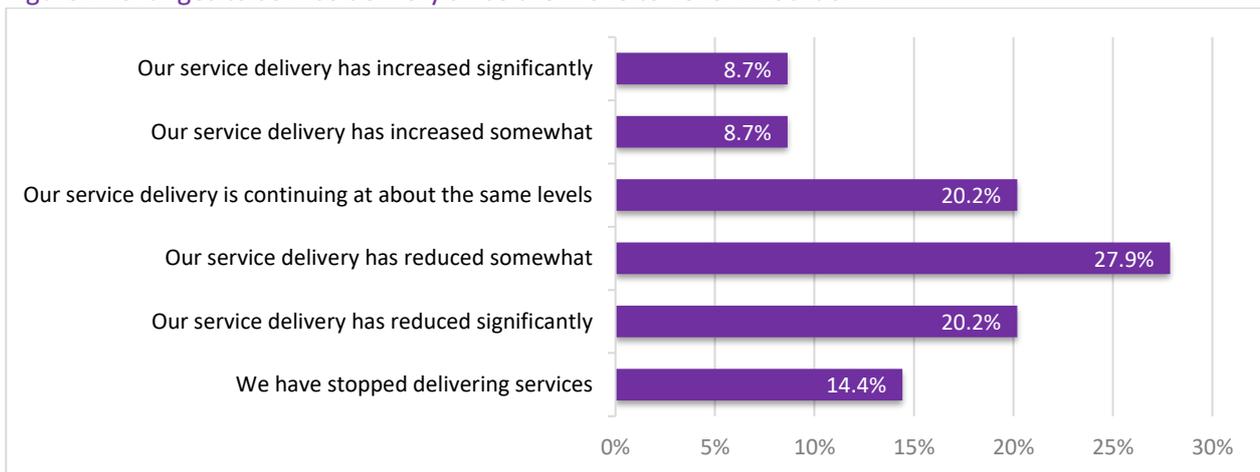
Forty percent of respondents (n=42) reported their organisation had been designated an essential service during the COVID-19 emergency, 9% (n=9) were unsure of their agency designation.

Changes to Service Delivery

Fourteen percent (n= 15 respondents) reported that their organisations had stopped delivering services altogether since the COVID-19 Level 4 Lockdown, with a further 50% having either significantly reduced services (n=21) or reduced their services somewhat (n=29). For the remaining respondents (17.5% 18 respondents), the lockdown had resulted in an increase in service delivery in their organisation.

Organisations who reported they had stopped delivering services included those who delivered services to seniors, sports & recreation providers, education support agencies and environmental agencies.

Figure 1: Changes to service delivery since the move to Level 4 Lockdown



² Respondents could choose more than one response option, so percentages will total more than 100.

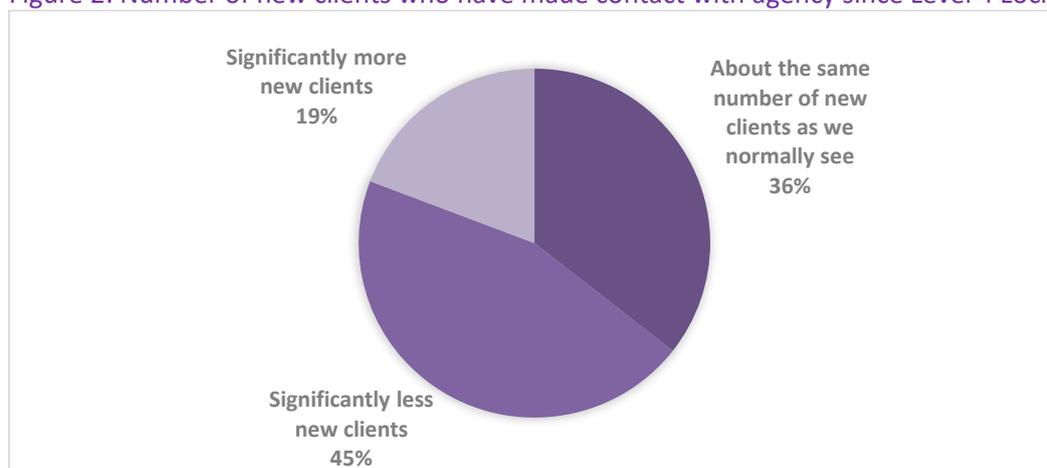
Most of the agencies whose services had increased during lockdown were involved in providing food within communities, were working with people who were homeless or were Kaupapa Māori organisations providing an array of services to whānau.

As one respondent reported:

“[There has been an] Increase in whānau seeking food from our foodbank. Engagement processes work well online over the phone and by texts. A core team has been set up to function in the building at this time. Other staff at home doing admin and supporting us.”

While many agencies (45%, n=47) have seen a decrease in new clients making contact with their agency since the lockdown, nearly one in five (n=20) respondents reported their organisation as having seen an increase in clients over this time.

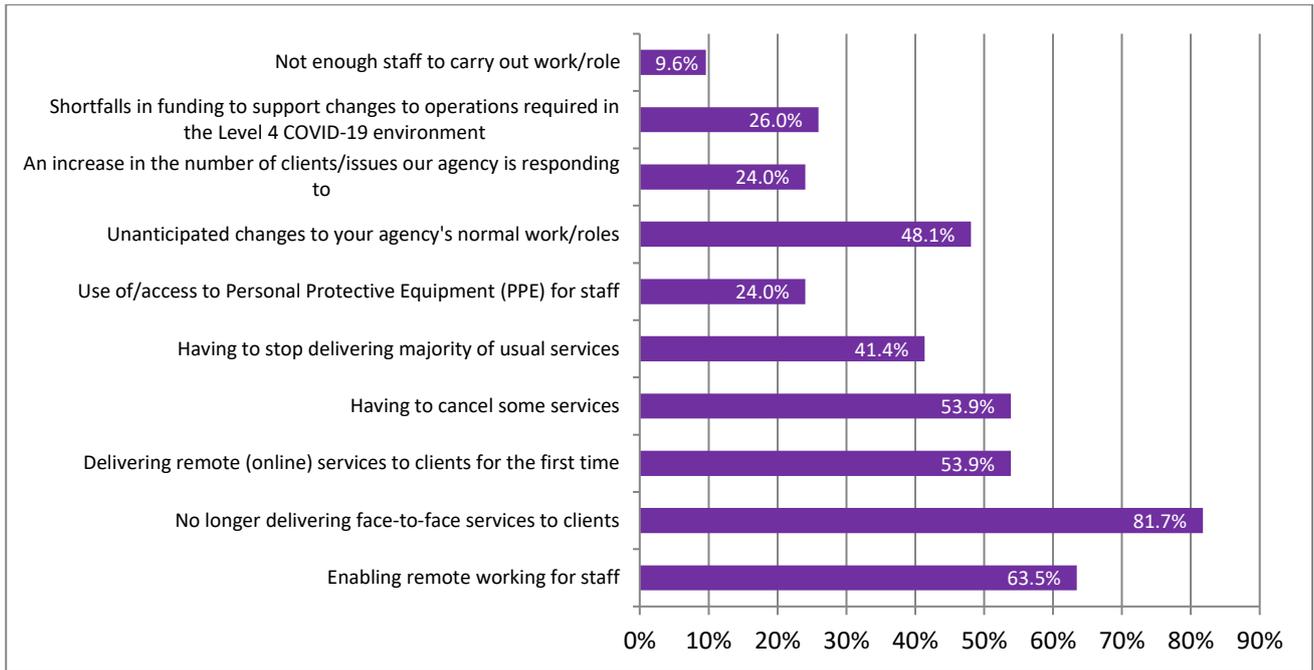
Figure 2: Number of new clients who have made contact with agency since Level 4 Lockdown



A range of **new issues** had impacted most organisations since the COVID-19 lockdown – with having to stop face-to-face services the most often reported change (82% of respondents, n=85), followed by enabling remote working for staff (63%), starting online client services for the first time (53%) and having to cancel some services.



Figure 3: New issues impacting organisations since moving to Level 4 Lockdown



As one agency reported:

“As our mahi is predominantly kanohi ki te kanohi, we have had to adjust the way we deliver service to clients and communicate with each other in this time. Our staff are amazingly responsive and are doing whatever is needed to ensure our clients are well supported and new responses can be implemented quickly.”

Other agencies reported difficulties transitioning to delivering remote services on short notice, with new constraints, placing services and staff under stress:

“Inability or difficulty of many staff to work from home - due to many reasons including family responsibilities, lack of equipment including specific to people's physical needs (staff with disabilities/injuries unable to access larger screens, sit/stand desks, double screens etc), poor connectivity. Additional pressure on remaining staff to pick up the load and doing long hours. Additional time needed to organise even simple logistical tasks such as courier pickup/delivery for PPE - taking hours of negotiating with courier companies despite our organisation being an essential service.”

Despite many challenges, respondents also reported significant innovation, flexibility and responsiveness in how staff have responded to the new requirements:

“Our role dynamics have somewhat changed but it has been to the betterment of our agency as we all work together in our team to do what is necessary to meet the demand at this time.”

“Has generated many new creative ways to support people to be more independent and maintain social distancing”



The Level 4 Lockdown had impacted on the types of services organisations were continuing to offer and reflected the changing needs within communities over this time. Ten percent of agencies had taken on a role of delivering groceries/medications or medical supplies to households during the lockdown. Over a third of agencies (n=36) have stopped providing group support during lockdown. One in five organisations (n=21) are providing more food parcels and meals to their communities. While almost half of respondents reported their organisations were providing similar (n=33) or an increased amount (n=16) of one-one support, 14 respondents reported they had stopped providing this service.

Table 1: Changes to level and types of services being delivered by Social Sector Organisations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Provision of information, advice and resources	5.0% 5	4.0% 4	36.0% 36	37.0% 37	18.0% 18	3.0% 3	100
On-to-one support	4.0% 4	13.9% 14	32.7% 33	15.8% 16	30.7% 31	4.0% 4	101
Group support (delivered in a group process)	2.1% 2	37.1% 36	16.5% 16	14.4% 14	19.6% 19	11.3% 11	97
Provision of food parcels/meals	5.0% 5	8.0% 8	9.0% 9	21.0% 21	7.0% 7	51.0% 51	100
Provision of emergency accommodation	1.0% 1	0.0% 0	6.1% 6	7.1% 7	4.1% 4	81.6% 80	98
Delivery of groceries / medications / medical supplies	10.2% 10	5.1% 5	7.1% 7	18.4% 18	2.0% 2	60.2% 59	98
Advocacy for clients (with government agencies etc)	2.0% 2	2.0% 2	32.7% 32	17.3% 17	20.4% 20	28.6% 28	98

- Legend:**
1. Have **started** providing this service (for first time)
 2. Have **stopped** providing this service
 3. **Continuing** to provide this service (at same level)
 4. Is **providing more** of this service
 5. Is **providing less** of this service
 6. Has **never provided** this service

The increasing needs of families has meant more people in the community needing support with basic needs, such as food parcels.

“Three days per week are basically used to pick-up and drop off resources to whānau and clients. One day per week is used to makeup 200 packs of takeaway meals for homeless people delivered as far afield as Papamoa, Pyes Pa and surrounding areas. Where we would normally cater, to up to 40 people [this] has increased to 200 meals. Resource requirements both human and physical have increased.”

“Our social workers are providing more additional support to families to help them with grocery and medical basics. We are collaborating with medical providers to bring a ‘pop-up’ clinic to our whānau to address health and wellbeing needs. All of our other supports continue to operate at the same if not higher level.”

The lockdown has also resulted in increased collaboration with other agencies to ensure community needs are being met.

“[We have] entered into a partnership with three other community organisations and our local supermarket to deliver groceries to the most vulnerable.”

“[Our agency] has effectively stopped since lockdown but has provided financial support to three other organisations [providing community kai].”

“A lot more time is currently spent on collaborative groups to try and establish other spaces to support victims during the lockdown.”

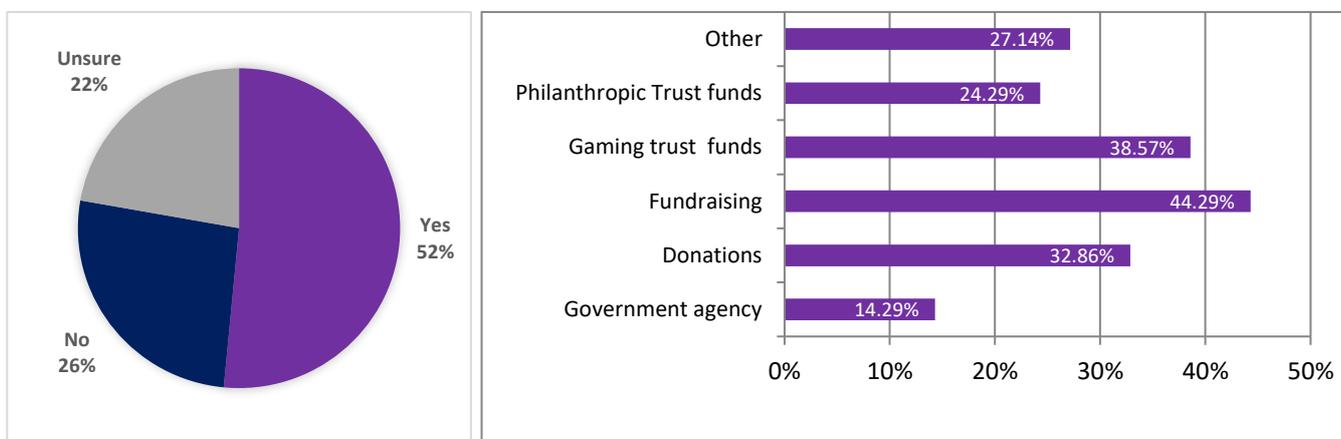
Another respondent shared their agency’s story of delivering something totally new, to meet new needs for connection and wellbeing.

“We are running daily live fitness videos for clients and the general public to engage in (to stay connected and get active). This is a totally new service we have never provided.”

Funding

Over half of respondents (n=51, 52%) reported an actual or anticipated reduction in their organisation’s income, with a further 21 uncertain about future funding.

Figure 5: Respondents reporting an actual/anticipated reduction in funding from particular funding sources



Of those who reported they believed income would be impacted, 31 (44%) predicted a likely decrease in fundraising, 23 (33%) in donations and 27 (39%) believed gaming trust funds were likely to decrease. Many organisations expressed their concern about the financial implications of COVID-19 on both short-term and long-term financial viability.

“Our main source of income was a fee-based service which was stopped at Level 3 and won't start up again until we move to Level 2. We anticipate we won't receive priority funding compared to other agencies who have been able to continue to provide services throughout lockdown.”

“Most of our donors have stopped donating since lockdown.”

“Currently no reduction so we don't qualify for the 12-week wage subsidy, but our workload has gone up which is unfunded. Going forward huge concerns about our funding as the (1) emphasis is on money for foodbanks and similar and (2) there's likely to be less funding for other initiatives and (3) the financial impact on funders will hit home in 6-24 months.”

“Our main street appeal in May has been cancelled. Our family stores have had to close, they are a major source of our operational funding.”

“Already 3 declined applications, that are normally regular and 7 (out of 10 I was looking at at the time) - funders have 'closed/in hiatus'.”

Community Issues

Social sector organisations work closely with particular groups in the community, who are often vulnerable. Respondents were asked about whether their agencies were seeing an increase in particular (or new) community issues.

Table 2: Community Issues seen by Social Sector Agencies during Lockdown

	1. SAME NO.	2. INCREASED	3. FEWER	4. N/A NOT SEEING	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Financial difficulties	19.1% 17	42.7% 38	4.5% 4	33.7% 30	89
Family violence	20.7% 18	21.8% 19	3.4% 3	56.3% 49	87
Mental Health issues	25.8% 23	41.6% 37	4.5% 4	28.1% 25	89
Drug and Alcohol issues	18.2% 16	23.9% 21	8.0% 7	50.0% 44	88
Housing / Accommodation issues	23.6% 21	28.1% 25	4.5% 4	44.9% 40	89
Isolation/loneliness	11.0% 10	62.6% 57	6.6% 6	19.8% 18	91
Health concerns	28.1% 25	36.0% 32	6.7% 6	29.2% 26	89
Worries about the COVID-19 virus	7.9% 7	68.5% 61	5.6% 5	19.1% 17	89
Specific difficulties related to Lockdown	5.6% 5	69.7% 62	6.7% 6	19.1% 17	89

Client worries about the COVID-19 virus (69%) and specific difficulties related to being in lockdown (70%) were being seen by most agencies. For particular groups - those with pre-existing health conditions or identified as “vulnerable” because they were over 70 years – the pandemic emergency has been a genuinely concerning time.

“Many of the older population (70+) are presenting issues of questioning their value and worth to society. Many are fit and healthy but feel they are being made to feel no longer an essential part of community and offer nothing to the community. Majority have worked all their lives but are feeling like they are an unwanted appendage.”

“Elderly people with early dementia are struggling to understand why family are not visiting. They can’t see or hear the virus, so it is hard for them to understand.”

“We have clients who are waiting for surgery/diagnostic testing who have to cope with uncertainty around this alongside everything else. We are starting to see clients who are having to go through the grieving process (death of a family member) in the context of their own health issues and with the absence of the usual rituals that allow for grieving for their loss. Some have been left feeling very alone nursing their loved one during lockdown/rahui.”



Having to close our drop-in centre means [older] people cannot come and get information.... only half of our members are online. We have had to cancel our monthly forums and outings, designed to inform, educate and alleviate loneliness, and other social opportunities for seniors to gather and socialise over cuppas. Finally, our quarterly magazine is unlikely to be published and so another isolation-breaker does not reach those not online.

While 37 respondents (41%) noted an increase in mental health issues, some suggested that we may also be seeing “the calm before the storm”. Other respondents reported on substance abuse and addiction issues and family violence as being exacerbated during lockdown.

“Addiction does not go into lockdown. More families are having to refuse entry back into their bubble by loved ones who have been out using for a period of time. More stress on whānau.”

“Victims being in lock down with perpetrators of DV creates additional challenges to manage their safety, and that of their children. It is also more difficult to engage.”

“Protection Orders that are granted are not being served. Police Safety Order's less likely to be issued. Threshold for [PO] breaches increased. More difficult to have application for new protection orders heard.”

“Very concerned there will be a massive increase once lockdown ends.”

The economic impacts on communities of the closure of many businesses and industries are likely to be significant. Thirty-eight respondents commented they were seeing an increase in financial difficulties. Others noted the “digital divide” as having further disadvantaged those without access to technology and digital connectivity.

“Capacity/capability of clients accessing Whānau Direct is pretty dramatic due to isolation from govt resources, retail outlets, internet, top ups. Lack of communication due to lack of connectivity on behalf of whānau we work alongside.”

“The financial and social impacts of COVID-19 are already being felt and we anticipate significant impacts to be felt within our community for years to come, so not only are we reacting to more calls for support now, but we are preparing for what is to come.”

“The digital divide is having a significant impact on community now that face to face services have paused. International students and workers not entitled to government support are struggling.”

Other respondents noted new stresses for families during lockdown. One also wondered about the support needs of essential workers who had been under increased pressure during the emergency response.

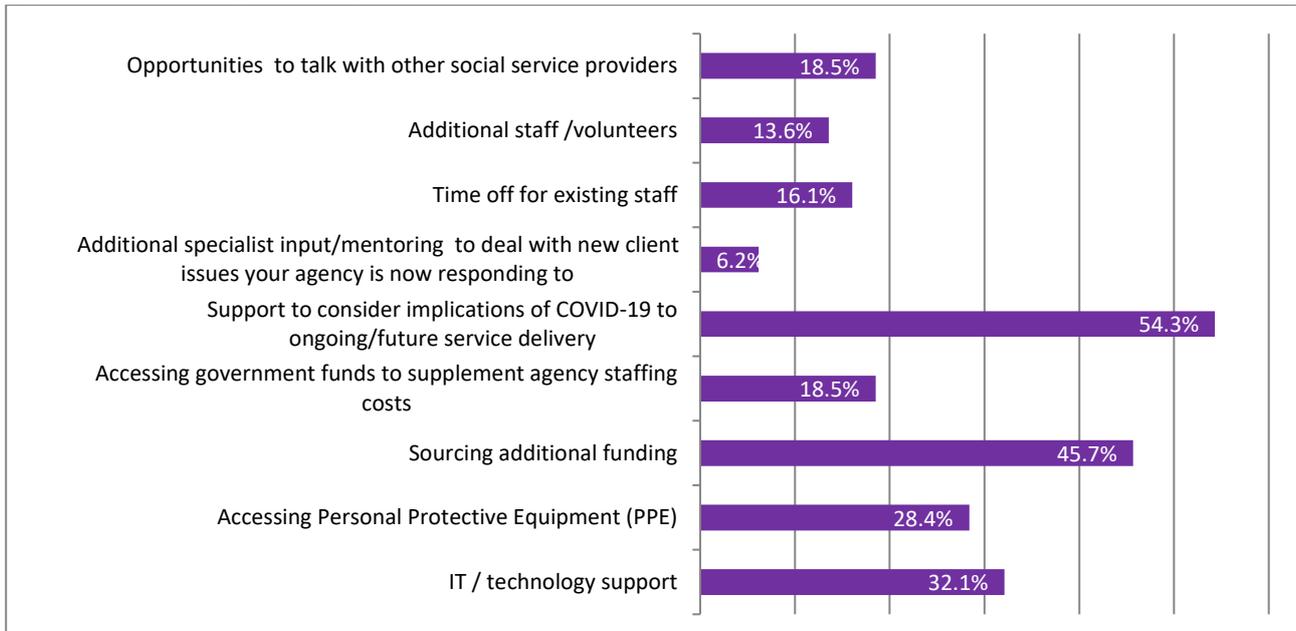
“[We are seeing an] increase in pressure on families with children who have disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and behavioural needs, [an] increase in pressure for single parent families without natural supports”

“We have seen a significant drop in new referrals to our counselling service, and a number of people on our existing waiting list have chosen to defer counselling until we are able leave lockdown/return to face-to-face sessions. We think people are just 'getting through things' and while at home (mostly) with family do not have the physical or emotional space to consider counselling or trying to work through issues. We anticipate an increase in demand for counselling in the future. We may also see a need to support those who have been working under immense pressure over this time - the essential workers.”

Community Organisation Needs

Respondents identified a range of issues their organisations currently needed support with. The highest rating item (54%, n=44) was for the need for support to consider the implications of COVID-19, followed by access to additional funding (45%, n=37). A full outline of support needs can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Current Agency Support Needs



Respondents commented:

"[There will be] opportunities arising for social change when we come out of lockdown.

"SocialLink has been really useful in setting up opportunities for provider-to-provider contact and I do hope this will continue post-COVID'.

"It is likely that the economic downturn that will continue post lockdown/rahui will severely impact on charities that don't have government or health contracts. It will be a climate where we will need to come up with innovative ways to survive - it would be good to have opportunities to get some creative thinking going with others on this topic."

Good News Stories

Amid the stresses of the lockdown and pandemic, respondents also shared lots of good news stories telling of the resilience of communities, kindness of individuals and huge resourcefulness within the social sector in responding in new ways in a challenging environment.

“On the whole our clients have largely been surprisingly content and able to creatively problem solve with staff and family ways to function and keep themselves connected. Greater resilience than we were anticipating to date. Some significant increases in autonomy and independence driven by necessity which have provided a real milestone for them. Definitely will be a number of good outcomes from this time. As a service we are seeing just how much we can do remotely as staff too with the potential that brings to increase our caseloads as those we support also become familiar with these types of alternative ways to connect meaningfully (calls, texts video etc)”

“Drugs including methamphetamine have become much harder to access which is a good thing. People are using less”

“Seeing most of the homeless in accommodation, although temporary, is wonderful. They are feeling noticed. It brings a lot of smiles to the faces of the people delivering their food, to see the gratitude.”

“I lead a team of young and innovative support workers that took the programme that is run for people from a physical building to an online programme through Facebook. With educational session (cooking, household tips, literacy, Te Reo, sign language), health and wellbeing (introduction of Te Whare Tapa Whā, daily exercises) as well as fun (daily quizzes, challenges). Feedback from the people we support, and their whānau have been great and has filled people’s days as well as stayed connected (we also run zoom meetings throughout the week).”

“Amazing camaraderie within our team.”

“I called a client as a result of police family harm report. She was so thankful that someone knew what was happening for her and that she had a link to the outside world.”

“We have had a great response to our online mentor sessions for the kids who are really enjoying them. It’s been awesome to see how we can continue to support our kids remotely.”

“The unity between local community groups has been incredible. We are all sharing our areas of strengths and working collaboratively to make a bigger impact than we could achieve independently. It has been very moving and empowering.”

DISCUSSION

A range of issues stand out from the COVID-19 survey of Western Bay of Plenty community and social sector organisations.

The pandemic and subsequent emergency response has **impacted the social sector services differentially** – severely limiting the ability of some agencies to continue to provide services, whilst others have increased their service delivery significantly to respond to increased community needs at this time.

All organisations have had to **respond rapidly to the changing environment**, with some agencies better placed than others to respond proactively. The changes agencies have had to make **will potentially change the ways in which services may be delivered long-term**. For organisations already struggling to remain viable, the COVID-19 emergency may prove one stress too many. Critical to this will be whether funding in the sector will be maintained. Already many organisations have seen (or are anticipating) a reduction in income - from reduced donations, an

inability to maintain fundraising initiatives, run events or receive income from fee-based services during the lockdown. Others have received notification that some community funding sources (e.g. gaming trust funds) have been put on hold. However, the different funding models and income streams utilised by organisations means there are likely to be different impacts across the sector.

In spite of these difficulties, new collaborations and innovative service delivery models have also evolved over this time. Some of these, could provide the frameworks for new structures from which more efficient community services could be provided in the future. Most community organisations want some guidance to consider the longer-term implications of COVID-19 on their service and the sector. The time for cross-sector strategising and planning, has never been more important than as the sector emerges from lockdown restrictions.

Disclaimer: The information provided is based on organisational and services information gathered from interviews and survey research in 2020. Please let SocialLink know if there are any inaccuracies or updates.