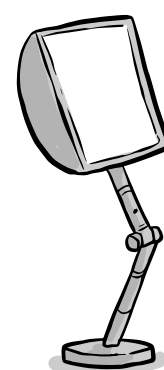
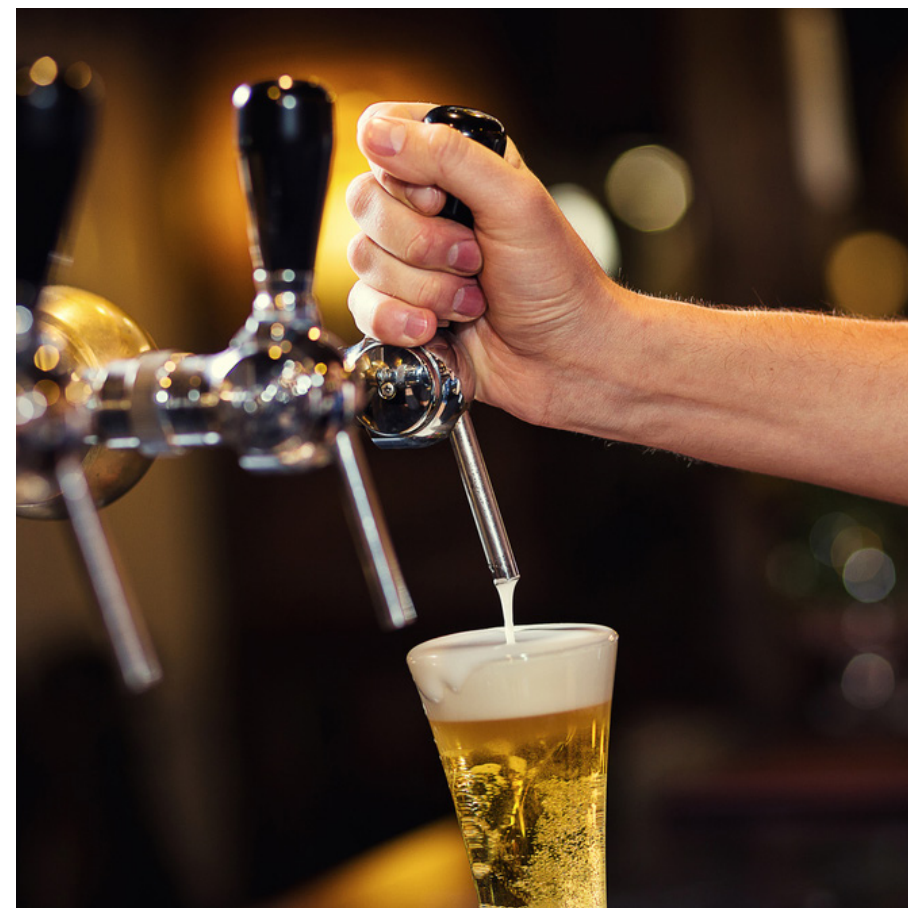
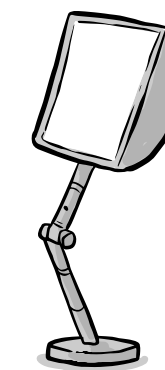


# AUCKLAND YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE



**COMMUNITY  
CENTRE  
SPOTLIGHT**





Community centres are needed more than ever. With local people turning to much-needed services and facilities following the COVID-19 pandemic, it's likely community centres will be particularly busy in the coming months.

We spoke to John Wiseman, Business Development Manager at Auckland Youth and Community Centre, about the challenges these vital community hubs are facing and what's in store for the future.

## ADJUSTING TO NEW RULES

Though Auckland Youth and Community Centre is yet to fully reopen, many community centres are opening their doors once more to serve local people. The key for many community centres is to work behind the scenes to ensure adequate safety measures are in place ahead of reopening.

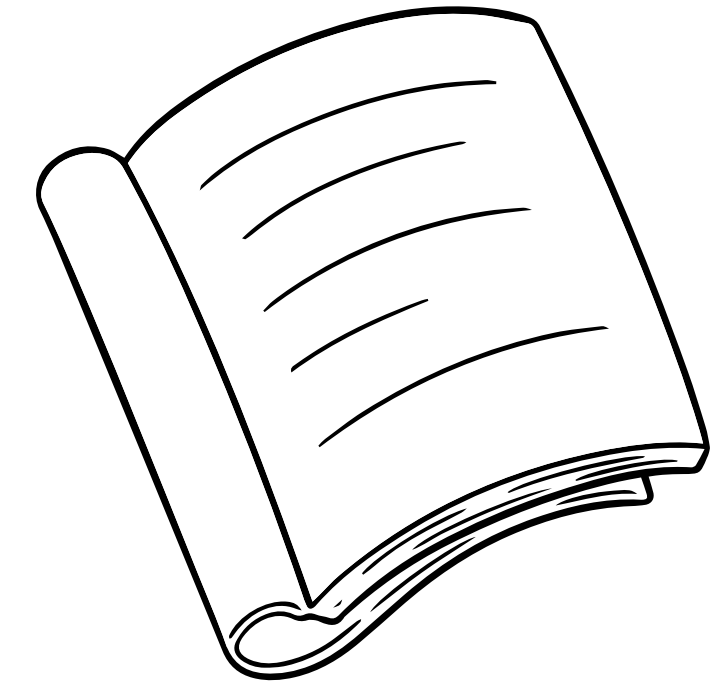
There's nothing worse than reopening too soon and finding team members not ready and the practical safety measures not quite right.

Community centres must ensure that, when people come back to the physical site, they

feel safe. Practicalities such as hand sanitising stations, staff safety procedures, one-way systems and much more must be implemented.

Whilst COVID-19 has undoubtedly had an impact on footfall, which has a negative impact on community centre finances.

In response, community centres such as Auckland Youth and Community Centre have been hosting Zoom and Whatsapp sessions in response. This has allowed the local community access to key services and facilities without any physical risk.



# HELPING THE COMMUNITY FACE KEY CHALLENGES

Whilst community centres themselves are overcoming huge hurdles, the communities they serve are also struggling. John told us that young people in particular have been impacted massively by COVID-19.

Unemployment, uncertainty about the future, limited face-to-face education and lack of additional support / extra-curricular activities has made life harder than ever for the people community centres aim to help.

Those in disadvantaged areas are likely to turn to their community centre for help and support. John told us all about the vital services Auckland Youth and Community Centre provide This includes job sessions, coaching sessions and youth groups. Outdoor activities such as StreetGames provide a

great way for people to socialise and join activities in a safe outdoor environment. Auckland Youth and Community Centre works with people from disadvantaged areas.

As the railway engineering works closed in the local area years ago, unemployment is still high. It's so important for the local community that services such as job sessions, social activities and food banks remain available.

The stats show community centres are appreciated, too. John tells us that the repeat footfall figure for last year stood at 14,000 – that's 14,000 individual visits to the local community centre. Engagement rates are high, but community centres must ensure they're in a position to cater for such high numbers.



# TARGETING NICHE AREAS

Community centres simply don't have the funding or resources to be all things to all people. In order to focus resources and make a real difference to the community, centres must decide who they aim to help and how.

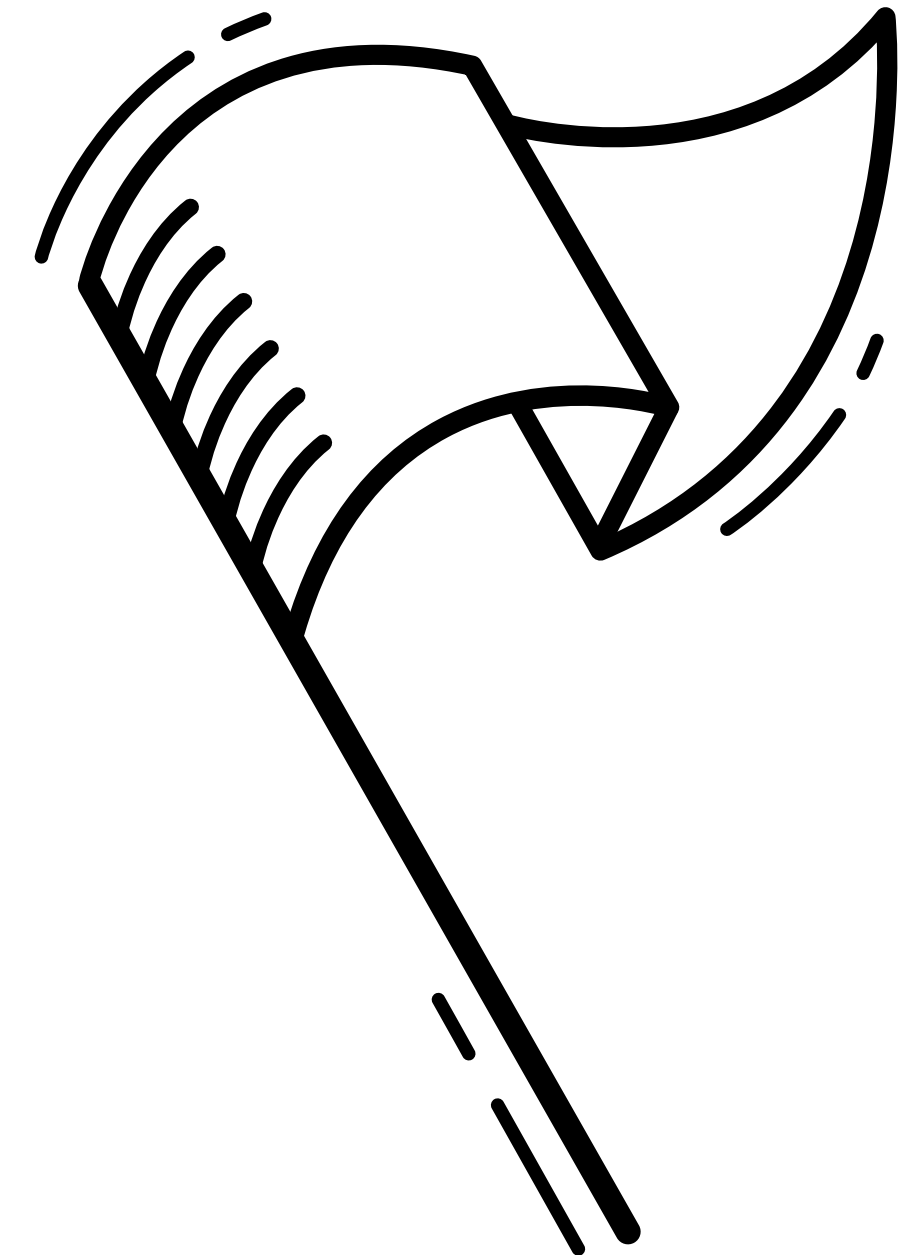
Auckland Youth and Community Centre, as the name suggests, works to primarily support young people. It provides a range of sessions specifically targeted at young people, such as an alternative educational package.

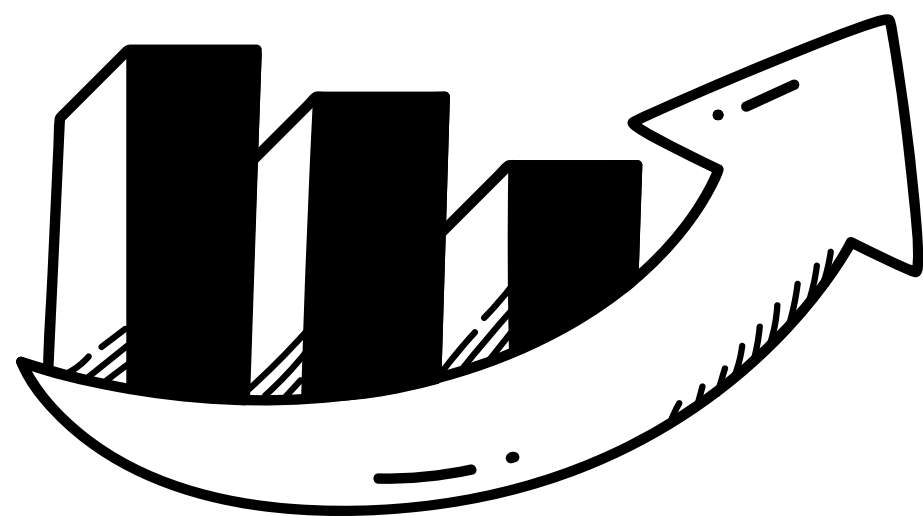
Whilst most community centres want to help everyone, it's important to stick to one area of expertise. It's better to signpost people to other organisations and sources of support than spread a team too thinly.

Of course, some specific funding routes do contribute more significantly to specific areas. This gives community centres the opportunity to expand their services.

For example, some Lottery Funding opportunities help community centres provide job sessions for all ages - from young people fresh out of college right through to older people looking for a career change.

Whilst community centres often carry out invaluable work themselves, some services are hired out to third party providers. This way, community centre staff and volunteers can focus themselves on specific tasks and allow experts to carry out activities and training sessions.





## STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS

Often community centres are run by a small team of paid staff members, with a management team in place to ensure the centre is run sustainably.

Volunteers and external support is invaluable. Whilst the expectation on volunteers is not the same as a paid staff member, their contribution is vital. Volunteers help to keep the centre open, and offer a great level of experience and expertise. Though staff members must be ultimately responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre, volunteers offer an extra pair of hands to help.

It's expected the number of people wanting to get involved with their local community centre will increase following the pandemic. People are more aware than ever of the help and support coming their way from community centres, and may want to give back.

Community centres should try to accommodate volunteers where possible. Some may want a new social opportunity, others will be building up new skills and experience ready for the next step in their career. Whatever an individual's circumstance, community centres should try to find a volunteer role that suits that person.

## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Community centres are needed more than ever.

With local people turning to much-needed services and facilities following the COVID-19 pandemic, it's likely community centres will be particularly busy in the coming months.

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# FINDING FUNDING

Community centres receive funding from a variety of sources. John tells us his team are taking part in a Virtual Great North Run to raise money for their community centre. Other volunteers and regular members are also keen fundraisers which helps to fund key activities and facilities.

One positive aspect to come about from the COVID-19 pandemic is people are donating to grassroots organisations. Communities are pulling together and noticing the hard work of local organisations and, when able, it's likely people will want to give back. However, local funding may be on a small scale and community centres will need to think bigger.

# THE SUSTAINABLE INCOME CHALLENGE

It's easy to view community centres as charities, or community hubs running on donations and volunteer time. Community centres are small businesses, and often are run commercially in order to generate the income they need to truly support their people.

Surviving on ad-hoc funding simply won't be enough. Community centres must strategise and find a way to ensure their income is sustainable. This includes:

- Bringing in a regular income through fees and service charges
- Grant income, ensuring time is dedicated to applying for suitable grants
- Running costs covered, with additional profit used to further help the community

Grants and funding opportunities are difficult to secure. Competition is fierce, with many organisations fighting for the same pot of money. Community centres must ensure

their offering is sustainable and can make a real difference to local people. They must be able to deliver what they promise.

Community centres must find innovative new ways to discover funding. For example, John tells us Auckland Youth and Community Centre is working with Durham University to help fund an intern, who will help to find further loans and grants.

The application process for many grants is complex and competitive, so dedicating a member of staff to this task will make a huge difference.

Hosting open days and hiring out services such as adult education programmes to other organisations are other great ways to bring in additional income. Auckland Youth and Community Centre are looking forward to resurrecting their double decker bus, aka Polly The Big Purple Playbus, a mobile soft play area which is privately hired out to generate income.



# COMMUNITY CENTRES SHOULD EVOLVE TOGETHER

It's easy to view community centres as charities, It's tough managing a community centre. But it's also incredibly rewarding. As a general rule, those who work at a community centre are community-focussed, pleasant people with a real desire to help others. So when community centre managers, employees or volunteers need help - just ask for it.

John's best piece of advice is to keep lines of communication open between community centres. All are going through the same challenges, yet approaches and solutions differ between each centre. Sharing best practice and advice is key to keeping each of these vital institutions afloat.

Other great advice from John includes:

- Start small, and be realistic - don't bite off more than you can chew or try to grow too quickly
- Focus on your key demographics and the needs of the local area
- Stick to your constitution
- Listen to your funders and try to appeal to their criteria
- Communicate effectively

The future is looking bright for community centres, but there's still a lot of hard work to do to support local areas, manage volunteers and secure funding.

Together, we must make sure our community centres are given the financial and moral support they need to succeed.

