

## Salvation Army Whangārei

Salvation Army Whangārei opened their Social Supermarket in January 2023 as part of improving their approach to food provision.



### **The model: More Choice Model of food assistance.**

The room is laid out to look like a humble supermarket. Shelving lines the outer walls and runs through the middle to create aisles. There are fridges and freezers for fresh kai. The shelves are ordered and labelled to make shopping easy and they use a point system to guide the amount of kai each person can take.

To access the supermarket whānau first have an assessment with one of The Salvation Army kaimahi. This is to understand what their needs are and book a time for their shop. They then come at the time of their slot and do their shop accompanied by one of the kaimahi.

The kai on the shelves is a mix of donated and purchased kai. The Salvation Army has a strong relationship with Countdown, who is their main donor. They also purchase some stock to ensure they are providing a range of products that can meet nutritional standards.

### **What led you to choosing the More Choice Model?**

The Salvation Army is committed to building food security and sovereignty for whānau and communities in Aotearoa. The Salvation Army's new food security strategy – Te Kai Makona, has guided their approach and practice. They have modified their traditional food parcels with a strength-based model. This model is more accessible for whānau and gives them greater control and choice over their food. It creates opportunities to build stronger relationships with whānau as it is more relational.

**“By strengthening foodbank practice and providing access to a wider range of kai supports, we can better meet immediate food needs while also providing the longer-term transformation needed to move whānau from foodbank dependence to a greater position of food resilience.”**

### **What is the core value of the More Choice Model and how does that help to shape your practice?**

The values which guide, underpin and align our practice are:

- **Aroha** - We care and act with compassion for the whānau we serve.

- **Choice** – we offer choice to meet individual and whānau needs. From the onset whānau are given the choice of pre-made food parcels or the supermarket model dependant on their needs;
- **Strengths-based** – we build on the capacity and skills of individuals and whānau;
- **Whanaungatanga** – we work relationally with those we serve, it starts from the initial assessment, and is carried on as they venture through the supermarket. It provides the opportunity to connect further and form a trusting relationship;
- **Manaakitanga** – we recognize and care for the intrinsic worth (mana) of individuals and whānau;
- **Collaboration** – we work proactively with others in the community to better serve the whānau we all support.

### **Is there anything unique about your model that helps you to better support whānau?**

Having a welcoming environment, alongside friendly supportive staff and volunteers helps them to provide the best support they can. Providing a space where whānau can enjoy their experience lays the foundation for staff to build connections.

They have also trialled opening on Thursday nights to make food support more accessible for working whānau.

### **What have whānau using the Social Supermarket told you about their experience using this model?**

**“While we have only been operating the More Choice Model since the beginning of the year, the feedback received to date has already exceeded expectations. We gather feedback through verbal comments when we are with whānau and written feedback via surveys based on their experience.”** It’s been said on numerous occasions how welcoming the space is and how having the ability to choose their own kai helps whānau to feel in control making it a better experience. **“Some whānau have been overwhelmed with emotion and gratitude, the ability to choose their own food has really broken-down barriers and blessed people.”**

### **What suggestions or learnings would you like others to know who are looking to adopt a similar More Choice Model of practice?**

**Planning is essential.** The Salvation Army Whangārei took their time and broke it down into small manageable bites. The key components were:

- Understanding what stock they had and what was needed;
- Set-up of the shelves and layout of the space;
- Re-stocking the shelves;
- Adopting the points system to work for this model;
- Finessing the environment to create the best customer experience.

**“It took a lot of effort to get the supermarket set-up, emptying the shelves and moving stock around took time.”** The Salvation Army Whangārei was able to adopt the More Choice Model with minimal set up costs. They repurposed the space they were using and kept shelving costs low by adding to their existing shelving. They used cost effective ways to create an environment that was user friendly and welcoming. For instance, they used shower curtains as dividers between the storage space and supermarket and made their own signage.

**“It is important to be adaptable and tweak things as you go.”** They used others points system as a base and adjusted the points system to better meet the needs of the whānau they support.

**“Strong support and engagement from our staff and volunteers.”** This is crucial to making a positive impact. *“Staff and volunteers help us to understand how our service is received and ensure we take the time to really connect with the people we support and their situation.”*

### **What is something you like wish, and or wonder about the More Choice Model?**

**“The big wish and wonder is: what would it be like to have the funding available to offer greater variety, quality and quantity of food with more paid staff? While we are blessed to be supported with generous food donation and volunteers, we are having to purchase food each week to meet nutritional requirements for four days.”**