

A relational approach to
community and social innovation:
Practices that make a difference

— Frances Hancock

The
Southern
Initiative

Auckland
Council
Te Kaunihera o Tamaki Makaurau

a Relational* APPROACH

“Ki te kōtahi te kākaho ka whati,
ki te kāpuia, e kore e whati”

“If there is but one stem it will break
but if they are in a bundle they
will never break”

– Kīngi Tāwhiao

The strength of this report lies in the 25 community voices bundled together to create a grassroots view of the relational approach to community and social innovation operating within The Southern Initiative.

Relational
a
APPROACH



Publication Design

The handwritten graphics used throughout this report were created by youth and family members from South Auckland through a community handwriting workshop.

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Executive summary

Focus: This report focuses on Auckland Council’s engagement with South Auckland communities through The Southern Initiative (TSI) and provides a grassroots view of its relational approach and practices.

The Southern Initiative (TSI): TSI is a place-based initiative that stimulates, enables and champions social and community innovation across the Local Board areas of Papakura, Manurewa, Ōtara-Papatoetoe, and Māngere-Ōtāhuhu. From Pukekohe to Māngere, TSI is working with and alongside community leaders (and their colleagues as well as staff from other parts of council, government agencies, funders, business owners and others) to support community-led aspirations. Through facilitation, brokering, networking, capacity-building, mentoring, design-led thinking and other forms of social innovation (such as galvanising the maker movement locally to foster learning by doing in a social space), TSI is supporting communities to achieve social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes. These outcomes are produced at an individual, youth/rangatahi and family/whānau level, at an organisational level and at a community/iwi level. TSI is also contributing to practice and systems level change.

Purpose: The report will inform future practice within TSI, enabling staff to better understand the kinds of help and support valued by South Auckland communities. Also, it will inform Auckland Council’s *Inclusive Auckland Framework* and its *Engage and Enable Communities* priorities, increasing understanding of what good enabling of diverse communities looks like. Of particular interest, the report highlights innovative community-led responses to complex challenges. There may be valuable insights here that can also inform Auckland Council’s *Māori Responsiveness Framework*.

Research aims: In 2018 TSI commissioned research to identify the less visible and less tangible TSI ways of working that enable diverse communities across South Auckland to achieve their community-led goals and aspirations. TSI wanted to learn more about how its relational approach and

practices have supported community leaders and changemakers to harness wide-ranging opportunities that help to progress their aspirations. TSI was also interested to learn about relational challenges, tensions and contradictions from community perspectives.

Research contributors: Twenty-five South Auckland community leaders and changemakers took part in in-depth interviews of around 90 minutes. Twelve identify as Māori, six as Pacific Island, five as Pākehā and two as Sikh leaders. All are engaged in a range of community-led initiatives and innovations supported by TSI. Their names and organisations, and an overview of the research approach, are provided at the end of this report.

Findings – Relational approach: Community leaders highlighted that TSI’s relational approach interweaves these qualities: “a welcoming team culture”; “the right mix of people”; “a style of leadership”; “a sense of place, a recognition of identity”; “diverse roles that enable diverse engagements”; “trusting relationships, family-like and whānau oriented”; and “a heart for community”. Community changemakers see TSI seeking to “whakamana” or uplift the mana of the people and communities of South Auckland through wide-ranging community-led initiatives and innovations. TSI is working with and alongside communities to achieve aspirations important to them *and* that address known challenges that concern local and central government.

Findings – Relational practices: The research uncovered six relational practices that enact a relational approach. These practices are: *helping* – to grow, to shape the future, to succeed; *building* – bridges, capacity, networks; *challenging* – the status quo and removing roadblocks; *sharing* – information, knowledge, expertise, relationships; *creating* – opportunities, connections, joined-up action; and *innovating* – grassroots to systems-level change. The report offers diverse examples that show how TSI is enacting each of these practices.

Findings – Case stories: The report includes a collection of short case stories. Although much of the work described in these stories is work-in-progress, these narratives serve to illustrate TSI’s relational approach in action and show changemaking at work at grassroots (with individuals, families/whānau, organisations) and at a broader level. Entrepreneurs/groups/communities have become better connected and resourced, enabling them to work together to achieve various outcomes such as self-sustaining community-led social enterprises, enhanced organisational capacity and leadership, and practice or systems-level change.

What the report illuminates: The report shows how a council-led initiative can enable community and social innovation. While it was not written in praise of TSI, the insights and stories of this group of South Auckland changemakers are inspirational. Readers begin to see how change can happen when power is shared, innovation is embraced and people seek to work productively together. This change is made possible through family-like/whānau-oriented council–community relationships. Nearly half of those contributing to this research were/are Māori and their kōrero enriches this report with Māori interpretations of TSI’s relational approach. Pasifika views also provide unique insights and add a strong South Auckland feel. Rather than smooth-over tensions, challenges and contradictions, TSI welcomed the critical enquiry and reflection found in this report. Working in the innovation space can be challenging and complex work but also captivating and highly productive.

Other readers: The report may interest central government agencies, philanthropic organisations and community agencies as well as scholars and practitioners working in the fields of social and community innovation, government-community engagement and Māori-Pākehā relations.

Introduction

This report makes more visible the kind of relational approach and practices that can enable council and government to work more productively with diverse communities. It weaves together grassroots perspectives of 25 South Auckland community leaders and changemakers to better understand TSI's way of working.

The context for this report is community and social innovation. It focuses on South Auckland, where TSI is working with and alongside diverse communities to grow innovative alternatives to social services and enable other community-led aspirations. TSI's approach to community and social innovation resources community entrepreneurs, local organisations, social enterprises, and marae in various ways to further enable them to tackle the entrenched problems their communities face and to reduce their dependency on local and central government and other funders.

TSI uncovers, values and works with the wealth of knowledge and expertise in local communities. A Māori changemaker, who lives in an often-maligned South Auckland community, got to the crux when he said:

TSI understands there is value within community themselves; there are community assets, community skills, all of that is here but it's about trying to tap into that and nurturing that for localised solutions. If you develop localised solutions, then that's a solution that's being thought of and prepared for the need that's based in that community by the heart of those people. (INT. 16)

Many changemakers emphasised a strong sense of ownership of and responsibility for the aspirations they are seeking to achieve, with TSI's support. Of critical importance, they stressed, the community takes the driver's seat, whereas TSI "seem to go for the backseat" (INT. 8).

Community leaders want to engage with Auckland Council and the Government on a more equal footing. They relish TSI's approach because it is based on a two-way relationship of trust that enables greater power

sharing. TSI mobilises opportunities that enable community leaders to harness the untapped creative talent and entrepreneurial flair in their communities. It shares resources that communities can easily access and rely on. It builds bridges with possible partners that can support community-led initiatives. It links like-minded entrepreneurs and innovators working in local communities and across South Auckland. It challenges the status quo with new ideas and innovative approaches as well as removing roadblocks that get in the way of community innovations.

This research responds to problematic approaches that continue to hinder productive government-community engagements. A Māori community leader highlighted "a subservient relationship" that plagues government-community relations and emphasised the need for "systems-level change". Speaking for many, she said, "Council needs to appreciate what they've got [with TSI] but also realign themselves so that they reflect that working environment across every division" (INT. 8). Also expressing a view held by many, another changemaker referred to "a sticky plaster or fly-by-night approach" that only lasts the length of a contract. "But we're not going anywhere," he said. "We're all from here and we want a sustainable approach" (INT. 3). Another changemaker said: "Other departments focus on the money they have to offer and make you jump through hoops to get it" (INT. 1). "There is high accountability when you live and work in your own community, whether you are paid or not paid, but the Council doesn't seem to get that," another leader said (INT. 5). A number of changemakers are keen to explore possibilities for social enterprise, to enable their groups/organisations to become less reliant on government and more financially self-sufficient and sustainable (INT. 5).

Here, TSI commissioned an appreciative inquiry, not an evaluation, but critical conversations inevitably generate insights and observations that can usefully contribute to evaluative purposes. Some may argue that an appreciative inquiry generates 'a good news account' and in this case by people who have something

to gain from its telling because they have benefitted or are benefitting from their engagements with TSI. But the community contributors to this research were forthcoming in 'telling it like it is'. They identified challenges in their relationships with TSI and asked strategic questions. The report offers diverse views of what real council-community relationships look like and their everyday struggles.

The report contains three main sections and concluding comments. The first section outlines key elements of TSI's relational approach. The second section distinguishes a collection of relational practices – what TSI does to enable trusting relationships to grow and innovation to happen. The third section provides stories of community-led initiatives and innovations supported by TSI. Some of these examples show long-held community visions coming to life, others present initiatives that particular groups never imagined, prior to working with TSI, but embraced when creative ideas were put to them. The report ends with 'last words' on working in the space of community and social innovation.

TSI recognises that other units within Auckland Council are forging innovative community-led approaches (including, for example, the Waste Solutions Team and the Community Empowerment Unit) and much of what is written here is likely to resonate and further inform their work.

Part 1:

A relational approach

A relational approach expresses how people orientate themselves in their relationships and when working with others. It draws attention to who we are and how we are together, in particular those ways of being that invite relationship, foster learning, create the conditions for innovation, and encourage people to collaborate, even in previously unimagined ways that become imperative to achieving shared outcomes.

Changemakers reflected deeply on TSI's relational approach, uncovering characteristics that are, on the one hand, seemingly invisible but implicit or, on the other, more obvious but no less significant. These relational characteristics are:

- A welcoming team culture
- The right mix of people
- A style of leadership
- A sense of place, a recognition of identity
- Diverse roles that enable diverse engagements
- Trusting relationships, family-like and whānau-oriented
- A heart for community.

These characteristics shed light on the qualities of TSI's relational approach and the people who work there. In the end, this research suggests, it really does matter who those individuals are and how they do relationships.



A welcoming team culture

Behaving in a similar way is a hallmark of culture or ‘how we do things around here’. Regardless of their cultural identity, background or role, certain behaviours signal to the community that “this one is from TSI” (INT. 1). Staff reach out to community in a welcoming way, whatever the setting or occasion, and exercise hospitable manners that invite engagement. A Pākehā changemaker characterised TSI’s culture in this way:

Hospitality, warmth, acceptance, an appreciation that you are there – that is the TSI culture. Obviously TSI staff have worked hard to make sure that happens. (INT. 5)

A Māori community leader agreed:

If you walked into a room full of people you would be able to pick someone from their team. They have a culture... [they] all behave in the same way, regardless of their cultural background and how knowledgeable they are. When you walk into the room, they are the first ones to come up and say hi. And it’s a proper greeting, a hongī [the pressing of noses and foreheads to enable the exchange of ha or breath of life], a harirū [shaking hands], a kia ora [greeting], and they mean it. They all value te ao Māori [the Māori world]. (INT. 1)

This invitational approach is also reflected in the look and feel of TSI’s office space. The physical environment has been designed (not purpose-built but made to work) and dressed in a way that helps to create the conditions for productive engagement. A Pākehā changemaker recalled visiting the TSI office. When she went inside the door, she saw the colours and the decorations. “This is really modern and neat and inviting,” she thought, “and I’d like to have more of a look around” (INT. 10).

A truly inclusive culture is about real contact with real people, whoever they are. For a Pasifika leader this inclusive culture is made obvious in TSI’s willingness to share its office space as a way to include others and see how something can work. Doing so offers contact with “the real people” they are working with, she said. When you share a space, this leader observed, “you talk to each other, love each other’s work, work together, celebrate, bounce ideas off each other. It is another way of seeing how council and community can occupy the same space” (INT. 7).

This community leader, and others, observed that TSI’s welcoming culture nourishes relationships across the wider council organisation and government. When you visit TSI or attend a gathering with them, you are just as likely to meet political leaders and senior government or council officials as you are community people or, alternatively, TSI will bring the “higher-ups” (like the council chief executive) to visit you (INT. 9). That is because this is a culture committed to “holding real conversations with real people wanting real change” (INT. 7). A Pasifika community leader explained that people appreciate that approach because “they hear the truth; they feel like they are getting the real deal and not [manufactured] spin” (INT. 7).

Importantly, TSI staff encourage and support one another. A welcoming team culture has created an “atmosphere” that generates excitement and is infectious, a Māori community leader observed. Staff are “given the space to flourish” and “do incredible things” which has fostered a generosity within the team. (INT. 8). This team culture may go some way to explaining how TSI staff can, in turn, be so encouraging, supportive and generous in their relationships with community leaders. Staff appear to give what they themselves have already received in some meaningful measure.

THE Right MIX of PEOPLE

Effective council engagement with South Auckland communities requires “good people” working at the grass-roots. According to the changemakers in this study, TSI has good people in its team; they are a diverse group of practitioners, each with unique characteristics, commitments, experiences and knowledges that enable them to engage effectively with communities. Community leaders agreed that:

It helps to have good people ... the right mix of people ... community people ... with empathy ... respect for the people they work with ... and who have a helpful attitude. (INT. 8)

TSI has different people in their team... TSI people push the boundaries and are really not like other people. There are oldies and goodies in that team as well as smart young cookies who know their stuff. (INT. 7)

“We’ve got some magic going,” a Pākehā changemaker said, and her inspiring stories suggested that magic begins to happen when a team of good people, in this case who happen to work for council, are available to offer valuable expertise that supports community-led innovation (INT. 13). TSI staff and others (including their network of highly regarded business mentors) offer various forms of professional expertise, experience and relationships that add significant value to the individuals, groups, organisations, marae and communities with whom they are working. “TSI staff are quite multi-skilled at their fingertips and they’ve got a lot of people that can get in behind them, support them, and brainstorm with them,” a Māori community leader said (INT. 10).

It is not simply professional ‘know-how’ that matters however, but also the kind of astute judgement, political sense, and seasoned wisdom that comes from years of experience. Experienced professionals know when and how to harness their professional resources without swamping the community. Also, when mistakes are made, they can withstand and navigate a fierce challenge instead of withdrawing (INT. 16). When a community leader says he “rates” a council worker, that is high praise indeed and a standard for effective helping practice. A Pākehā community leader explained that someone you rate is someone whose judgement you trust. They “will tell you what they consider to be the best outcome, without the

gloss” (INT. 9). He says he rates his TSI colleague because “politically and all round he’s very astute” (INT. 9).

Rather than emphasising their position in the organisation or operating at a surface level, TSI staff demonstrate through their actions that they are “personally invested” in helping the community to succeed (INT. 1). According to one Māori changemaker, they come with this commitment: “We will give you what we can and it will be the best of what we can offer” (INT. 1). These council workers are not gate-keepers but door-openers, willing to do whatever they can to help enable “the community to transform themselves on their own terms, so it’s community-driven and community-led” (INT. 1). This changemaker, and others, also appreciate council staff who come with all their commitments and relationships, past and present, and allow those resources to enrich their council–community engagements.

A style of leadership

Leadership is crucial in any council initiative but particularly important when trialling new approaches. Changemakers valued the way mana (authority) is exercised through TSI's style of leadership. One Māori changemaker described this quality as "servant leadership", in other words, working in a way that will whakamana, uplift the mana of, the community (INT. 1). To whakamana is to build and strengthen relationships, enabling people to have a voice (INT. 3). The idea of "mana motuhake" suggests leadership is enacted when TSI help to support community changemakers to "recognise their power and get to that space they want for themselves so they can make the impact they want for their people" (INT. 1). A Pākehā changemaker described this approach as, "Having an intuition for developing relationships with people who can lead ... and developing that capacity" (INT. 13). This is not about building a TSI empire, but about building capacity in people/groups who will in time then go on to build capacity in other leaders like them.

One community leader emphasised "a nurturing style of leadership" (INT. 8) and another "a transformational leadership style" (INT. 10) operating across TSI that enables people to grow and develop. Here the attention is not on the leader (although their human qualities do matter) but on that person's ability to enable "other good people to do good work" (INT. 10) and everyone in TSI exercises that responsibility. A Pasifika leader emphasised that this style of leadership means "our success is theirs" and critical to that success is enabling collaborations at every level, "to make real change across the board" (INT. 7).

Many changemakers highlighted the particular leadership style of the TSI director as a kind of standard bearer for leading a team of skilled practitioners engaged in social and community innovation. They emphasised a can-do leadership willing to give things a go and create and hold the space while new ideas are tested. A Māori leader explained that:

You've got to have a particular skillset to be able to take TSI to the places where it currently is and the current director has that skillset. [The TSI director] is very good at creating spaces for people to step into and take ownership. If people feel like they have ownership, then they develop a sense of investment

in making something work. [The TSI director] does that really well. She's brought people around her that have the same philosophical way of doing things; different skillsets but same philosophy. (INT. 8)

Another Māori changemaker observed the TSI director had hand-picked people with skills, behaviours and attitudes that "fit for what she's trying to achieve and that makes a huge difference" (INT. 10). Sharing her vision means others "do some great things with it," she said. Also, the TSI director invests in good ideas and is not hindered by bureaucratic thinking:

There was no bureaucracy in her vocabulary. Nothing was too hard. If you have a really good idea, she'd get in behind you and somehow make the resources appear or whatever was required to happen. To me, that said she had good connections. (INT. 10)

Rather than claiming the centre of attention, [the TSI director] creates space for her staff: "When we hosted them here, a new person walking into that room would not have been able to pick who the leader was, yet she leads that team" (INT. 8). At the same time, a Pasifika leader observed she is also "a very hard taskmaster and you have to produce the goods" (INT.7). "She doesn't flog something until it is dead," she continued, "it will either work or it won't. Her approach is this: "Tell me you are testing something and if it works great, and if it doesn't then let it go and move on."

Integral to this style of leadership is a focus on impact and how best to achieve it. Because they see the people they are working with and for, and are in close proximity to them, TSI staff are constantly thinking about the impact of their actions on South Auckland people/communities. "They see the people that they believe they're working for," a Pasifika leader said, "and that means they are aware of and thinking about the impact of what they're doing and what they're trying to deliver" (INT. 8). TSI does not view people as social statistics, which is how some individuals, groups and communities in South Auckland are still perceived. Rather, they see people as human beings – as individuals, as groups and as communities, with assets and aspirations.

This way of seeing makes all the difference to TSI's style of leadership because it brings into view a vision that South Auckland communities aspire to achieve. That vision is multi-layered, uplifting and inspiring. Because it is expressed by different communities differently, it is not easily contained. Sikh leaders pointed out this way of seeing challenges community partners and TSI to be open to possibilities neither party may have thought of before coming together but which become more obvious and achievable through collaboration (INT. 15).

For TSI, and community leaders, outcomes take many forms; big or small, all are valuable, especially when they affirm and activate the knowledge in the community. A Māori changemaker said:

TSI focuses on the impact that you create, not a pre-defined outcome. The impact could be something small like a young person 'getting it' and going "Wow, this is cool, I want to do more of this. How do we do more of this stuff in our community?" It's doing things differently; asking people what they think and want because they're the experts of their community, they're the experts of their backyard. (INT. 16)

This style of leadership targets "the core of injustice and inequality, using a top-down and bottom-up approach" (INT. 5). TSI resources communities to create and lead "localised solutions" that will address the challenges they face while also working to challenge broader systems-level change (INT. 16). TSI's style of leadership works for community leaders because it conveys whakaaro (thinking, understanding) that makes sense to them. As a Pākehā changemaker said, "TSI understands what grassroots is all about. They get local and they understand power and the need for resources" (INT. 5).

According to others, TSI's style of leadership is also characterised by humility (hūmārie). "A humbleness resonates across the team," a Māori changemaker said: "and tells you they are not trying to advance themselves individually" (INT. 1). Many community leaders also stressed that a humble style of leadership enables TSI staff, whatever their position, to navigate the power relations at work in council-community encounters in a way that leaves them and their communities feeling recognised, respected and able to engage on a more "an equal

footing" (INT. 1 & 5). "And when we're with them we feel brainy too!" a Māori changemaker said, laughing. Here again, she suggested, te reo Māori (the Māori language) offers another way of thinking about humility that is helpful when orientating ourselves in relationships, whoever we are:

'Whakaiti' can be used in a negative way like a put down but in this sense it means humbling oneself, being humble and gracious; to know your place in a way that allows other people to know their place. (INT. 1)

A sense of place,
a recognition of identity

A Sense OF PLACE

A relational approach recognises the importance of place in the lives of people – past, present and future. A sense of place matters, especially for Māori but for others too, because it offers “a confirmation of identity” and “the source of belonging”, and “ways of making spiritual connections” (INT. 3). According to community leaders, TSI values South Auckland – the place – and appreciates the Southsiders who live in their communities. Some South Auckland communities have been and still are often maligned, so, it matters hugely when council staff view this place and its peoples through community eyes – warts and all, but with an emphasis on the ‘all’. As well as seeing very real challenges, TSI staff see tangible and intangible strengths such as rich cultural diversity, entrepreneurial flair, creative talent, incredible networks, and the desire in people and communities to be self-determining, not dependent (INT. 13 & 5).

Community leaders appreciate that many TSI staff live in South Auckland or have worked here before. Their sense of and relationship with ‘this place’ equips them with the local knowledge required to engage effectively with Southside communities. TSI staff have developed “networks they can tap into” (INT. 3), and often know key community people or can access them through others they know. Their prior knowledge of “the lay of the land” often includes an understanding of local challenges, priorities, and preferred ways of doing things, and long-held visions (INT. 10 & 4). For community leaders, a sense of trust already exists or develops more easily when there is evidence of this prior knowledge and especially when they know the council person arriving on their doorstep. As a consequence, the initial engagement can move more quickly into collaborative action. An iwi leader said that when he heard a colleague had a role at TSI he thought, “She is mana whenua and she knows us” (INT. 6). Another iwi leader observed it can take time to get to know one another in the early stages of the relationship. “But TSI staff already knew where we were at a personal iwi level and understood our priorities. So, having people on board with prior knowledge of iwi and how we operate is key” (INT. 4).

Here lies a curious contradiction. Living locally, or having worked in South Auckland before, is not essential to engaging productively with Southside communities. A number of TSI staff do

not live in South Auckland but were/are highly regarded by community leaders in this research and considered “part of the community” (INT. 3). What matters is they demonstrate the kind of relational qualities and practices familiar to community leaders. This means, as one iwi leader put it, “I can work with you” (INT. 4). What matters most, was profoundly put by the youngest leader interviewed in this research; it is having staff who “know how to relate to our communities and the stories they hear, without judging them” (INT. 11).

At the same time, it is important to community leaders and changemakers that the TSI team reflects the cultural diversity of South Auckland. It is comforting to see your own reflection in others. Through TSI, skilled Māori and Pasifika staff are available to work with Māori and Pasifika peoples/groups/communities. These staff have cultural knowledges and ways of being honed over a lifetime and that are, as an iwi leader put it, “in your DNA” (INT. 4). Their wide-ranging connections extend across generations and are grounded in particular places/communities. Māori community leaders gain value from deep conversations with TSI Māori staff whose lives are also immersed in te ao Māori (the Māori world). Put simply, both can look through a Māori lens and understand and discuss Māori perspectives. Conversations can go where they need to go quickly, instead of being weighed down by the pressure often put on Māori to explain themselves. A Māori changemaker observed:

Having a number of skilful Māori staff who are immersed in te ao Māori also adds value to our relationships with TSI. ... They aren't only Māori by definition but Māori in their heart. Our conversation can quickly go where we need it to be. We don't have to start at “A” and try to explain ourselves. We can jump straight to “M” and have Māori conversations about the world that look through a Māori lens with people who understand Māori perspectives. (INT. 1)

Pasifika community leaders value the way in which TSI staff (Pasifika staff and others) can and do engage in the practice of talanoa – empathetic conversation that allows for rich storytelling and meaning-making. Practising talanoa makes it possible for Pasifika leaders to engage deeply and talk about what matters most to them, knowing the listener is doing

A sense of place, a recognition of identity

their utmost to hear what is at stake for their community in what is being said. Talanoa enables informed decision making that organisations can own and encourages people to take responsibility for those decisions. A Pasifika leader explained:

I really appreciated the talanoa we had with TSI about whether or not we even wanted to [take up a particular business opportunity]. [TSI] raised that reflective question and it was good for us to pause for a moment to consider it. When we decided to go ahead, we knew it wasn't based on TSI wanting us to go ahead but rather [our organisation] wanting to pursue the opportunity. (INT. 14)

In any team there will be a range of capabilities and experiences in relation to cross-cultural engagement. But across the TSI team are practitioners who are highly adept and offer a body of cultural knowledge that can be accessed by their colleagues and relied upon. How this cultural knowledge plays out depends on particular engagements. Day-to-day, TSI offers to “come to us” (INT. 1) or “we go them” (INT. 7). This easy ‘to and fro’ was described by a Pasifika leader as both “a come along approach” and a “whānau way of working” (INT. 7). It signals an awareness of place, of the strength that comes from being the host, and of the value of working in different spaces. It also creates the conditions for a different kind of approach based on relationships, rather than an agenda (INT. 1).

Respect for cultural identity, and recognition of the unique status of tangata whenua through protocol that is appropriately applied in a given situation enables Māori to feel culturally safe and able to engage fully. Here, a Māori community leader observed that having council staff able to speak te reo Māori (the Māori language) affirms “who we are” and supports the exercise of tikanga (cultural protocols). She expressed an idea that is profoundly important: that in “every encounter”, TSI acknowledges “who we are, as Māori” (INT. 1). This leader said:

... we always begin with a mihi (greeting) and a karakia (prayer), and close the same way, every time. This means there is tikanga in the engagement, every time, [so] we feel very culturally safe as Māori when we meet with them. And this

means we feel comfortable to express ourselves. So, right from the beginning that changes the game. (INT. 1)

This way of working changes the game because it enables a genuine exchange between people. The non-Māori changemakers in the research also expressed deep connections to place, to South Auckland in particular, and appreciate being valued for who they are.

As well as recalling the profound importance of place and of identity, these reflections are a helpful reminder of the bicultural work Māori, Pasifika and people of other ethnic groups do daily when travelling between their own cultural world and that of the Pākehā world. This does not mean that TSI staff get cross-cultural engagements right all the time, that is impossible; but perhaps these reflections provide a valuable reminder when working cross-culturally, especially for Pākehā, to pause, pay attention, and learn from those with whom you are engaging. The beauty of TSI’s relational approach is that makes it possible for staff to learn from their mistakes, make amends, and keep going.

Diverse roles that enable diverse engagements



Different roles are required to enrich possibilities for fruitful council engagements with communities. Māori community leaders focussed on the notion of “kaitiaki”, understood here as a guardian exercising responsibility in close proximity to those leading innovation at the grassroots of the South Auckland communities (INT. 1). In exercising this responsibility, one observed TSI had developed productive relationships with Māori/iwi before reaching out to others, which bears witness to an active commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi at work in TSI and a genuine desire to be truly responsive to Māori, whatever that means and it will mean different things in different situations. A Māori changemaker explained:

TSI’s role is one of kaitiaki; they carry a responsibility in the sense of being closest to the leadership and the innovation of change at a grassroots level. ... TSI needed more Māori in the team first, to get the relationships with Māori right first, as the foundation before hitting others. How can you celebrate others when Māori are topping all the negative statistics and the positive is so small? (INT. 1)

Another Māori community leader described the role of TSI as a “mangai” or mouthpiece for communities. He did not mean in the sense of speaking for them, but rather being a voice in helping to bridge gaps between government (local and central) and communities. He identified “a void, a gap” between communities and government TSI can bridge. “TSI staff have their feet on the ground in the grassroots,” he said. “Their eyes and ears are focussed on uncovering the gold nuggets in our communities. That is mana for us; mana is the vehicle that enables us to become stronger” (INT. 3).

TSI is also like the “māra” or cultivator who nourishes and resources communities in ways that enable them to achieve their dreams (Int 3). They plant seeds (such as ideas) and come along with resources (such as encouragement, opportunities, connections) that can help fertilise those seeds. “TSI cultivate through their relationships with our community and their contributions,” this Māori community leader observed. “As a community we have our own dreams and aspirations. TSI helps to turn the soil to make those visions a reality. What grows out of the māra is community-owned and

community-shared.” Here, she explained meanings of the word “māra” to help others understand:

In te reo, ‘mā’ refers to the colour white or pure consciousness and ‘ara’ means awakening. So ‘māra’ is the awakening of something pure that will enhance the ability of the community to take action. (INT. 3)

Changemakers described other TSI roles. These include “advisory” and “door-opening” roles that facilitate community-led and owned initiatives as well as “liaison”, “brokering” and “networking” roles between parties, connecting communities to council and government, and vice versa (INT. 6). One described TSI as a “catalyst” enabling communities to use innovative approaches such as design-led enquiry and thinking (INT. 12). Another highlighted its “major advocacy role that is outcome-focussed” (INT. 3). A Pasifika community leader called TSI a “critical friend” who “resources your development” and “lifts your thinking.” (INT. 7). A Pākehā changemaker said TSI plays “a very empowering, releasing and supportive role” that does not “create dependency” (INT. 5).

TSI grapples with productive tensions when enacting these roles. When seeking to influence policy, a Māori changemaker observed, TSI must be careful not to “take over the voice of the community” but at the same time “be a voice for community” (INT 1). When building capacity that supports community to own and lead their innovations, TSI needs to be careful not to take credit for community innovations (INT. 1). Also, as a unit within Auckland Council working across different platforms, TSI negotiates internal challenges. To influence and impact change at all levels, from grassroots to systems change, TSI must balance the tension of remaining accountable to the communities it works with and alongside as well as being accountable to its relationships within the Council and with Government (INT. 1 & 4).

Trusting Relationships

Trusting relationships,
family-like and whānau-oriented

At heart TSI seeks to grow trusting relationships with communities. TSI feels “like family” to many of the community leaders in this research and is seen as whānau. The reason why many see TSI as “part of council but not council” is because, from their point of view, TSI works from “such a different mindset”, not from the basis of traditionally defined professional relationships (that are more detached and remote) but from the basis of personal connections and relationships created between particular individuals (INT. 5). A Māori community leader explained:

TSI staff don't come in as an agency; they slide in softly, contribute quietly, and then gently slide out again. We describe TSI as whānau, nothing else but whānau. We don't define them as an agency. (INT. 3)

These community leaders treat TSI as whānau because the staff behave as they would with whānau (family) or friends, on “a bro's level” (INT. 16). Both parties co-create, if you like, a kind of professional friendship that is not only supportive, rigorous and durable but also includes a professional stance. By and large, as a team, they demonstrate the kind of values that thrive in te ao Māori (the Māori world) and in te ao Pasifika (the Pasifika world), which is not surprising when the majority of TSI staff identify as Māori or Pasifika. And, of course, these values are human values that, although sometimes expressed differently, also thrive in other cultures. A family-like relationship includes being inclusive, valuing who you are and what you each offer, showing interest in one another's lives, demonstrating genuine care and concern, being yourself, being open to things as they unfold, and being willing to operate at both a human and a professional level. Māori community leaders said:

We work with so many departments in council. When we talk to TSI, it's at more of 'a bro's level'; we're more friends, rather than worrying about having to keep their bosses happy. With TSI, it feels much more high trust and we appreciate what we each bring. (INT. 16)

TSI understands it's about whānau and take that idea seriously. They understand that when whānau come together to really talk about things of importance, sometimes we go from kōrero [conversation] of importance to kōrero on a low-key level. Sometimes people

come and, you know, it's business, business, business. But when TSI come, we talk about business but we can also talk about fishing, and “How is the whānau?” They value both conversations. ... The relationship goes beyond the professional and includes the personal. (INT. 1)

This relational distinction of behaving like and being treated as family/whānau is significant because it suggests an intimacy of engagement that, for changemakers, fosters a real relationship. Acting like and being treated as whānau relies heavily on who people are and how willing they are to be in the relationship – which works both ways, for council staff and community changemakers. One iwi leader acknowledged that “because of everything we've been through our manner can be combative” (INT. 6). A Pasifika leader named “a ledger of mistrust” operating in relationships with other government departments, which means: “You're already working with a sense of mistrust with those organisations,” he said (INT. 8). For these reasons, especially, a relational approach matters. Instead of being defined or limited by transactional engagements, this kind of approach creates diverse relationships with communities based on trust and transparency.

Relationships based on trust and transparency generate whakawhanaungatanga (a sense of belonging) that opens the door to an engagement that makes a difference (INT. 3). Council and community can address challenging issues, together. An iwi leader said that he trusts TSI to have the “straight talk” without compromising staff roles and responsibilities (INT. 4). Their relational approach is a strength, he said, “because we do get an honest response from them.” An honest response conveys that “transparency is important to them” and that “there are no hidden agendas; everything is on the table” (INT. 3 & 9). Community leaders said they feel able to raise concerns and share insights that can prevent mistakes or slow down the pace of engagement, so that it becomes more manageable, for everyone.

Part of the trusting relationship is that if we get warning bells that something might be heading south, it's easy to pick up the phone or fire off an email, and say, “Woah, guys, maybe not” before it becomes a mistake.” ... Sometimes they move

Trusting relationships, family-like and whānau-oriented

too quickly for us. ... “Hang on a second,” [we say,] and they do! It’s cool. They go, “Give me a ring when you’re ready or when you’ve got staff.” (INT. 8)

A Pasifika leader added, with TSI because there is an ongoing relationship based on trust, “the small mistakes, the human ones, you can look past and be forgiving” (INT. 8).

Reciprocity is another hall mark of a trusting relationship. Council–community relationships often seem one way (with council calling the shots), but a relational approach creates a two-way exchange that is mutually beneficial and allows people to be themselves. “When they ask for something I know it’s important to them and I am willing to respond,” an iwi leader said (INT. 4). Giving back, for him and for many others contributing to this research, is an acknowledgement of and obligation arising from what TSI has already given to them. “We need them and they need us,” a Pākehā changemaker said (INT. 10). “You are being reciprocal with intangible things that are not always seen,” another Māori changemaker explained. “That is why the relationship works between us and TSI; it is not taken lightly. There is a responsibility that comes with that level of relationship and personal investment” (INT. 1). Reciprocity, then, is a responsibility that cannot be neatly defined nor should it be taken lightly. When asked, “How you know you have a relationship with TSI?” a Pākehā changemaker said:

We’re working on projects together, so it’s very practical. TSI will ask me for support; that’s another indication. ... Also, I was able to create a connection to someone in the Ministry of Education for TSI. ... [TSI staff are] very low key, down to earth, real, no stress and say yes, so I don’t feel I have to be anyone other than me. (INT. 13)

None of this engagement is “forced” or “fake”, instead TSI’s relational approach was described as “genuine” and “organic” (INT. 1). Over time TSI has developed “a large catchment of good relationships” across South Auckland (INT. 14). It has worked, or is working, intensively with some groups and differently with others who need less support. Strong relationships exist and are ongoing, or have become inactive. Some groups want more engagement. “I expect TSI is constantly scoping what they are doing and can

do, to leverage and maximise opportunities,” a Pasifika changemaker said (INT. 14) and that is the challenge facing TSI.

TSI is very aware other entrepreneurs and groups might want or need, and benefit from, its support. TSI staff must constantly judge the pace of their engagements with groups/communities. If they move too quickly, as the example above showed, they may inadvertently overwhelm or pressure groups or else miss an important step, but if they move too slowly they could lose community interest and motivation. One group was reluctant to apply for new funding, but their TSI colleague was enthusiastic because she saw potential in the women she/they were working with. “We thought it was too early, but we all had the right intentions to move forward with it and see where it went. It was right that we got turned down. We weren’t ready. These are learning experiences” (INT. 10). In another case, a Pasifika leader described the period after intensive support, in which suddenly, it seemed, TSI was gone:

TSI moved on to other projects and left us to get on with it. ... The relational element got lost a bit and at the moment we do not have regular contact with TSI but we also know they are only a phone call away. It would have been helpful to have a clearer picture of how much engagement we could expect or not [after we achieved our goal]. (INT. 14)

Another example shows the pitfalls of moving too slowly. A marae leader said the pace of their relationship with TSI had been slower than he preferred. “We need to move from the kōrero stage to strategic action,” he said. “We want to invest the time it needs to create something that is sustainable into the future” (INT. 3). [Researcher’s note: With his permission, I passed this information on and the next day I got a call from TSI to say, “We’re onto it.”]

Notwithstanding a relational approach, TSI is not immune to relational tensions. TSI is still figuring out how and when to transition relationships to a new place following a period of intensive engagement or capacity-building. “TSI is quite clear that they will support you for this time,” a Pākehā changemaker said, adding that “TSI created that clear expectation early on but others learnt it later in the journey” (INT. 5). While, in his

case, TSI had retreated to the background after intensive engagement, he understood TSI was still available when needed. “I give that approach 10 out of 10 because it offers some security,” he said (INT. 5).

The above examples show the rough and tumble and reality of engaged trusting relationships. People/groups move at different paces and TSI will not always get it right. Sometimes someone will get ahead of themselves and make mistakes. Workings of power operate and can be intimidating, but here there is a willingness and courage on both sides to deal with things directly. Inevitably, tensions arise in any relationship, including a trusting relationship, and characterise the complex terrain of social and community innovation. But discussions with changemakers suggest that relational tensions can also become a productive force that enables council and communities to learn from each other.

A Heart FOR COMMUNITY

TSI is working with Southside communities made up of predominantly Māori and Pacific peoples and a high percentage of youth. The kind of heart you have matters a great deal to Māori, Pacific and young people, and others too, because it says so much about the kind of person/team you are, what you care about and why. According to many community leaders in the research, at the core of TSI's relational approach is a heart that is "generous", "abundant" and "good" (INT. 16, 10 & 5). Careful not to speak for others but expressing a view held by many, a Māori changemaker described TSI's heart in this way:

They have a heart for community, for people, for local organisations like ourselves, who are just out there doing things and making things happen. (INT. 16)

A heart for the people, for community, is expressed through aroha (unconditional love and concern for the other). "Aroha is felt", and when given freely, it flows both ways, another Māori changemaker explained. Aroha is "organic", she added, and "comes from the heart, however you express that. With TSI, aroha is there because you wouldn't have the level of relationship working without it" (INT. 1).

This heart cares about injustice, a Pākehā changemaker said, and responds with answers and solutions (INT.5). For TSI, nothing is too big, too small or too hard to tackle because they see "the abundance in others and in the communities they work with" and want to help in a meaningful way (INT.5). This doesn't mean that TSI can or will do everything asked of them, because that is simply not possible for various reasons, but TSI will listen to and consider requests or ideas put to them. According to a Māori community leader, "You can tell they have a good heart by their friendly personalities and their soft humble approach." That kind of approach is so important, she said, because "it allows your kōrero to come through."

This reflection is hugely important given community voices are often ignored or swamped by other voices in other conversations. What she values so much about her relationship with TSI is that, "Every time we meet an outcome is made, new connections created and jobs are completed" (INT. 3).

She conveyed a sense that she feels that her time has been well spent, that it has been productive to meet with TSI and that things are moving forward in a good way.

A Pasifika youth leader highlighted the value of TSI's open and welcoming heart. This heart conveys to changemakers that council staff value and believe in the people they are working with and the communities those people represent or connect to. She, and others, placed great importance in the way TSI staff believe in you. She said:

I value TSI's openness. Two of us young people did a summer internship at TSI and the staff let us voice our opinions in other TSI projects. ... We felt respected and included; that we mattered and so did our ideas. ... having positive people around you who believe in you is so important because it lifts you up. The people at TSI are like that; they value and believe in you. (INT. 11)

Certain assumptions activate a heart for community and resonated for the changemakers in this research. 'People, whoever they are, matter.' 'If you look for goodness in communities (resilience, courage, innovation, and so on), you will find it.' 'Believing in people/communities and building their capacity to lead will bolster their confidence and enable them to work for positive change that lasts.' A Māori community leader described the kinds of values permeating the assumptions she and her colleagues see operating across the TSI that convey a heart for community as follows:

We see the TSI team operating with kaitiakitanga (a sense of responsibility), manaakitanga (being welcoming), whanaungatanga (engagement with communities), tika, pono, aroha (ensuring they do it all in the right way for the right purpose with good intentions and love), ukiuki (sustainability in an environmental sense but also in the sense of creating sustainable relationships, and encouraging us to become self-sufficient in a business sense), and auaha (being innovative and creative). (INT. 1).

Finally, it is important to note what will be obvious to some. A relational approach represents significant value for Māori and Pasifika cultures/peoples, in particular, because their worlds, te ao Māori and te ao Pasifika, are constituted through relationships.

Their way of being in the world reminds TSI, and can teach others, that relationship-building is the work of the heart and when you work from the heart relationships flourish and somehow find a way to navigate human diversity, negotiate different interests and work through complex challenges. Here, respect comes into play. The importance of respect was often implied, but not directly discussed by this group of changemakers. "It takes away the value of the word [respect] when you have to say it," a Māori community leader explained (INT. 1). For TSI, the relational power of respect is made obvious in and through its lived expression.

Part 2:

Relational practices

What kind of relational practices demonstrate an engaged relational approach? This section, on relational practices, begins to make more visible how Auckland Council, through TSI, is working hard to do things differently when seeking to engage with South Auckland communities. There is much in what follows that can inform council–community engagements with diverse communities whatever the setting or the geographical location – that is, the value of a more relational way of working extends well beyond the borders of South Auckland.

A practice-based approach focuses on what people do. The emphasis here is on ‘doing that makes a difference’ by working in ways that enable communities and council to achieve their aspirations and priorities. TSI is doing different things in different settings with different people/groups/communities, depending on their capacity, needs and aspirations.

This research highlighted six relational practices that, according to community leaders contributing to this research, enable TSI staff to work effectively across diverse community settings/groups as well as to engage productively across the Council and with the Government. These relational practices are:

- Helping – to grow, to shape the future, to succeed
- Building – bridges, capacity, networks
- Challenging – the status quo and removing roadblocks
- Sharing – information, knowledge, expertise, relationships
- Creating – opportunities, connections, joined-up action
- Innovating – grassroots to systems-level change.

These relational practices are not discrete but interweave to whakamana (uplift) communities, enabling them to lead and drive community-led innovations. A practice-based approach is enabling TSI to work with and alongside South Auckland entrepreneurs and changemakers to support them to make change across various levels of engagement. TSI also plays a significant role in challenging the status quo within council to remove roadblocks that create barriers to community-led innovation and to activate new approaches.

Helping

Helping can take many forms and what matters in the end is the particular help that communities need, as defined by them. Community leaders identified many ways in which TSI has helped them/their organisations to grow, to shape the/their future and to succeed. They described effective helping as: practical help “with administration” (INT. 5) and “with funding” (INT. 6), “help by giving us contacts” (INT. 12 & 15), “help to build new skillsets” (INT. 1), “help to build organisational capacity and capability” (INT. 5), “help to grow my thinking and believe in it” (INT. 7), and help “to invest an innovation culture in our organisation” (INT. 7).

Effective helping begins with “taking the time to sit down and talk” with community leaders/groups about who you are and what you can offer as well as where they are and what they aspire to achieve, and then respond in practical and specific ways that make a difference by filling the gap (INT. 5).

TSI explained how they could work with us and listened to what we were interested in and hoped for. They gave us ideas. ... They assisted and helped us not only through advice, meetings and contacts but also by doing heavy work ... on a summer's day to help establish the garden project. (INT. 15)

When council workers ask groups/communities, “What can we do?” “How can we help?” they demonstrate an awareness that communities hold valuable expertise about their realities. Their questions convey respect for the other and a disposition of humility. When given the opportunity, community leaders will jump at the chance to begin a conversation that allows them/their community to determine their future.

[When TSI asks those questions] you feel like you own the project and are responsible for what you are doing. Importantly, TSI doesn't dictate but will give advice if you ask for it. (INT. 5)

Responsive and timely interventions help to grow community confidence. When presented with a real need at short notice, TSI works hard to address the issue without adding to the existing burden by making groups cross hurdles or negotiate barriers.

Things happened quickly and easily ... they trusted us to make the right decisions for what we needed. ... If we hadn't had that support at that critical time, we would have been in real trouble. (INT. 5)

Effective help does not always require loads of time, expertise or money. TSI supported a group of South Auckland youth to grow their sense of belonging by sharing its space with them. Without expense, fuss or bother, TSI met a particular need that also maximised the use of council resources. Having a crucial need met motivated the youth to continue working together to create ways to address issues in their communities.

Being trusted to use the TSI space let us know they were listening to us... We felt motivated to keep attending the group. Those of us who didn't have much, felt more valued. The environment offered us a place of belonging ... to meet up with friends and talk about the issues in our community and how we could respond. (INT. 11)

Understanding community vision, and supporting those seeking to implement it, is key to effective helping. Pasifika social entrepreneurs valued the expertise they received through TSI to tell their story to prospective partners, funders and interested others so they could appreciate what they had to offer.

Right from the start, TSI understood our vision and wanted to support us. They understood that we didn't want a handout. We were looking for support to help us to do what we can do best, which is to create opportunities for our people. TSI developed a two-way relationship with us and ... returned with valuable information and ideas. We did what we said we could do [and] the relationship grew. TSI offered us valuable expertise that helped us to tell our story to others so they could understand what we were doing and could do. ... With TSI you feel they want to help you to grow. (INT. 2)

Community-led innovation becomes more possible when council staff come with a positive attitude and realistic outlook, expecting people/organisations/communities to succeed and willing and able to help resource them to do so. Here a Pākehā changemaker

speaks for many when he highlights the benefits of a helping approach that supported his organisation to succeed.

TSI expected us to succeed; they think we have the capability and capacity or can grow it. TSI's approach is based on a relationship and a track record. ... TSI not only see the strengths and the possibilities, but also see the challenges we face. Instead of assuming we will fail, they have a positive attitude. ... Their approach is realistic, trusting and empowering; it gives you hope. (INT. 5)

Building – bridges,
capacity, networks

Building

Particular people/groups make a critical difference in community-led innovations, so finding “the right fit” is a crucial consideration (INT. 1). Through critical enquiry, careful listening and reflective thinking, during and after conversations with community leaders, TSI builds a bridge to a particular person with particular expertise or networks that can awahi (support, assist) them to take the next step. Māori, in particular, but other community leaders also, want to understand the whakapapa or origins of such connections. This example shows the process required to find the right fit.

TSI is always thinking about how to awahi your work. ... After a hui, they often call and say, “I was thinking about what you said and I got to thinking about this person who would be awesome for your kaupapa [purpose].” ... And when they tell you about the person, they can tell you who they connect with and what kura [school] they went to, which marae or part of the north they are from and who they’re related to. ... They know that information is valuable to us. ... It works the same with their council/government contacts. ... TSI will say: “This department is doing this.” We’ll talk some more and TSI will narrow in a bit more and say, “This unit is doing that.” Then we’ll talk some more and they will finally come up with a person who is the right fit for what we need. (INT. 1)

Individual mentoring is crucial for strengthening existing leadership and building the next generation of community leaders. A number of changemakers have noticed TSI’s flair for “talent-spotting” leaders. A youth leader talked about the importance of mentoring and what she gained from the experience:

The mentoring I received from TSI was incredibly valuable and is crucial for building up the next generation in our communities, including the future leaders. TSI taught me how to network and that it’s okay to get out of my comfort zone and talk to people. I have developed more of a business-like mentality and become more entrepreneurial in my approach. (INT. 11)

Organisational capacity-building resources groups/business/organisations to exercise leadership, take community-led action and become more self-sufficient. “How can we upskill you to do this work yourself,

so you’re not dependent on us?” TSI asks (INT. 5). Again, the assumption is that communities know what help they need, but may lack access to the specific support or resource to address it. As a result of tailored, high-quality capacity-building support, a number of community leaders said their organisations now have better planning processes, stronger systems, improved accounting procedures and greater transparency between governance and management. Here is one example:

TSI worked with our marae to help us to identify our own governance barriers and how to overcome them. TSI brought in guest speakers who helped us to develop a better understanding of how media and communications can work for us. We learnt how to write a proposal, how to market the opportunities we provide and how to use social media to maximise our exposure to the whānau and communities we already work with and others we want to reach. The work they have done with us has helped to build our capacity as an organisation and as individuals. (INT. 3)

Building understanding, knowledge and skills enables social entrepreneurs, community organisations and marae to create a solid foundation for their work and operate more effectively. The whole community’s capacity is strengthened when local organisational infrastructure is equipped to spearhead community aspirations and address local issues when they arise. In the next example, a Māori social entrepreneur described how business mentoring not only helped to establish a clearer vision and a viable business primed to deliver sizeable contracts, but also produced a flow-on effect – a commitment to nurture others in his community.

We had to learn how to negotiate the bureaucracy, especially all the red tape, and understand how to tick boxes for council. We had to become set up as a vendor and have the right insurances. ... TSI provided access to business advisers as well as opportunities that helped us to set up our business properly. TSI helped to shape us and reshape our vision and where we’re moving to now. ... For us, now, it’s about nurturing our community to be us. That’s the goal. (INT.16)

Building ever-widening networks helps to make a growing pool of talent available across communities. This example, by a Pākehā changemaker, shows the benefits of council staff acting as connecting points and linking groups across communities.

The same names keep popping up. TSI staff are connecting points across South Auckland communities. They see needs and link groups to find ways to meet them. The opportunities they make happen are helping to create a growing pool of talent that makes our own community of Māngere stronger and more inclusive. Also, interweaving connections from unexpected places helps to build a closeness in the community that is empowering. (INT. 9)

Sharing – information, ideas, expertise, relationships



The practice of sharing demonstrates a willingness to share power by creating access to information, ideas, expertise and relationships. Sharing valuable knowledge, in whatever form, not only empowers communities to act on their aspirations but also helps to create the conditions for change and innovation by giving people new ideas/people to think with. TSI has developed a pool of expertise and has relationships “on tap” that it shares with groups and whānau (INT. 8).

Sharing information is a valuable relational practice when it doesn’t demand a lot of time and responds quickly to what social entrepreneurs and communities need to know to progress their aspirations. Simplicity, relevance and a practical approach were highly valued by one Pasifika social entrepreneur who said:

TSI recognises the need to engage in a way that is different from the way council usually works. They asked us what we wanted to achieve. ... They kept it simple and cut to the chase quickly so we didn’t have to invest a lot of time that might go nowhere. The most valuable thing we received from TSI was information; information about jobs, about what’s going on in South Auckland, about how to tell our story effectively, and about how to engage with council as a business. (INT. 2)

Sharing ideas can help communities and council to imagine new ideas and embrace fresh possibilities. One community changemaker said TSI is “good at brainstorming ideas and the brainstorming goes both ways” (Int 10). Working across sectors also enables TSI to stay abreast of and share new developments and opportunities with the groups it is working with. A Māori leader said:

You get phone calls from TSI, like “Hey have you guys ever thought about doing something like this?” The nature of their work means they know what is happening across a number of sectors. I think TSI started using the language of co-design and co-create a lot earlier than others did. (INT. 8)

Sharing ideas in a collaborative manner helps to connect people and support their visioning. A youth leader highlighted that TSI is willing to share ideas with anyone in the community. Here she notes, in addition, that doing so is particularly important in South Auckland because of the gaps that divide people, including generational gaps.

A lot of people have similar ideas but they might not share them or know that people think or feel the same way as them. Collaboration and co-design helps to connect people and enables them to uplift each other’s visions and projects. This sort of approach is very important in the South because there are generational gaps that can separate people. (INT. 11)

Sharing expertise with whānau builds family and community knowledge, fostering relationships and changing lives forever. A Māori changemaker explained how TSI has supported a strand of their work over a couple of years that included sharing expertise in a way that delivered a range of outcomes.

[TSI supports] whānau leading the design of their solutions. ... TSI helped us and the whānau who put themselves forward to understand [and apply] the co-design methodology. ... TSI also brought in expertise to teach our women and build their knowledge around what makes a warm dry home. ... The tests have been on their own homes and were eye-opening, and it took time to build trust and be able to go into their homes.... Quite a few of the ladies were isolated prior to coming on to this project; some didn’t have friends nearby. Developing friendships and relationships has happened through this project; it’s been quite amazing. And there have been other significant changes. (INT. 10)

A valuable way to share relationships is for council to bring possible partners to the table, to help communities to achieve their goals. Many community leaders appreciated the generous way TSI exercises its influence and shares its relationships for their benefit, instead of keeping its connections to itself. As an island nation, our country runs on relationships, or as one Pākehā community leader put it, “It’s all about the people you know” (INT. 9). A Māori community leader provided this example:

We want to design a marae entirely built by whānau with disabilities; not a disability marae but a totally inclusive marae. TSI worked to get a number of players at our table, so we can achieve that goal. Foundation North are there as the funders, Auckland Transport is there because of where the land is and the roading needed, and TSI also brought the Ministry of Social Development to the table. We had a hui at Auckland Council and TSI supported us with that. ... TSI’s support is enabling us to look at the possibility of what a marae might look like if it was designed by our community using a braille design. (INT. 8)

CHAL

GING



Bureaucratic systems and processes can feel very foreign, even scary, to those unfamiliar with them. A people-centred approach helps to make bureaucratic systems become more human and accessible to communities. A Pasifika community leader said that TSI “feels more human”, adding:

It is a door, a small door, into this incredibly huge building that feels clinical. ... TSI shows that building and its systems can be accessed and infiltrated. But it is big and quite scary. TSI is an easy side door into council; I can get in through there. (INT. 7)

Communities need people inside the system who are willing to challenge “Business As Usual” approaches (INT. 16, 5 & 7). As a council insider, TSI plays an enormously helpful role by removing roadblocks to community aspirations and unplugging blockages that hinder productive council–community engagements.

It needed TSI to sort out that kink; you need people inside the system who get [community] and can push the right buttons to leverage the change that needs to happen. (INT. 5)

At one stage we felt one party wasn’t listening, and TSI went and sorted it out. (INT. 6)

What remains profoundly important however is for communities to have the opportunity to speak for themselves. Community leaders valued TSI’s relational practice of creating space for communities to challenge unhelpful systems as a form of productive disruption that can help other stakeholders to see through community eyes:

I think what they do is create a space for disrupters to disrupt. ... That’s a disruption in itself. You have to disrupt to create a space. (INT. 8)

TSI organised a stakeholder ‘walk through’ and mentored our whānau to speak directly to the stakeholders about their services and the impact on them and their whānau. It was very powerful; it helped to breakdown some of the barriers with funders or helped them to see the value added when investing in a whānau-led approach compared to an institutional approach. (INT. 10)

Asking critical questions is another effective way to challenge the status quo and provoke thoughtful consideration that can lead to productive change. TSI uses the practice of critical enquiry to encourage people to reflect on their actions. TSI questions all the groups it works with, not only council and other partners but also the whānau and communities it works alongside. TSI assumes everyone can enhance their approach in some way and benefit from considering other ways of doing things (including its own team). A Māori community leader explained that:

TSI is raising questions with families, with young people, with providers, with bureaucrats, with government departments [and in the process] calling people to action or to think about how their actions might change and improve things. ... “Are there better ways to do things?” “How do you work in a way that is holistic and gives community members the benefit/acknowledgment that they know their communities?” (INT. 12)

Creating space for and fronting-up to face-to-face engagement is often a constructive way for council to address a challenge from the community. TSI invites a conversation in which concerns can be named, aired and dealt with, face-to-face or, as Māori say, ‘kanohi ki te kanohi’. Where there is a genuine “two-way relationship” (INT. 2), a face-to-face conversation allows both parties to be honest with one another (INT. 4). As noted earlier, however, a community challenge may require a resilient council response. Council staff must be prepared to stay the distance and accept that, for a whole host of reasons including the workings of power, such challenges may be ongoing. A Māori community leader described a situation that caused some qualms and valued TSI’s response:

I did a haka! ... TSI just moved a bit too quickly, that’s all. ... “I think we need a meeting,” TSI said. “Cool, all good,” I said, and we worked it out. All that was needed was a conversation. ... To me they’re more like family and with family you can be straight up. (INT. 16)

The practice of challenging the status quo requires a willingness to navigate complexity on the basis that there are no magic bullets or simple solutions. Community leaders see TSI disrupting

the norm by empowering communities to develop localised community-led or whānau-based responses:

I’ve seen that approach come and go, people coming to our community to say, “This is the magic bullet that’s going to save you guys.” TSI challenges that whole process of doing things. ... Change happens when you empower people from communities to create the solutions for their own communities. ... TSI trusts and follows our lead. (INT.16)

Like so many of these things that TSI is leading, it’s culture-led first. It’s not about putting these cool technologies in a room and saying, “There you go, go for it”, it’s actually about building a culture or a whānau would be a better way to describe it. Once you have that you can move forward. (INT. 13)

CREATING

-ACTING

Creating opportunities for community leaders to meet people and groups beyond their existing community networks can add significant value to community-led initiatives. Communities encounter other ways of thinking and outside interest that allows them to see their world/work through new eyes, or gain access to professional expertise. A Māori community leader valued TSI providing opportunities to connect with government officials and community groups as part of co-design training and access to skilled professionals working in the same field.

... at the master class there were people from Treasury and all sorts of government departments as well as other community groups. ... I think that's huge in terms of community being exposed to those people and those opportunities. TSI also introduced us to people who were interested and skilled in the work we were doing. We really appreciated [their] input. (INT. 12)

Assessing potential opportunities is crucial to sound decision-making. A Māori community leader not only valued access to new opportunities, but also appreciated the way TSI assisted their marae to think through possible implications:

They come with potential opportunities but also identify risks and suggest ways to address those risks with solutions. For us that's the wisdom in their approach; recognising there will always be risks and providing ways to deal with them. (INT. 3)

New connections can lead to opportunities that provide rich experiences for whānau. A Māori community leader described how making a new connection with a government department through TSI enabled a relationship that over time evolved a sustainable model that no longer depends on TSI for support.

TSI helped us to create a relationship with the Department of Conservation (DOC) that led to a sustainable model. Three South Auckland marae now work together with DOC to create opportunities for our youth, enabling them to look at life through a different lens. (INT. 3)

Making critical connections and finding ways to maximise opportunities can enable multiple impacts. Pasifika social entrepreneurs described the “knock-on effect” of TSI opening doors to opportunities and creating valuable connections. They developed a business model that includes social and environmental outcomes important to their (Pasifika and Māori) communities and council.

We plan for a positive knock-on effect for our communities in everything we do. TSI understands this approach and wants to support it. ... We needed someone to point us in the right direction, open doors and create contacts so we could show how we could help to address problems faced by our communities. ... TSI connected us to the right people in Auckland Council and we got the exposure we needed to attract interest. [We were able to show that we already contribute] to what council is trying to achieve in waste minimisation, supporting Māori and Pacific achievement, and creating employment opportunities. (INT. 2)

Joined-up action across South Auckland is now enabling groups to become part of a wider strategy of change that connects them to the future. A Pākehā community leader explained how an opportunity to participate in the developing South Auckland Maker Movement, galvanised by TSI, is not only having a positive impact on student learning but also connecting the school community to a broader movement of change.

It enables our school to involve the outside world in learning. Our students get to work with new people and they love it. ... None of that would be happening without TSI. ... we're actually joined up to a wider regional strategy. ... My sense is that that's only going to grow bigger and bigger. ... It joins us up as a community and then as a region and then as a city. (INT. 13)

A wider strategy for change that supports community aspirations requires collective action and someone that has the confidence of all parties to drive it. An iwi leader identified reasons why he believes TSI is well placed to help to drive collective action but also recognised that iwi have a vital role to play:

TSI has the expertise and networks, they're focussed on the business of achieving outcomes for our communities in South Auckland, and they're semi-independent from the conflicts we as iwi, as mana whenua, as Māori, have between ourselves and have been created, for example, through Treaty settlements. But iwi can't expect them to do everything; we have to take responsibility and play our part. (INT. 4)



Co-design – a creative, engaging and versatile approach in which users are respectfully regarded as the experts of their experiences and integral to the design process – allows community voices to be heard and to impact change affecting their lives and futures. Community leaders greatly appreciated the codesign training made available through TSI; for some it was the thing they valued most. Many groups are now applying this approach across a wide range of community-led innovations. A Māori community leader was excited to report that:

A codesign approach has spread across our work and we now use it across the organisation. We do codesign with our youth, the population we serve, which allows us to focus on what the youth need and want. The kids get invested when the ideas are theirs. [We've] also used codesign in a programme aimed at developing interest in [science, technology, engineering, and maths] from a young age. (INT. 1)

A codesign approach allows communities and council to trial strategies for change without making a huge financial investment. A Pasifika community leader observed that one of the things that works well for TSI is its willingness “to trial and test many things” (INT. 7). Learning and applying “the practice of testing quickly and failing fast” has enabled this leader to identify a sound business development model that can support Pasifika families to achieve self-employment.

It has been a long arduous process but we think we now have a business model that works. ... [Our families] see themselves as proper businesses and behave like proper businesses. ... That is the kind of impactful change we want. (INT. 7)

Opportunities to trial changemaking strategies can help to motivate communities to contribute to systems-level change. A Māori community leader described how her organisation was able, with TSI support, to successfully trial the idea of “peer support, whānau to whānau support, families supporting other families”. Even families reporting considerable adverse childhood experiences felt motivated to support systems change, she said:

These families now want to contribute to improving ways of doing things across systems in our community and in government so that people in the future can benefit. ... they are motivated to use their stories to encourage others in similar situations to be heard. (INT. 12)

The Maker Strategy is an example of innovative, place-based, sustainable changemaking. Sharing the vision for ‘Maker City’ enabled TSI to support a school to push the boundaries and extend the Maker strategy. A Pākehā community leader explains:

Maker City is about people, programme and place, where that creativity can flourish as an economic, transformative activity. It was TSI sharing that vision for South Auckland that strategically, for me, showed the alignment with what we're trying to achieve. Becoming part of this strategy will enable our kids to create income for themselves and for their families, and use these technologies to make a difference in their community. (INT. 13)

An openness to learn from communities builds relationships that can teach council staff what they need to know to be truly helpful and innovative. Seeking to better understand ‘difference’ (whatever form it takes) ensures its protection and cultivates humility in the learner who becomes more aware of what they do not know, but need to know more of, to be an effective practitioner. Community leaders and TSI respect and practise a willingness to learn from each other because it nourishes their relationship. A Pasifika community leader gave an example of TSI’s willingness to learn from communities and develop relationships as a basis for future action.

The disability sector is quite a difficult one. ... we confront a whole lot of people that find us difficult to comprehend. The difference with TSI is that they don't actually stop; they try to find out what it is they need to understand by building that relationship with us and then, once they comprehend and develop their own personal relationship with our whānau, they work out as an organisation what they need to do to help us. ... They come back to us and try to understand that difference. ... When they meet us for the first time, you have a sense they are willing to learn. (INT. 8)

Learning side-by-side provides council staff and community colleagues with another way to build meaningful relationships that can lead to other opportunities for engagement that bear their own fruits. The next example shows the benefits of TSI staff co-learning with a group of South Auckland women. Their confidence grew, encouraging them to grasp another opportunity, offered by TSI, to take on a co-teaching role by sharing their stories.

TSI had a co-design workshop ... They were learning co-design and teaching us to become co-design practitioners. Our ladies warmed up to the TSI staff.... They travelled around with them for four or five months doing different things including going to workshops and telling their story at conferences. ... those kinds of experiences have helped our ladies to realise they've got some good skills to offer. ... that they're very capable and have huge knowledge. You don't realise how phenomenal your work is until you actually tell the story to others. (INT. 10)

Part 3:

Case stories

The following short case stories show a relational, practice-based approach in action. Much of the work described here is work-in-progress and the stories were abbreviated for this context.

A few examples cannot show the extent of TSI's relational engagements across South Auckland, however these stories serve to illustrate the kind of relational approach community leaders appreciate and show changemaking across various levels, at grassroots (with individuals, families/whānau, organisations) and at a practice and systems-level.

Helping to bring a community vision to life

Told by Graeme Hansen
Auckland Teaching Gardens

“What would you like to do with that block of land,” TSI asked one day, pointing to a skinny section on the boundary of our Māngere site. “I’d really love a vertical garden to create a food forest for educational purposes,” I said. “A vertical garden would show four or five levels of food production, starting with canopy trees as fodder crops, big fruit trees, little fruit trees, shrubs, bushes, above ground vegetables and below ground vegetables. School groups, local residents and the wider community could then see the potential for maximising land use for food production in whatever space is available to them at school, at home or wherever.” TSI saw the land through our eyes and offered to help.

As the project got going we both realised that the model we were imagining didn’t exist in the wider community or New Zealand so far as we knew; there are only off-shore examples. TSI made a connection with staff at the Auckland University of Technology who developed the initial concept plans for a 2,000m² vertical garden. We were very involved in the whole process, including site visits and presentations, and we got a very good result. It’s very exciting to see our vision come to life.

Nurturing creative entrepreneurs enables them to nurture local talent

Told by Waikare Komene
THE ROOTS: Creative Entrepreneurs

It was very hard during the first two years. As creative entrepreneurs, we had the skills and the time but no paid work. We created our name with nothing but heart and passion. TSI came alongside us and said, “Hey, you guys are doing amazing stuff! Can you do it over here and here, and we’ll pay you this?” I was like, “What! You mean we can get paid to do this? Cool!” TSI helped us to set up our business properly and we’ve done a range of projects with other groups they’re working with. ... Some school students heard about what Roots was doing and turned up at the door one day while I was building. They were like, “What are you building? Can I help?” and I was like, “Yeah! How about you break down those pallets and see how you go.” They began turning up every day and eventually became our crew.

They’ve helped us with so many projects, including building a portable café for a new TSI-supported community social enterprise, the Fale Kofi at The Ōtāhuhu Station. When their teacher saw it, she was blown away. Now the teacher stops by on a regular basis and tells us how the boys are tracking and if there’s something wrong she asks me to have a chat with them. ... These boys are now talking about becoming architects and designers and builders. They’ve got a vision in their head. ... We just need opportunities to nurture our people. TSI has done that for us, nurturing us in terms of our visions and our goals. We know all these young people in the same position we were in when we started out. Now we want to be there for them, inspiring them and providing opportunities so they can flourish and showcase their talent.

Connections that nourish youth-led initiatives

Told by Mele Tapueluelu
Youth Leader and Advocate

In my last year of high school, I took part in a 10-week programme called “Live the Dream” that gave me the opportunity to explore what it meant to be innovative and become an entrepreneur. This challenge was put to us: “If you had a vision, how would you start it?” We pitched our ideas at a networking event and the TSI director was there. She was interested in our pitch and gave us her contact details. We met up with her afterwards and talked about what we thought we could do in the community and how TSI could help. We needed a place where young people could meet to discuss ideas and become motivated to put their ideas into action. We were so surprised when the TSI director suggested that we use TSI office space and we jumped at the chance.

In response to the Live the Dream challenge, our core group of young people created the “412 Project”. The name comes from a verse in the Bible (1 Timothy 4:12), which we tried to keep as our core purpose: “Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young but set an example for the believers in speech and conduct and faith and in purity.” We all love music and dance, so we ran events for performing artists. We hosted a dance workshop and invited our friends to perform. We supported other organisations such as a local library and The Roots Collective by helping out at their events. We volunteered our time and sometimes we received gift vouchers that recognised our contribution. The biggest outcome for us during that year was being able to put forward and execute our own ideas and run our own events. It was Very Cool!

A social enterprise adding local flavour and delivering a range of outcomes

Told by Ann-Helen Rasmussen Nu'uali'itia
Affirming Works

Through TSI, we partnered with a group of local providers, Auckland Transport (AT) and local government to create Fale Kofi, a cooperative coffee kiosk that began operating in March 2017 and is based in the new Ōtāhuhu Bus and Train Station. This social enterprise was developed in stages and we relied heavily on the advice and assistance of TSI. The questioning process of talanoa enabled us to articulate our point of difference: We were a local feasible social enterprise that could deliver a sustainable business operation and create education and social outcomes for our community. The stakes were high and TSI wanted community ownership as much as we did. Fale Kofi was an opportunity to add local flavour. TSI helped to pull in additional support, providing initial capital for Creative Roots to make an amazing upcycled design for a coffee kiosk in a very tight time-frame. We had an existing relationship with the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board and TSI also supported us in that space as well as doing other critical stakeholder relationship-building work behind the scenes to enable AT and others to understand what we could offer. During the commercial tender and contracting process, we felt a heightened sense of anxiety because we were competing with commercial operators.

We were awarded an initial six-month trial, which was a great learning experience for a young team like ours. When you run a kiosk, it's not just about serving food but also requires developing a skill-set that allows you to analyse and grow the business. We presented monthly reports to AT that helped us to establish good practices and ensure good accountability back to them. TSI offered contacts and pitched new angles that helped us to think of different ways of doing things and how to overcome the challenges we met along the way. TSI was alongside without taking control, striking a balance that allowed us to grow, develop and feel a strong sense of community ownership. When you have that kind of support you don't feel so alone or overwhelmed by the responsibility. The initial contract gave AT the right to retender the kiosk business opportunity when the six-month period ended. The tender process for the three-year contract happened over 6-8 weeks and was another steep learning curve. We did what was required and were awarded the contract, which was a huge achievement for us. We strongly believe in the way the kiosk works; after expenses are paid the profit is reinvested back into social programmes for the kids and families in the community in which we operate. We pride ourselves on being able to show kids and families that there are different ways of being able to achieve sustainability.

Creating a bridge to a community-led social enterprise

Told by Dave Tims
Member of Urban Neighbours of Hope/
Randwick Park Community

In the early stages, before our new community centre was built, I said to TSI one day, "It would be very cool if we could mow the local park. Being able to do that would grow a sense of community responsibility for looking after our area and provide a way to generate income." TSI brokered a relationship with the company that had the contract for maintaining council parks and reserves in our area, and sold them a vision of a local group taking on the responsibility for maintaining their local area. The company were very enthusiastic and agreed to subcontract this maintenance work to us. They went the extra mile by ensuring that we met the health and safety regulations, and other requirements. Their goal was to awahi [support] us to meet all the standards and they even supplied the necessary safety gear. I could ring them at any time and ask for help and they would respond. We were able to start a small social enterprise, buy equipment and create local employment. That all happened because TSI acted as the bridge.

Introducing new ideas while doing what's needed

Told by Karl Whare Tipeti Flavell
Te Ara Rangatu o Te Iwi o Ngāti
Te Ata Waiohua

A number of groups become involved in a discussion about protecting cultural sites on the Āwhitu Peninsula. TSI could see that other groups were overseeing other aspects of the project. They offered to coordinate the Māori component to ensure that our interests and cultural values were properly recognised and protected. They offered to wrap a framework around what Ngāti Te Ata wanted. “What do you want, Ngāti Te Ata?” they asked and I presented our ideas. “Okay!” our TSI contact replied. “Now I can see what you want. I see different components and I need to create a plan and a budget, find funding, and identify and engage the expertise that will enable you to achieve these different components.”

It was at this point she introduced new ideas. “Have you considered an eco-tourism venture that could provide tourist opportunities and income for some of your people? It would allow you to promote your stories, promote the culture and provide a regional attraction.” “Throw us a plan of what that might look like,” we said, and she prepared a plan for our Iwi Authority to consider. These are never easy decisions for various reasons, but our people could see we were getting what we wanted, which was access to the sites and to be able to protect their cultural integrity for future generations. “Beautiful,” they said, approving the plan. “This is a long time needed and a long time coming.” Promoting our cultural heritage will enable others to start to see, understand and value it, and provide some of our people with meaningful employment.

Sharing relationships to enable community-led innovation

Told by Daljit Singh and Rajinder Singh
Supreme Sikh Society New Zealand

TSI linked us to a Cook Islands Mamas Group in Māngere to explore a way to repurpose our ceremonial cloths. Ramala Sahib fabric is only used once during our religious ceremonies and normally disposed of annually. TSI asked respectfully how important it was for us to burn this cloth each year. We said we were open to suggestions, so long as the fabric was used for a good purpose. TSI suggested the idea of reusing the cloth to reduce waste and we agreed. We now give the Mamas Group 15-20 boxes of fabric every fortnight. We informed all of the Gurdwara Societies around New Zealand that we were establishing a national collection point and 23 temples across the country now send fabric to us on a regular basis.

This initiative allows us to demonstrate our values as a faith community, especially our commitment to contribute to good outcomes within the wider community. We're also working towards our zero-waste policy and encouraging other Temples to do likewise. ... Everyone is very happy with this initiative. No other Temple across the globe has done anything like this. This is just one of the initiatives we have underway with TSI's support and the result of all these initiatives is that our community is becoming more active.

Embedding design thinking into a school's pedagogical approach

Told by Leanne Gibson
The Business Academy,
Manurewa High School

TSI partnered with the Ministry of Education to host a workshop to help schools apply for innovation funding, to support a design thinking approach. I think the intention was to try to shift the way research was done in schools to become more empathic. A couple of us attended that workshop and our school started working with TSI to build staff and student capability with design thinking. TSI ran design thinking workshops in the junior programme, Years 9 and 10, to teach our students the process, and a teacher developed that approach to inquiry learning.

Nobody really had much experience three years ago in design thinking, and I don't think we'd be anywhere near as advanced in it as we are now, if we hadn't had TSI's help. This is important not only because it's a valid way of engaging students in learning, but also because it's an approach that is guiding the world they are heading into. So, we're preparing them for the future, in that sense. So that's the first thing that TSI helped us with, to embed design thinking into the pedagogical approach of the school, particularly in the junior years.

Working together to codesign and promote urban conservation initiatives

Told by Chantelle Whaiapu,
Zara Motutere and Vicky Otene
Taiohi Whai Oranga

We put codesign into practice as a collective when working with other organisations. Pua ngā māra is an example of working together collectively that focusses on urban conservation. The words have many meanings, but include blossoming, planting and sowing your garden. In that initiative we're looking at water quality, to restore mauri [life-force] to our water ways. That collective is Māori and Pākehā, and is a mixture of mana whenua, urban Māori, council bodies, government departments, universities and others. With TSI's support, we were able to go to the Department of Conservation, Healthy Waters and the university, and work with them to create a prototype water testing kit.

The first year was spent doing whanaungatanga (cultivating a sense of belonging) to build relationships and we also did projects together. This year we decided to be more action-orientated and youth-focussed. We're creating opportunities for youth to be involved in urban conservation and to help with the water quality prototyping testing kit. We were able to tap into expertise that enabled our kids to win a science award. Twenty-eight whare kura (school) kids entered the award and they came second! They were the first whare kura to enter and the first school to incorporate mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) into their science project. They delivered around 90 percent of their project in te reo Māori (the Māori language). That project has developed a water quality testing kit that is cheap to make, portable and compact, and can be used in saline and fresh water environments. It uses technology to measure chemicals in the water. We expect it will eventually cost \$20-25 per kit, compared to other products that cost between \$300-500.

Maybe we would have gotten there eventually with this project but it would have taken us longer. TSI understood our mahi and our thinking as well as a collective approach, which is the world that we swim in. We all have different projects going on and TSI is thinking about us all the time. The beauty of a codesign approach is that you come to see that you have things in common with your project partners. You say to yourself, "Gosh we have the same priorities, they may be different here and there, but mostly they are the same, so why have we been working separately for however many years?" It builds us up, having people to draw on for particular priorities. That first year we realised we had the same priorities, with some differences.

Lifting the game of others to achieve practice-level change

Told by Tania Kingi
Te Roopu Waiora

We're a kaupapa Māori and consumer-based organisation working with Māori who have a range of impairments. We're the most economically, socially, and culturally deprived population in the country, so anything we're able to work on is good for everybody. TSI recognises that. ... We work with the concept of hauatanga which focuses on people with particular gifts as opposed to people being disabled. We've spent years developing this idea and just as many years telling doctors and nurses they have to be competent to look after our community. We haven't outgrown that role but we've matured a bit. Now we now say, "Actually, we could help you to do a better job." That's where TSI has been useful. We had been cooking the idea of offering a programme to health professionals for some time but had very little support. When we told TSI, "This is what we want to do," they said, "Let's have lunch and invite these people. Let's get in business mentors to strengthen the capacity of your community to lead this initiative. And let's go to a conference and see what other countries are doing."

With TSI's support we developed a programme to train Counties Manukau DHB staff to become more culturally competent from a disability world view. The programme offers an NZQA Level Three qualification in health management capability. The deliverers and the assessors are whānau with disabilities. We've done a couple of pilots with them and now we're ready to roll-out our programme. Our whānau have developed teams to work with organisations within the DHB to lift their game and we've created a way for them to earn some income. This approach does what we want. We don't want 'the charitable thing', we don't want 'it feels good for the soul thing' – although that is definitively part of it. Instead we wanted to develop and offer a whānau-led programme that would be financially viable and achieve practice-level change. We now have a programme that can do that.

Last words: Working in the innovation space

Working in the innovation space can be challenging, hard and complex work but also highly productive and inspiring. All of the changemakers in this research expressed appreciation for the support they have received from TSI. An iwi leader expressed a view held by many: “TSI has helped us tremendously and we would not have gotten this initiative off the ground without its support” (INT. 6). For him and others, the relationship has worked because they received what they needed.

Effective engagement has enabled some groups to achieve things they never imagined before working with TSI or that may have taken much longer without its influence and support. A Pasifika community leader said working with TSI has enabled her and her organisation to better understand themselves and the complex environment they navigate every day. “We may have gotten there, maybe, eventually, but it would have taken us longer. Instead we got there quicker,” she said. “The gem of TSI is that the staff raise and broaden and challenge your thinking, and love you in the process” (INT. 7).

She and others feel they are just getting started. Some are looking for further help to create new community-led initiatives. They now see possibilities for income-generating social enterprises that will create jobs and provide uplifting experiences for whānau as well as provide future sustainability for their organisations that will reduce their reliance on government and other external funders. Those on the other side of intensive capacity-building want to remain connected, to grasp other opportunities that might arise through TSI or through participation in a network of like-minded South Auckland social entrepreneurs/organisations (INT. 14). A Pasifika community leader sees other organisations in South Auckland already doing elements of what TSI is doing and hopes TSI will “biodegrade” in areas where local groups can lead the way (INT.7). She sees TSI working hard to “meet a whole lot of expectations,” which creates its own challenges. “I don’t think their job is easy,” she said. (INT.7).

Responding to certain tensions that communities also face, a Māori community leader recognised that TSI needs to manage community expectations, continue to be brave by tackling things that others avoid, and accept that certain priorities may not please everybody. She explained that when “you have a really positive experience as a member of the community, you want that to continue”. She sees value in TSI focussing on “fewer but more focused areas” that allow for follow through over time (INT. 12). An iwi leader acknowledged TSI can only deliver within the constraints in which it is operating. From his point of view what matters is clarity of purpose, an agreed kaupapa, and ensuring TSI is adequately funded to resource communities in various ways to lead and drive initiatives that will achieve their aspirations (INT. 4).

For TSI, these and other tensions and contradictions create opportunities for genuine engagement and social innovation. Being innovative means being responsive, going where the energy is and biodegrading where or when it is no longer needed. Like the communities it is working with, TSI is also finding its way while seeking to resource and support the vision and leadership of South Auckland innovators and changemakers. This kind of changemaking enterprise – from grassroots to systems-level change – takes time. A Māori community leader observed that it can take years to get a major initiative going. “While you’re impatient and you can see what you need to do, you need to be in it for the long haul” to achieve impactful change across all levels (INT. 12).

The South Auckland changemakers and community leaders who contributed to this research want Auckland Council and the Government to align themselves more closely to relational ways of working that work for their communities. They want a more family-like/whānau-oriented, innovative, impactful approach to become the norm across every division of council and government that engages directly with communities like theirs. That kind of approach, they argue, will enable respectful, robust and productive relationships in which people/practitioners from council/government and community work together to co-design and co-create outcomes that matter to everyone.

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About the research

In 2018 TSI commissioned research to identify the less visible and less tangible TSI ways of working that enable diverse communities across South Auckland to achieve their community-led goals and aspirations. TSI wanted to learn more about how its relational approach and practices has supported community leaders and changemakers to harness wide-ranging opportunities that help to progress their aspirations. TSI was also interested to learn about relational challenges, tensions and contradictions from community perspectives. TSI invited a diverse range of community leaders and changemakers to participate in this project, including:

- People TSI had worked with over a number of years or for less than a year;
- People working for groups/organisations/social enterprises/marae across South Auckland;
- People engaged in a range of community-led initiatives and innovations; and,
- People who may have experienced tensions and challenges in their relationships with TSI.

Of the 17 invited to participate, 16 community leaders embraced the opportunity and one was unavailable. Some leaders brought along their colleagues to the interviews. In total, 25 changemakers across South Auckland took part; 12 contributors identify as Māori, six as Pacific Island, five as Pākehā, and two as Sikh leaders. Among the 14 women and 11 men were a mix of experienced and emerging leaders/innovators.

TSI created a small in-house project team to work with the independent researcher undertaking the research. Over a two-month period, the researcher conducted 16 in-depth narrative interviews with community leaders at their workplace or a place of their choosing, usually a café. The researcher took extensive written notes and digitally recorded the interviews, on average 90 minutes. The researcher compiled a written record of the interview, either as a conversational text (if more than one change-maker took part) or as a first-person narrative, which community leaders

reviewed, and made minor changes when requested. The project team read the approved interview material and workshopped key ideas (with the researcher) that distinguish TSI’s relational approach and its practices. The structure of the report evolved through this collaborative conversation and was modified during report writing. The report was compiled from 80,000 words of interview material. TSI reviewed the draft and suggested minor changes. All community contributors received the final draft for their review and the feedback received was very affirming.

Researcher’s note

Definition of terms:

The terms ‘community leader’ and ‘changemaker’ are used broadly and interchangeably in this report. Some of the research contributors are mandated representatives of their communities, for example iwi leaders. Others may not consider themselves to be ‘leaders’ in the sense of having a mandate to speak for their communities. Rather, they seek to progress the interests and aspirations of the communities they live in, or through a leadership role in their organisations, or as a local change agent, or as a grassroots social entrepreneur, and so, in that sense, they may also be considered as leaders and changemakers. The term ‘Southsider’ is also used and claimed by some community leaders/residents who live in communities situated on the southside of the Manukau Harbour and feel a strong association to this place and its peoples.

Direct quotes and case stories:

Here direct quotes are anonymous and sourced to the interview. “INT. 10”, for example, was a quote taken from my 10th interview. Interviews were scheduled in no particular order and arranged to suit the timetables of the research contributors. Changemakers approved the inclusion of their names and organisations in this report.

Glossary of Māori terms

[Aotearoa](#): New Zealand

[Aroha](#): All-encompassing love, unconditional concern

[Auaha](#): Being innovative and creative

[Awhi](#): To give support, nurture

[Haka](#): In this context, to make a challenge

[Hongi](#): To press noses in greeting

[Harirū](#): Shake hands

[Hui](#): To gather, meet, assemble; also a gathering, a meeting, an assembly

[Hūmārie](#): Humility

[Iwi](#): Tribe

[Kaitiaki](#): Guardian

[Kaitiakitanga](#): The practice of guardianship

[Kanohi ki te kanohi](#): Face-to-face engagement

[Karakia](#): Prayer/s, affirmation/s

[Kaupapa](#): First principles, purpose, philosophy, plan, programme

[Kia ora](#): Informal greeting

[Kōrero](#): Talk, speech

[Kura](#): School

[Mana](#): Unique force, power, recognition, standing, influence

[Manaaki](#): To be hospitable, caring

[Manaakitanga](#): Hospitality, care of others

[Mangai](#): To be a mouthpiece

[Manawhenua](#): Local tribal group/s. Māori with relationships and territorial rights to an area

[Mana motuhake](#): Self-determination and control over one’s own destiny.

[Māra](#): To cultivate

[Māori](#): An indigenous person or the indigenous people of New Zealand

[Mihi](#): To greet; greeting

[Pākehā](#): The Māori language term for white settlers to New Zealand and New Zealanders of European descent

[Pono](#): Truth

[Rangatahi](#): Youth, young people

[Tangata whenua](#): Literally “people of the land” or Māori as Indigenous to Aotearoa-New Zealand

[Te ao Māori](#): The Māori world

[Te ao Pākehā](#): The Pākehā world

[Te ao Pasifika](#): The Pasifika world

[Te Tiriti o Waitangi](#): The Māori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document of Aotearoa-New Zealand

[Te reo Māori](#): The Māori language

[Tika](#): Right, ethical

[Tikanga](#): Cultural practice, custom, rule

[Ukiuki](#): Sustainability

[Whakaaro](#): Thinking, understanding

[Whakaiti](#): Here meaning humbling oneself, being humble and gracious; to know your place

[Whakamana](#): To enable, give strength, empower, to uplift the mana of others

[Whakapapa](#): Genealogy; origins, source of life

[Whakawhanaungatanga](#): A sense of belonging, also intentional relationship-building; relating well to others

[Whānau](#): Extended family, a collective

[Whanaungatanga](#): Strong reciprocal relationships, kinship, an inclination of care and responsibility to others

[Whenua](#): Land

