



Te Hau Toka  
SOUTHERN LAKES WELLBEING GROUP

# Community Mental Wellbeing Expert Design Challenge

## Key Themes

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**This summary document provides an overview of the Expert Design Challenge which was part of a three-month co-design process facilitated by Leadership Lab on behalf of Te Hau Toka Southern Wellbeing Group. It was carried out between September and December 2021 and is part of a more detailed recommendations report.**

The purpose of the community co-design process was to determine the mental wellbeing challenges being experienced by communities in the Southern Lakes region as a result of COVID-19 and to gather ideas from the Te Anau, Cromwell, Wānaka and Queenstown communities about how Te Hau Toka could best help support their mental wellbeing. The findings will help form an action plan for the group to allocate its funding in the most impactful way and in alignment with the three 'Promotion and Prevention' Focus Areas outlined on page 7 of Kia Kaha, Kia Māia, Kia Ora Aotearoa.

Te Hau Toka recognised that the nature of the challenges being faced in the region were not unique to this time or this place. So while there were absolutely likely to be locally-specific nuances and challenges to address, there were also likely to be a suite of valuable interventions and solutions from other times and places which can be drawn upon.

An expert design challenge was run in parallel to the other codesign work and contributors with experience and expertise in the wellbeing and social change arena ranging from Clinical Psychology, Mental Health, and Population Health, through to Anthropology, Whanau Ora Commissioning, Nutrition and Human Performance, and Disaster Recovery were selected and invited to participate. As well as individual submissions, the participants joined a 2-hour group discussion about each of their findings, commonalities and differences, and general recommendations.

**For more information, visit:**

[Leadershiplab.co.nz/projects/te-hau-toka-wellbeing-in-central-lakes/](https://Leadershiplab.co.nz/projects/te-hau-toka-wellbeing-in-central-lakes/)

# Key Question

For the Expert Design Challenge part of the co-design process, Te Hau Toka drew on the knowledge of a group of people who had expertise in the wellbeing and social change arena and direct experience of supporting communities dealing with COVID or other relevant disasters. They were asked to respond to the following question:

***“If you had NZ\$3 million to assist and strengthen the mental wellbeing of Queenstown Lakes/Fiordland communities recovering from the negative effects of COVID-19, what would you do and why?”***

**Their recommendations fell into two broad areas:**

1. Process principles to use for providing assistance.
2. Interventions which could strengthen the mental wellbeing of the Queenstown Lakes/Fiordland communities.

The key themes have been summarised in the following pages using direct quotes from the experts' recommendations.



# Process Principles

for strengthening mental wellbeing in the Southern Lakes region

## Key themes

1. Community-centric
2. Social connection is the key wellbeing resource
3. Foster positivity, hope and meaning
4. Funding and accountability
5. Place and storytelling
6. Honour Te Tiriti

## 1. Community-centric

A key principle that emerged from the experts' recommendations was that efforts to assist and strengthen mental wellbeing "must be community driven", with the community at the centre and interventions flowing from the community upwards - not top down

### 1a. Community design

*"To do things that sit outside of the system you have to hand over power and not decide on the solutions and how you will measure them. It is the process as much as it is the funding. It's not about people being "helped", it's about people participating in their own wellbeing."*

*"People are the main resource, the experts in their own communities, and in what makes them feel good and function well. So the process must be community driven."*

*"Give the power and decision-making authority to communities and community organisations and catalyse ripples of self-determination."*

*"More than ever, the community's involvement in designing their own future is both a tool for wellbeing and community building, as well as the optimal approach to creating collective impact and sustainable plans that have the support of the community."*

*"Be dubious about experts and resist allowing the 'health' services to own 'health'. This is a great opportunity for communities to reflect on what wellbeing actually feels like, using Te Whare Tapa Whā, with its interdependent walls grounded on the whenua."*



## 1b. Localised solutions and changing needs

*“A one-stop-shop won’t work because every community is different. You need to support bespoke community level initiatives.”*

*“It’s about resourcing that enables what local communities are already doing well or would like to do.”*

*“Needs will change and vary across individuals and across time. Ask “What do you need?” and then listen, honestly, genuinely and safely.”*

*“Telling an overarching narrative about how the communities are doing is challenging and possibly dangerous. There are multiple, dynamic stories at play, constantly kaleidoscoping across each other.”*

## 2. Social connection is the key wellbeing resource Community-centric

Social connection emerged again and again as the primary wellbeing resource and as a critical path to getting things done.

### 2a. Connection as a wellbeing resource

*“Build community connection. Seed and encourage the development of a rich and extensive network of self-sustaining connections across the community.”*

*“Foster meaningful social connection, cohesion and belongingness and invest in opportunities for people to connect and generate kindness, meaning and hope together.”*

*“Social connection is the key. The most helpful people in this process will be your people – friends and family, those who like you, live the whole journey of reestablishing new lives in the shadow and light of what has happened.”*

*“Treasure the social capital that is already there – the community groups, organisations, networks, friendship groups which make up your place.”*

### 2b. Connection and getting things done

*“Build alliances with institutions, schools, Iwi, health providers, organisations, community networks, business leaders, media, influencers, political leadership. Establish a network of champions that span all sectors and levels of society and honour their connections, mahi and leadership.”*

*“Work in partnership with diverse faith communities. These are the communities which gather regularly around ancient stories of suffering and hope.”*

*“Build and activate long-term partnerships between public health institutions and wider economic and community-focused organisations.”*

### 3. Foster positivity, hope and meaning

Some of the experts commented on the “spiritual wounds” and the “fatigue, overwhelm and hopelessness” that many have experienced over the COVID period. They suggested that it will be important to foster positive emotions generally and to build a sense of agency, hope and possibility in terms of what can be achieved in the future.

*“As much as possible work to generate positive states such as gratitude, kindness, creativity, optimism and awe.”*

*“Highlight and celebrate what has been and is being achieved, what is emerging and in what we can do and have done as a community.”*

*“Celebrate the things we do know and that we can control.”*

*“By all means speak truth to power, but be prepared to be called upon to deliver a better solution. Try to avoid the drama triangle - it’s tempting to rescue people and persecute the villains, but in reality we are all inadequate people doing the best with incomplete information.”*

*“There are no doubt lots of stories about distress and anxiety - about people being broken and the long queue for services to mend them. There will be a lot of medicalising of grief, and particularly lots of parents who fear that their children are being permanently*

*damaged by the current situation. I’m sceptical about this narrative - even if it were true, telling the story of a broken generation does more harm than good.”*

*“Continue to build a sense of belongingness and agency at local and regional levels to combat the sense of futility and worthless sacrifice that is contributing to hopelessness and exhaustion. Increase the perception of a range of possible viable futures for self and economy in the next phases of the pandemic. Build an understanding that although the monotony and frustration of recent experience feels challenging, New Zealand is in an excellent position to move forwards.”*

*“Build small islands of predictability to build hope and a sense of forward-looking hope and progress.”*

*“A ‘staging’ approach may be useful in helping to meet the need to feel like we are achieving milestones, and that our sense of time does not dissolve further into what feels like an endless pandemic. The secret here may be to define and differentiate specific community goals and achievements that can be disentangled from how the pandemic is progressing.”*



## 4. Funding and accountability

Three themes emerged here. The first, somewhat ironically, was to be wary of outside “experts”. The second was to fund initiatives that are coming from the community versus “expert” solutions that are rolled out from “above”. The third was to use “high trust funding models” approaches that foster rather than frustrate community level innovation, and evaluation practices which capture and tell stories of success.

### 4a. Funding and expertise

*“Be dubious about outside experts.”*

*“It’s especially important to ignore the experts. Don’t be dazzled by the outsiders with their snake oil remedies”*

*“Support local solutions and use the lived experience and knowledge and draw on resources in the community to make something new.”*

### 4b. Support community level initiatives (also refer 1b. Localised Solutions)

*“A one-stop-shop won’t work because every community is different. You need to support bespoke community level initiatives.”*

*“It’s about resourcing that enables what local communities are already doing well or would like to do.”*

*“Support talented, energised, in-community change agents who are committed to enacting the social transformation they know meets the needs and aspirations of their community.”*

### 4c. High trust accountability

*“Money is very important but so is trust – high trust funding, which doesn’t suffocate innovation with petty reporting deadlines, or unrealistic short-term demands. Structure evaluations which look to long-term, social benefits, not widget counting.”*

*“Pay for good integrated evaluation, so the stories of what has been grown are captured. Use “outcome harvesting” evaluation methods to assess investment outcomes versus more traditional planning and KPI based approaches.”*

*“There are benefits in evaluation and sharing your impact. Establish clear indicators of success, consider using validated measures or scales for population wellbeing – several have national or regional baselines already to compare with your population. Use process as well as impact evaluation. Get evaluation or impact reports designed up and utilise infographics. Collect anecdotal feedback – emails, social media etc. and use quotes and testimonials”*

## 5. Place and storytelling

The concept of “place” as a wellbeing resource was highlighted, including the telling and hearing of stories to amplify the healing power of connection to place and expression of identity. Involving the community in creating an inspiring vision of a post-Covid future was central to the experts’ recommendations.

### 5a. Place and stories

*“Place is the one emotional landscape that is wordless. Places heal us.”*

*“Hope is the antidote. How do we operationalise hope? We need places dedicated to exploration and discovery. Places that engender collectivity, curiosity and meaning.”*

*“There is an extensive literature on the power of story, both as the act of telling one’s story to affirm one’s unique identity and humanity, and the hearing and valuing stories as a way of strengthening a sense of place and community.”*

*“A well told story can change the way we relate to time. It can change the way we relate to each other. It can take tired energy and the capacity to leave and turn it into the capacity to stay. It can open up the wide expansive places of humanity that we can then be part of.”*

### 5b. Collective stories of an inspiring future

*“Central to the story-telling process is the development of a collective story about the future of the region that fuels inspiration and hope for the future. [The Queenstown Lakes District’s] Vision Beyond 2050 touches on the same theme. Its title page describes, “A unique place. He Wāhi Tūhāhā” and “An inspiring future. He Āmua Whakaohoho”. Here the honouring of the spirit of the place is directly linked to the possibility of a better, more grounded and more sustainable future.*

*“When communities build and shape spaces together. When people make the spaces together, secondary storytelling happens, about how we live in a crazy and fun community that’s done amazing things in the Covid period. A community that echoes the place and space and the wordless emotion of the landscape.”*

*“We need to share our stories and show people that there is an opportunity to contribute to building this sustainable economy and bettering the life of the members of the community. We want to involve people in a vision of something that’s greater than themselves.”*

*“The biggest thing that will help people’s wellbeing is giving them some hope and letting them turn the light on at the end of the tunnel so that they can see where they’re going and that there is a favourable outcome of a revitalised community at the end.”*

## 6. Honour Te Tiriti

Te Tiriti o Waitangi was seen as providing important guiding principles for wellbeing efforts.

*“Cultural identity is crucial to wellbeing – this is a great opportunity to support people to explore this collectively.”*

*“Invest in making Te Tiriti come alive for communities.”*

*“The pandemic has shown again the wounds of colonization. Honouring Te Tiriti involves exploring meaning, culture, identity and citizenship within 21st century Aotearoa.”*

*“As your regions re-examine their place in the world, supporting communities in a better understanding of Te Ao Māori – the stories of the landscapes and the worldview is a great investment, both in itself, increasing equity, and in terms of future tourism models.”*



# Interventions and Ideas

for strengthening mental wellbeing in the Southern Lakes region

## Key themes

1. Connection and community
2. Wellbeing and resilience
3. Leadership support/development
4. The arts, creativity and awe
5. Create places of refuge, restoration and storytelling
6. The roles of a Community of Practice

## 1. Connection and community

### 1a. Promoting connection (general)

*“The prerequisites for psychosocial wellbeing are safety, calm, agency, connection and hope – the pandemic has disrupted all of these. This disruption plays out differently over time, across communities, across different cultural groupings, and within individuals so the investment challenge is to fund opportunities for people to connect and generate kindness, meaning and hope together.”*

*“If we want to foster mental wellbeing, we need to encourage social connectedness by imbedding in-person, meaningful interaction into our community.”*

*“Your leaders are sustained through the community of their [places of worship], soccer teams, pubs and Plunket groups – if these were thriving before, they’ll be your salvation now. Investing in community associations is the best disaster prevention. Maybe spend a chunk of money on micro grants, so community groups can host their own celebrations and seed their own initiatives. Local and small is good.”*

*“Invest in parenting, and in the networks which nurture children.”*

*“Invest in community initiatives which promote transferring skills across the generations – this will address loneliness, strengthen communities and have long lasting impact. Promote opportunities for diverse people to find things [in common].”*

### 1b. Promoting connection (libraries, co-working and sharing)

*“If we want to foster the mental wellbeing of people in the Southern Lakes, we need to encourage social connectedness by imbedding in-person, meaningful interaction into our community. The original and long-standing sharing facility is the public library. By consciously designing libraries to support social connectedness, we can improve the mental wellbeing of local communities.”*

*“Coworking spaces offer a relief from loneliness of working from home, along with serendipitous encounters with like-minded people, idea generation and sharing, and business networking.”*

*“Attached to sharing workspace and things, sharing knowledge and skills would further increase social connectedness. Southern Lakes residents have a vast array of skills, knowledge, and cultures. While a shared workspace and the interactions that make up the Library of Things would foster the sharing of skills intuitively, a structure and service for skill and knowledge sharing would deliberately encourage this opportunity.”*

*“By expanding our already thriving libraries to include the sharing of workplaces, things, and skills, we would improve the social connectedness of the Southern Lakes communities, reduce loneliness, and improve mental wellbeing. This culture of sharing would build the social, cultural, and economic foundations for mental wellbeing. With a community coworking space, a Library of Things, and skill and knowledge sharing, whānua and communities will have access to resources and live in healthy environments that support mental wellbeing.”*



## 2. Wellbeing and resilience

### 2a. Wellbeing support

*“Wellbeing is holistic – both in how it is impacted and how it remains resilient. Use bicultural models and up-to-date concepts that encapsulate positive mental health and not just illness treatment.”*

*“If we want wellness, we find it in relationships – with the environment, with each other, with our cultural contexts. If we want to keep the whare in good shape, the best DIY component is the five ways to wellbeing – giving, learning, being active, talking notice and connecting – these are the actions which will carry us individually and collectively along this journey.”*

*“Develop community resilience and wellbeing literacy and agency by equipping people with knowledge and tools to support resilience and wellbeing for themselves and their whānau. Delivery must be tailored to the different priorities and needs of diverse stakeholders.”*

*“Support people to take more control of their wellbeing. Engage, educate and empower with methodology from mental health promotion and social marketing. Develop personal skills, create supportive environments and strengthen community action using clear, engaging messages and calls to action. Produce useful or interactive resources that groups and individuals/whānau can use day to day.”*

*“Build self-help resources and workshops based on peer-led practices, focused on helping people manage boundaries between work achievement and personal fulfillment. The aim is to decrease a sense of monotony and the experience of always being ‘on’.”*

## **2b. Wellbeing and economic support**

*“It’s not just mental health promotion and support services, but economic and community level support. For example, this could take the form of initiatives such as one recently launched to attract workers into rural areas. This could be extended to consider how new workers attracted to areas could be offered mentorship and training opportunities through some form of resource/job pooling scheme. This would mean that new workers would pick up a wide range of skills and contacts needed in this new environment. There would be a wider pool of workers with skills to draw upon, especially when job-sharing may be more appropriate than hiring permanent FTEs.”*

## **2c. Wellbeing and Climate Change**

*“In addressing the disconnect between growing economic opportunities in hospitality and tourism sectors with the reality of safer sustainability in the near-term future of Covid-19 challenges, we also need to account for the longer-term dynamics of climate change and action taken to mitigate its worst effects while promoting enjoyable experiences.”*

*“The South American concept Buen Vivir was examined by Everingham and Chassagne (2020). This is a non-Western alternative to neoliberal capitalism for moving tourism priorities from economic growth to the welfare of, and meaningful connections in, the society at large and covering the ecological balance. We know that building meaningful connections can be a powerful buffer in the face of ongoing crisis and uncertainty.”*

*“There is an opportunity for the tourism and hospitality sectors to focus on societal wellbeing. There is an opportunity - and need - for a “community-centered tourism framework” with responsible approaches to reset, re-describe, and re-familiarise the tourism industry in the interest of local communities.”*

*“Invest in local initiatives which address climate change - the pandemic is a symptom of this bigger disaster. Awe and humility are part of the emotional literacy we need to build wellbeing and to address this.”*

## **3. Leadership support/development**

### **3a. Leadership and local governance**

*“The most frequently noted success factor in disaster support initiatives was buy-in right from the top – the belief that supporting people is valuable in itself.”*

*“It will be important for QLDC [Queenstown Lakes District Council] leaders to be educated in disaster recovery. To develop an*

*understanding of the typical trajectories and challenges faced by communities and the supporters during long-term recovery.”*

*“Some of the most important initiatives do not involve significant budget but require support from QLDC leadership. More than ever, the community’s involvement in designing their own future is both a tool for wellbeing and community building, as well as the optimal approach to creating collective impact and sustainable plans that have the support of the community. Opportunities for meaningful input to future plan development, being listened to, and seeing one’s ideas reflected in the district plan also builds community trust and resilience.*

### **3b. Investing in community leaders**

*“Treasure the social capital that is already present in the community and invest in/ support community leadership (including those with lived experience such as mental illness and disability).”*

*“Look after the local leaders - they come in all shapes and sizes, which is good because so does recovery. New leaders emerge and some old stalwarts fall over under the strain. Cherish them by backing them, making sure they get a weekend away with their partner or still get to the kids school camp. They’ll give everything and more to their community so it’s important to find the right balance between accepting their gifts, freely given, and gently reminding them to keep refilling their own tanks. This process feels all-consuming, it’s addictive, but it’s a long journey so rotating Te Manu Taki - the goose who leads the flock - is essential.”*

*“If there is extra resource, especially cash, make sure it sustains the social infrastructure which already exists - pay some staff more hours, pay some volunteers, don’t be dazzled by the outsiders with their snake oil remedies, but do wrap some practical supports round the emergent leaders who bring fresh energy and vision.”*

*“Often those who have greatest experience of hardship and marginalisation have the strongest capacity to generate hope, which is why investment in community leadership should be broad and deliberately include those with lived experience of mental illness or disability.”*

### **3c. Leadership development specifics**

*“Build community capability to connect, lead, and plan for a future that can sustain wellbeing. Capability development should focus on:*

- *Community development leadership*
- *Resilience and wellbeing leadership”*

*“Training in leadership development and wellbeing and resilience leadership for community members who will take a leadership role. They can be drawn from education, industry and service sectors, and/ or dedicated wellbeing trainers.”*

*“Multiple training and learning opportunities tailored for different needs, supported by a team of wellbeing leads and effective training programmes, online resources, apps, and materials”.*

## 4. The arts, creativity and awe

### 4a. Invest in the arts

*“Especially invest in the artists – they’re the ones who see things differently, can shine a light, encourage and inspire. Get the buskers out to the working bees, celebrate the folk memorials which spring up, create opportunities for your communities to record what’s happened and what their hopes and fears are from here.”*

*“Invest in community art initiatives so communities can chronicle their stories for themselves, the wider world, and for the future. The Black Death opened the door to some of the greatest artworks of European history – works which bring comfort, awe and hope still. What your communities make together now will sustain them and could inspire countless thousands over the next few centuries.”*

### 4b. Art and awe

*“One of the quirkiest discoveries of the academic research on the earthquakes is the protective qualities of awe – those who experienced awe alongside all the other terrors and confusions seem to have come through with greater resilience. Encourage people, especially children, in anything which brokers awe. Arts, creativity, physical activity, getting out into nature, planting a community garden – all these things and more provide possible pathways through the dark times.”*

## 5. Create places of refuge, restoration and storytelling

### 5a. Create places of refuge

*“People and communities need safe, intimate refuges to heal from grief; places where the anonymous kindness of humanity and simple gifts restores deep faith in belonging to the human and natural community. The wind telephone created by garden designer Itaru Sasaki in Japan, used by over 30,000 people to find solace following the Tōhoku tsunami, and replicated in multiple locations worldwide is an example of a community refuge.”*

### 5b. Places to share stories

*“Setting up places of refuge could also provide a setting for the healing that can come from storytelling. Story Corps is an example of an organisation that facilitates the telling of and listening to stories. It has been remarkably effective in capturing stories of “lives lived with kindness, courage, decency and dignity” and inspiring greater hope, generosity and love.”*

*“Who wouldn’t want the job of listening to people’s stories? Or creatively stitching those stories into a beautiful narrative, say a film and facilitating the community to see it?”*

*“Shared stories could uplift each community and the country as a whole, inspiring further acts of creative generosity that can and will take on a life of their own, sparking enduring individual and community wellbeing.”*

## 6. The roles of a Community of Practice (CoP)

While wellbeing should be everybody's responsibility, there is a need for a guiding structure to support the process, providing training, and measuring the effectiveness of initiatives put in place. Another critical responsibility is to ensure access to support is equitable—within and across teams, roles, and across time for those who may need support later. The expert design team suggested that the Community of Practice model might be helpful in this respect.

*“It's important to establish an overarching Community of Practice that will lead and coordinate wellbeing development initiatives across the community.”*

*“The CoP can guide a collective impact process where the community has a genuine role in co-designing plans for the region's future and can see the results of their input in subsequent plans and initiatives.”*

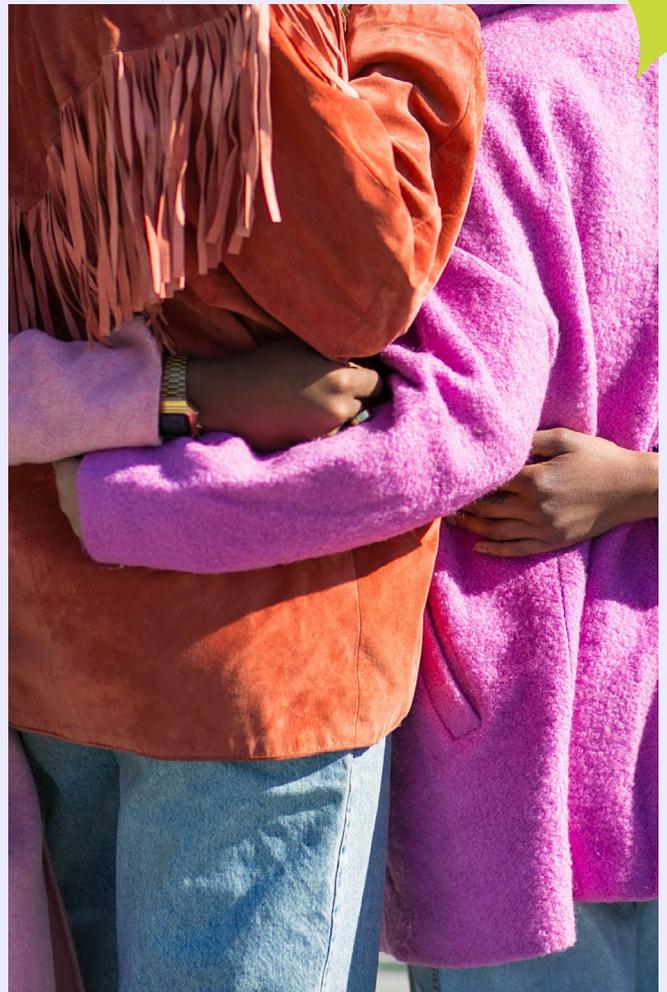
*“The CoP can connect the helpers charged with delivering services to the community [The Mana Ake model in Canterbury]”*

*“Connect community members who can support and help each other, explore shared interests, and create enjoyable and meaningful experiences. Enable a rich network of community connections to connect the multiple 'new' and separate people and*

*communities within the area. [Maroondah, and the 'deep dives' and 'focus projects' of NZ CoPs].”*

*“Integrate initiatives like the Te Hau Toka's Connecting Communities microfund into the wider goals of the initiative so that it can achieve maximum impact and become self-sustaining.”*

*“Join the dots for the community: establish a way to curate and share who is doing what so that people can easily find and join groups with shared interests.”*



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