



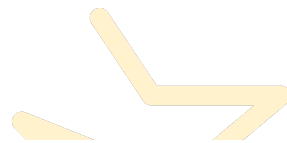
Wellington City Council

# DID COMMONSPACE DELIVER A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE YOUTH HUB THAT CONNECTED COMMUNITIES?

Draft Research Proposal December 2021

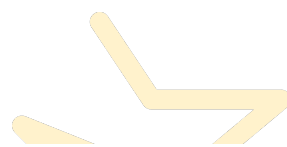


"The space, the mana, the people definitely, overall obviously a unique space. I'd say nowhere else in Wellington is like it."



## Contents

1	Commonspace's purpose	4
2	Overview and performance	5
3	Commonspace set out to create a living room for the city	7
4	How does the space enliven and create a space of inclusiveness for attendees/participants?	8
5	How does the space help attendees/participants connect to other communities and resources and give them the agency to produce new activities?	14
6	Measuring success: early wins	17
7	Lessons were learned along the way: the need for clear roles and processes	19
8	Looking to the future: what would Commonspace 2.0 look like?	20
9	Conclusion	21
10	About this evaluation	22



## 1 Commonsense's purpose

Commonspace is a Mouthfull collective project, delivered with some support from the Wellington City Council (the Council). The central idea for the Commonsense project is to create a space for being and belonging, learning and connecting for arts practitioners amid central Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

The purpose of Commonsense is 'to come out more connected and alive than when you entered'.

Commonspace's kaupapa is:

Commonspace: 1. (adj.) belonging to or shared by two or more people. common property. 2. belonging to or shared by members of one or more nations or communities; public. a common culture. 3. a supportive platform to nurture the growth and creativity of artists working with all mediums. Connecting, inspiring and empowering the arts community at large. 4. a place to be and experience arts at 113 Taranaki Street.

For the Council and Mouthfull, it is important to be aware of the performance of the Commonsense initiative from the perspective of the Mouthfull collective, the Commonsense kaitiaki, artist facilitators and attendees.

This evaluation was designed to capture learnings and insights around delivering safe and inclusive youth hubs and supporting the connection of creative communities.

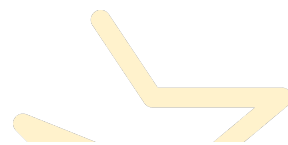
### Evaluation objectives

To understand how Commonsense performed as an initiative, the Council commissioned Research First to engage with kaiāwhina of the Commonsense project. The overarching aim was to look for evidence of participants becoming producers of projects in the space.

The key objectives of the research were to understand:

- How does this space enliven and create a space of inclusiveness for attendees/participants?
- How does the space help attendees/participants connect to their communities and resources and give them the agency to produce new activities?

Emphasis was given to voice of attendees in the evaluation process.



## 2 Overview and performance

### Commonspace delivers what it promises

Through the pilot's development, Commonspace became a community hub by being 'a living room in the city' that offers space to be, relax, or do activities and learn and share knowledge. By being a connecting space for people with common ground to come together with no barriers, Commonspace helps create a sense of community and enlivens and connects participants. But more than that, the space facilitated participants to become producers of activities and events.

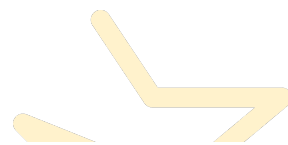
### However, it is not just about the space, but it is about the people who facilitate the sense of community

Most people who enter Commonspace (and come back) do so because they seek some kind of connection, a sense of belonging and a sense of community – one that is safe, highly creative and well resourced. A place where experimentations and making diverse artworks is encouraged and where people can learn about others.

Some people attend for a specific activity; some enter because a friend 'dragged' them along; others just 'stumble' across it; while others just want a place 'to be'. The person's background or interest is irrelevant, and there is an unquantifiable need for connecting with others that makes them seek out the space. So long as the person is open-minded and respectful of others, they will be welcomed in and offered hospitality and be treated like they had known them for years. Many participants went on to become producers of projects, which was a particular strength of the project.

But it is not just about the activities: it is about the intent behind the Commonspace concept that is genuine. The activities just facilitate it. By bringing people who care and giving them a safe space, resources, and artistic creativity to bond them, Commonspace enlivens and creates a space of inclusiveness for attendees and participants to feel connected with others. Together, the kaitiaki (responsible for planning and facilitating the workshops) and the people who attend events and activities contribute to making Commonspace a welcome place. Everyone makes an effort to connect with others and share their knowledge.

While connections may be fleeting (just on the day), or the recognition attendees get when they come back, even to friendships that extend outside of Commonspace, the full long-term impact of the space is yet to be determined. However, several of the attendees and artist facilitators spoken to were given hope that there is more to Wellington than they thought. There is now the realisation that it is possible to find a community they feel connected to.

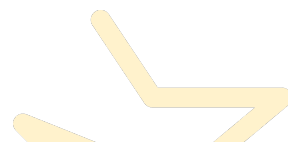


But as the community is being built and momentum gathered, the closure of Commonspace comes at an inopportune moment

All the young people who took part in this research were sad at the thought of Commonspace closing. But they were hopeful that Commonspace would evolve into a new space. Commonspace was seen as a model that showed what is possible that set a precedent that can be followed. They felt that supporting these projects for young people in Wellington should be a priority. There are a lot of young artists in Wellington, but not a lot of venues that support artists without incurring financial costs. Commonspace provided that space.

Should there be a Commonspace 2.0., this should build upon what was already done, considering lessons learned

There have been logistical challenges, such as the need for coordinating social media to spread the word further and better management of housekeeping. But attendees want to keep the connections alive and look for further places like this. Commonspace had showed them what was possible.



### 3 Commonspace set out to create a living room for the city

"We want to explore what it is to be and belong in common spaces, in public spaces. And to sort of create this sense of community and humanity in the city."

A community arts project is about the community's creativity, art, goals, aspirations and mana motuhake<sup>1</sup>. Projects with the greatest social, cultural and well-being outcomes are usually community-led. Urban Dream Brokerage and Mouthfull Collective came together to fill an essential gap for the city's youth, to provide an inclusive, safe, creative, welcoming and much needed central city youth lounge.

The brief behind Commonspace was to build a living room for the city: a place to be and connect with an inner-city community of like-minded people. The idea was formulated due to a couple of things that were happening in Wellington. Firstly, the public library was closed due to earthquake damage. Also, the restricted lifestyle of lockdown made it obvious that home life was not equal for all. Overall, many young people had no way to host and spend time with each other, particularly in an inner-city environment. So this space was designed to invite young people to a place where they did not feel hamstrung by their lives and provide access to a living situation where people could feel comfortable. In addition, the Council was interested in the inner-city life in Te Aro:

*Te Aro is growing massively but didn't have a community centre that was about community participation, so that constellation around it was what we wanted to pay attention to in Commonspace.*

The idea with the space was to incubate more collaborations and provide a platform to put on events and build up foundations and practices. There would be no obligation to participate, no monetary transactions where "everything is free". Workshops, events and happenings with artists were planned. But in quiet times when no events were planned, Commonspace was designed as a place "just to be" where attendees and artist facilitators could come and create, charge your phone, and "just put your feet up".

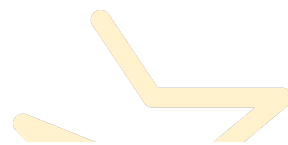
The overarching concept was to have a revival room to revive the community's spirits post COVID-19 lockdown. The name 'Commonspace' was decided to symbolise what it is like to explore and belong in common spaces to create a sense of community.

As a result, Commonspace was open for three months (until 31 October 2021) in Taranaki Street. The space was operated Wednesdays to Sundays, 10 am to 10 pm daily. Activities planned included album launches, yoga and meditation, community dinners, film screenings, creative workshops, a peoples' choir and lots of conversations.

---

<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.creativenz.govt.nz/development-and-resources/community-arts-toolkit/what-makes-a-strong-community-arts-project/#1-make-the-community-the-centre-of-the-project>



## 4 How does the space enliven and create a space of inclusiveness for attendees/participants?

"The idea that I can sit here for a while or pop into the kitchen. Feels like a living room in the city. It really feels comfortable to be here. Not sure how to put my finger on it."

### Curiosity brings attendees to Commonspace

Attendees who were onsite during the weekend of 16 to 17 October 2021 were asked what brought them to Commonspace. Most had been taking part in various activities over the weekend, including yoga, macramé, ceviche making, clay work, and art of drawing workshops. Some were just relaxing in the space between events.

Curiosity brings in attendees. People may have heard about Commonspace through a friend or walking past; they might be unsure what the place is about or whether it is a place they belong.

Having a family or friendship connection to artist facilitators or Mouthfull collaborators was an important motive for attending for many attendees:

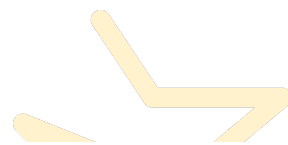
*I came here when babysitting, it was raining, and my friend, he works here, always told me to come, and I was unsure, but that day it felt right, as I wanted to do something with the little man. It felt so safe, so welcome.*

Many came along with friends and family who were attending workshops:

*I came with my sister as she was doing this pottery thing, and she invited me along, and I decided to come. I've seen a lot of pottery things before on social media. I've always wanted to make it but never got into clay. So I wanted to try.*

But many attendees found the space while accidentally walking by:

*I was just walking past, and it caught my eyes: it had the carpet thing down. I poked in my head and thought, this is an art gallery, Ollie was here, and he said, "this is a common space; lie down if you want", so I did. I chilled out on a Sunday afternoon and chatted with him about the space.*





## **Attendees found Commonspace to be an easy space to be in that was safe, inclusive, welcoming and friendly**

“Someone's always greeting you as you come in; nice to have that guidance. It makes a difference.”

The attendees liked the atmosphere of the space. It felt alive and cool. They felt it was important to have spaces where that are open and encourage artists (where cost is not an issue). Somewhere people can take part in activities that they might otherwise not have the opportunity to:

*It's pretty alive. I like the fact that different spaces are activated in different forms, and I feel it's really important to have a space like this in Wellington.*

The positive energy was a big aspect of welcoming new people into the space. Making attendees feel welcomed is a fundamental aspect of the project and one of their greatest successes. There is always a kaitiaki onsite in Commonspace to be the 'face of the space' to represent the kaupapa and be the 'switchboard operator'; essentially, the connector and host. They live their kaupapa and embody it:

*It will start with the kaitiaki and slowly make me come out of my shell to talk to other people. Kinda lead by example.*

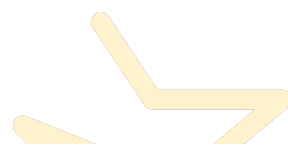
Attendees are made to feel welcome with an offer of tea or coffee and are encouraged to ask questions:

*When I first met Sarah, she was just very friendly, treated you like you are a friend. It reminds me of being back home... I've made some new friends, the people here aren't hard to talk to, but I have anxiety to talk to other people. But this has really helped. And everyone seems pretty comfortable, even if you come here and don't feel like talking, you can still do that.*

During the activities or quiet times, the kaitiaki help facilitate conversations with attendees. Having small conversations is an important aspect. Conversations felt natural. But most importantly, attendees did not feel intimidated to take part in activities:

*The activations are good, as I come and meet more people and feel more confident in the space. Some other activations I felt intimidated before. For example, the somatic incubator, improv dance workshop sounds cool but scary, so chatting to people who are also going is nice.*

But the time after workshops and sessions was a social time. The kettles get put on, and sometimes there is food available. Some attendees leave, but others stay behind to talk. But It is not about the tea/coffee itself or getting it for free, it is about the hospitality that is being offered. It displays the Manaakitanga. This was the time for new social connections to be made.



Importantly, the space felt inclusive – everything in the space is genuine. There was no need to prove anything to anyone, no expectations to deliver or perform to make money or sell anything:

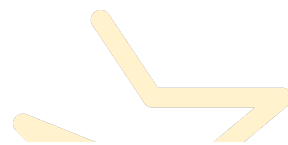
*They are really accommodating of people who have different needs. I also feel like I've met a lot of people here who are also queer. So a space you can be yourself and be authentic. So many reasons. I think it's just massive.*

#### Case study: inclusivity

I think for me the main thing that drew me is the parallel with Māori ideas, free community space where everyone can talk and hui and be themselves. And the use of te reo made me feel welcome as well. The parallels and the constant use of te reo I noticed and loved. It was so calming and welcoming. so that was a huge one but also, the young people. It is by young people for young people.

#### Case study: inclusivity

I think it's the whole concept, anti-capitalism, being free and welcoming for everyone. And that's important to feel comfortable and welcome because there are no expectations. There's no hierarchical structure. You meet people you normally wouldn't because everyone has access. And the people who facilitate and organise, they are so lovely, even before you get into the door people say hi to you. Socially really good. And also integrating and multicultural. It is very important for me to see people of colour, and people from different backgrounds. For me it's a safe place - not just white people. If there is teaching of multicultural stuff, the people who are teaching or are on the board.



## The space offered access to the community during a difficult time

"I come to chill with a variety of people. Even if it was just sitting watching a group and feeling part of a community"

The August 2021 lockdown due to COVID-19 and subsequent alert level restrictions meant many young people in Wellington were feeling isolated from other young people. Commonspace offered a welcoming place to meet and chill with like-minded artists – allowing feeling like they were part of a community, and gave a sense of belonging with other young people:

*It was an idea right after lockdown when I first heard about it. I spent a lot of time inside and thinking about what to do. I had just moved to Wellington, not knowing too much about the city. Something like Commonspace at that time was something I needed – a safe, welcoming and friendly place.*

Attendees was appreciated having a space where they were not forced to bring anything or pay anything to participate and were able to access the community:

*The people who have never been here before, they see the space, see its workshops, free food. It's becoming a link between creative people, people who are willing to give and share to the community, and a link to the community.*

Other spaces such as the library or the university felt sterile compared, and there were perceptions that they had to be productive in those spaces and relaxation was not allowed. But Commonspace allowed for conversations and the ability just to chill out:

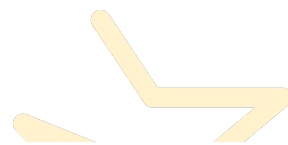
*You don't have to purchase anything, not like a café. You can just walk in here and do whatever you like.*

Commonspace allowed people to feel they belonged. Young people can feel quite intimidated in spaces where they do not feel they belong. But Commonspace seemed to remove this obstacle and was viewed by attendees as very approachable, especially there were no expectations put attendance:

*It's so open and valuable to someone who wants to bring something in, no pressure, no standards to meet, and that's very special, so it's kinda the momentum. The people who have never been here before seeing the space, see its workshops, free food, this is accomplishing something.*

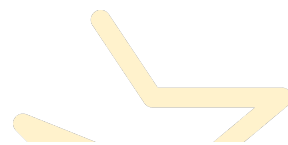
Importantly, attendees felt that they were part of a community and realising there is a space where they can talk to other people gave a feeling of well-being and where everyone is accepted:

*I got diagnosed with PSTS. I didn't know what was wrong without me, but this place had helped me get out of my shell; I still get nervous, but learning these news skills and people, gets my mind off stuff, learning there's is more to life.*



Case study: reconnecting with community

It's been a fantastic way to reconnect with a community based here. My previous work was very remote, and I felt there wasn't much grounding in daily life. So I was looking for something about community and connections and joining with people who cared about similar things. I like how we explore ownership and explore to engage and uphold te Tiriti, with events and conversations, and a space where I feel safe enough, and feel we can take these ideas forward and create a proposal.



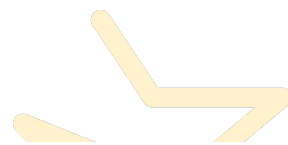
## Many attendees became regulars

Over time, attendance grew noticeably. There were regulars from Massey University and Wellington High School and people who came after seeing social media via radio, Instagram and the Council newsletter. Commonspace was designed to be a 'youth safe space' although no upper age limits were imposed. Little clubs evolved and developed over time, like cinematic incubators, the peoples' choir, and Sunday shared dinners. But everything else was quite sporadic.

Most attendees spoken to agreed they would come back. Many frequently came to activities, while some only visit a few times, others come back two to three times a week. Apart from the atmosphere and friendliness of the kaitiaki, attendees liked the activities that were on offer. The weekly rhythms were useful for planning visits:

*I think workshops are pretty easy because I always like what's on—just the open space. And if I need to stop by and work, there's Wi-Fi available.*

When asked if they would recommend Commonspace to a friend (on a rating scale where zero was 'never' and ten was 'always'), the attendees scored between 8 and 10. The activities were regarded as the best way for people to interact with others, rather than music gigs – but something you could do yourself. If people were around doing the same thing, it is easier to strike up a conversation.



## **5 How does the space help attendees/participants connect to other communities and resources and give them the agency to produce new activities?**

### **The Commonspace building and facilities allowed a dedicated space for the community to come together**

“In any place doesn’t matter what the decorations, what matters is the connections with the people, and the people who host it. The place is a plus. It’s not overwhelming because its space to breath. But the main thing that makes it is the people.”

Unlike an outside area, the dedicated space allows for collateral to be built and grown and provides a space where people can belong. The building space also provides a safe area protected from the outside weather. The facilities and facilitators provide comfort and welcoming for people by providing sofas, books, tables and free Wi-Fi. The space has a capacity for about 20 to 30 people at any time.

The area gets rearranged frequently from having the sofa outdoors to enjoy the day on a Saturday to sit outside and create interest when people walk by, to rearranging the space for the various activities – moving tables for yoga, setting up on the little outdoor courtyard for spray painting, and putting the tables together for clay playday or even sitting on the floor. In addition, there is a 'quiet area' with books, so people can choose to be a bit more 'off-side', but still within the space.

### **Feedback from the attendees was that they did meet new people and make new connections**

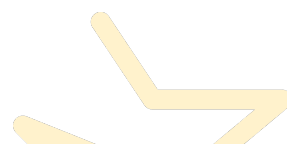
It's becoming a link between creative people who are willing to give and share to the community. Even as a creator, it's hard to find the space and the means to share the skills simply, so I feel Commonspace is accomplishing and serving that.

But the aesthetics of the space were not as important as what went on within the space

The feeling of social connection was improved by the opportunity to contribute to the space if they wanted - by facilitating events or activities and supporting other like-minded young people. This is how many artist facilitators came to produce new activities.

These opportunities were very important, particularly for people who are new to Wellington, where Commonspace provided the opportunity to connect with like-minded creatives:

*When I first moved here, I found it hard to find an artistic community or a welcoming community, and for a moment, I thought that might not be something I could find here because it seemed very unattainable.*



## **Apart from learning new skills such as macrame, yoga, and dancing, many attendees found other like-minded creatives they could bounce ideas off**

"Made me feel like I could do something here."

Commonspace gave many attendees the confidence to create or collaborate on new activities, and this opportunity was appreciated. Being creative was the key theme. Many attendees were giving serious thought to producing activities themselves:

*Wolfe came down, and we were talking, and I was like, man, I am having so much fun, and doing it with other people (seashells), that was so much fun. Everyone has seashells, so that I would love that. I would love to be involved in anything; I wouldn't mind facilitating, organising, or volunteering.*

The confidence to contribute was a direct result of encouragement from the Commonspace collective, including kaitiaki and other artist facilitators:

*I have been thinking about it. I would like to do a belly dance class. I'm into dance, like contemporary dancing somatic dances, and like the idea of making cuisine, so would probably make Arabian samosa, would want to do a workshop.*

For other attendees, although the seed was sown, they might require help to overcome their fears of not being skilled enough or lacking courage:

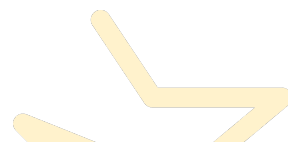
*I've noticed how people who come here have things they want to offer and run their activations. I guess I haven't thought about what I could do. I'm more of a follower. I would consider it, but I don't think I'm skilled enough to teach others. I would if I felt like I could. It seems like an easy process based on how I have gauged workshops.*

But as the project developed, conversations and ideas for new activities grew. As a result, many attendees did become artist facilitators, and many facilitators became kaitiaki themselves. This was one of the great successes of the initiative:

*The thing that came out of it was self-discovery, self-realisation of how to overcome problems that I've got within my project, so that was the point of it to have someone external talk you through a project and discover your own, take your things from it.*

Ideas for activities evolved from conversations, and people started to make plans. The artist facilitators were initially encouraged by Mouthfull to run activities. Networking through word of mouth was important and sharing ideas with like-minded artists:

*So with his project, from the very beginning, I think we were the first even in the space, and they said, "do you want to do something?", and we decided we would do it every week. So we are a regular rhythm.*



### Case study: exploring opportunities

Thought about it. The stuff I do as a carver can't be easily transferred, but the idea is there. I've talked to the girls and guys, and they've told me you can run a workshop or an event and get confirmation that I really can. I wasn't even sure if they were just doing that to egg me on or if they were speaking the truth. Now I've seen this; it definitely shows me that I could if I wanted to do something in a space like this. Sometimes if you show things to the right people, they'll share their opinions - especially in this place.

### Case study: exploring opportunities

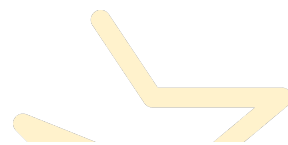
I have been exploring social permaculture. Not a lot of people have heard of it. Still, it is ultimately about learning about communities, meeting needs rather than relying on the economy, and how we as a small group of people take responsibility. Witnessing what's happening in the world inspires patterns that would really help people. So I wanted to synthesise permaculture - how do we look at the social systems differently and ask what we could be doing differently in the community. This is the stuff I am really passionate about. How do you cross that threshold (from an idea) to making it happen - do you find a mentor? But here, you just hope the right person comes along. But now, I am being invited to prototype something and not having that effort undervalued, but something I could envision to do for a living. I get feedback in real time and find out if my ideas are something people would invite me to do in the future.

### Case study: testing new ideas

It happened last night [workshop at Commonspace]— I started engaging with a sustainability trust, who had given me access to their waste streams - parts of waste compact fluorescent lightbulbs. I have learned how to break them open to retrieve the electronics and reconfigure the self-isolating booster. I take the remaining energy of a double AA battery that boosts enough to light up like an LED shine. Last night about eight people took part. I spoke to them about electronics, where they came from, where they might go, and what it might mean, and reconfigured them to light up decorations - even read with maybe. They were harvested from dead electronics and e-waste.

### Case study: making creativity accessible

I can take ownership of ideas, create diversity and sustainability, and see the relationships blossom through the event. Maybe nothing comes from it that we can see. Still, sometimes a relationship will spiral into a project, a local incubator or start-up, something that continues to make creativity more accessible. Thinking about my workshop and what I would like to see - the idea of literacy, and sometimes learning how to put action in the world, on how to make decisions or distribute ownership and responsibility and accountability, I would hope that I could see these amazing projects develop because of something they applied from what they learnt here. Not more projects in a quantitative way, but that they are happier, healthier, living in vibrant places, not burning out - and less conflict.





## 6 Measuring success: early wins

“I mean, it’s something else, something different. Sometimes it is just the fact that places like this exist. It is just a place to come in, kick back, if something going in, its going on and join.”

Measuring direct impacts from Commonspace is difficult. But many objectives of the initiative were realised. People have been brought together in the inner city, where people have come to meet and feel inspired, and were empowered to connect with different people. It was less about outcomes – not simply about an art workshop and filling a page. It was about belonging and enjoyment. There were no barriers to entry.

### Facilitating social connections

The big winning point was that Commonspace existed and that more and more people walked through the door repeatedly – and were able to make new connections. People naturally came along. That was the proof that it was working. Regular kaitiaki dinners helped many attendees connect – people who may not have met any other way:

*I didn't know a lot of people, but now sitting together with these people, eating and talking about ideas, I feel I belong to something and have relationships with people I didn't know before. We inspire each other.*

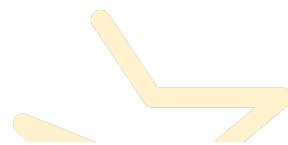
Artist facilitators enjoyed their opportunity to lead activities and had the opportunity to show others what can be done so they might host an event themselves:

*The workshop last night was pretty amazing. I've never run anything like it, ever. I didn't know how it would go, but it went well, and people enjoyed it. I made these objects, and the photos looked great. This is important so you can show others in the future, whether it is a potential participant, hosting, or programme for the event.*

### Activities enabled easy participation

The activities provided an invitation to participate. Having activities to go to allowed people to find an immediate common ground - and something to bond over or talk over. Barriers to participation were lowered. For someone who is shy, the activity becomes an invitation and a gateway to enter the new community as the pressure is taken of them to immediately mingle with someone. A solo activity such as yoga, or pottery doesn't require bringing a friend, and it is something known and safe.

*I know many young people feel pretty much like they don't have a place in the city, so if anyone was looking for a safe space to mingle or participate, this is the place to go...More than just a space to dwell in but a space where life happens.*



## The cost structure was a major success

While the activities were free for attendees, the artist facilitators and kaitiaki were paid for their involvement. This enabled many to contribute who may not have been able to otherwise. Many young artists do not have the resources to travel into town to volunteer for activities or already have other employment and want to protect their free time. But being paid to facilitate activities and events makes Commonspace different and a motivator to participate:

*I put in a proposal a message. Money makes everything easier. That's the main barrier to helping with stuff.*

But it also meant they felt their contribution was valued. It meant they did not have to choose between an income and doing what they love. So often projects burn people out because they have to have other jobs to pay for their living expenses, and then make the time to volunteer to do the things they love:

*Paying your artists is important. They are here caring for people. And not everyone has the luxury to do it. I work in three jobs. The funding means I don't get burnt out.*

*I do a lot of work that is unpaid, volunteer and artistic work, cus that's just how it is. Being paid is really significant. Feels like I'm valued, the skills and the ideas, and not just having to jump through crazy hoops.*

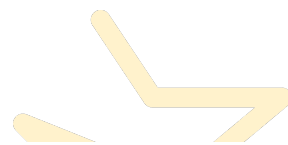
### Case study: being valued

Being paid significantly changed my ability to connect with this project. It is too easy otherwise to come up with excuses not to take part. But this has allowed me to prioritise part of my human need to be part of community. It's easy to say I want to do something but being invited to hold this space feels like something I want to offer. And I can get there, I don't have to worry about taking on another job. Now I can host my own workshops. It allows me to step into my true expression on how I want to contribute to my community. Huge shift in that. I realise how much I have learned and how much I have to share. Through conversations I've seen there is a lot that I can give. Makes me feel I have a role and can contribute to society.

Free activities were a major drawcard for attendees. Many activities for young people have costs attached that act as a barrier for many to participate:

*With obviously the university community, there's not too much to do in Wellington that's not free. Everything can be expensive to go to events and cost money. But here you can do free stuff with other like-minded people. Everyone is so friendly and nice. That draws you in.*

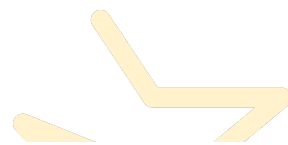
*It's a pretty artistic city, but there are not many open things happening to people. Of course, there are performances or plays, but you always have to pay a lot. So if you don't know what you like and don't have a lot of money, a space like this is encouraging.*



## **7 Lessons were learned along the way: the need for clear roles and processes**

Commonspace unfolded organically, and there were some initial logical teething issues.

- The project was opened in a hurry, and Mouthfull reflected it might have been good to have had a more solid base and understanding of the structure of the project before opening to the public.
- Having a dedicated person to manage social media would have helped. There were opportunities to spread the word further via word of mouth, better social media, or other networking.
- Scheduling was an issue for some artist facilitators regarding submission requests and timings – trying to slot in their event, but not knowing what is booked in the future. Having a clear system in place that was not reliant on one person would help with bottlenecks.
- There were issues with building access and knowing who was responsible for opening and closing (and who had the key to the facility). One facilitator had to take the key home with her – but this was overcome when a lockbox was installed.
- Organising a roster for cleaning of the kitchen and toilet facilities was needed. Good hygiene was particularly salient during COVID-19. Goodwill was relied on, so the same people took on these tasks, whereas a roster would have felt the responsibilities were more equitable.



## 8 Looking to the future: what would Commonspace 2.0 look like?

### Attendees

“Just knowing that the community is here and knowing that there are people you can talk to about whatever you want to. It’s going to be really weird when it is not here anymore.”

All of those spoken to, particularly those who had been there frequently mentioned that they would be sad when the space closed. But others would try to keep the connections alive and look for further places like this. Commonspace had showed them what was possible. They were really hopeful for Commonspace 2.0. so they could continue to make social connections:

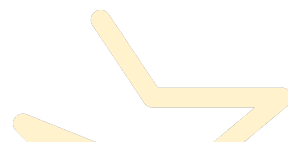
*So that it is closing is devastating... I don't know what to do when it closes. I think there was talk about the continuing the Kaupapa alive in parks. I would go along to those but would be nice if the space stayed and the funding stayed so I could find a space to connect, and not feel disconnected.*

Attendees were asked to comment on what they would like to see changed for future Commonspace initiatives. Given that most had not been involved in projects like this before, they did not have a benchmark for reference. Essentially, they were happy with the space as it was. But a few suggestions centred on having a bigger space available – one with more seating and easier flow.

### Facilities

Learnings of the space itself show the importance of having a closed area as a common space to that do not separate people too much. However, it is worth considering the layout, especially when there are a lot of activities scheduled because people want space just to be, as many felt the open space was a bit overwhelming. Therefore, consideration should be given to having a dedicated bit of the space free of activities for just chilling out.

Having a space that has natural light and was spacious should be a consideration going forward. The current hall was long and dark – while this worked well for evening events, it was difficult to convince people to come into a dark space during the day.

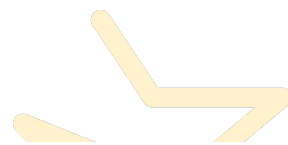


## 9 Conclusion

Commonspace delivered what it promised. The goal was to provide a common space in the inner city where young people felt alive and connected. The door was open as a space for people to come and meet and feel inspired and empowered to connect with different people. The community was made the centre of the project.

Young people engaged in a creative process; they met new people and some made life-long friends. Along the way, they learnt about diverse artworks and other artists and, importantly, had a safe inclusive place to be where there were no expectations, and everyone was welcomed without question.

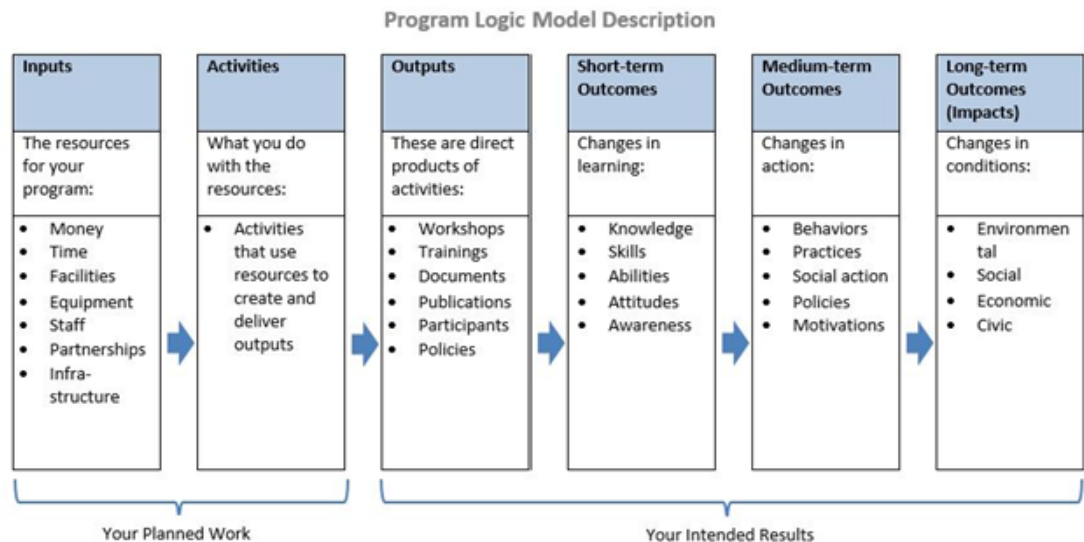
But more than that, the space facilitated artists to become producers of activities and events.



## 10 About this evaluation

### Evaluation approach

Because the Commonspace project was in progress, a formative evaluation was chosen using the following Program Logic Model<sup>2</sup>:



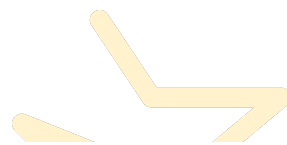
Essentially a logic model describes the sequence of events thought to bring about benefits or change over time. A logic model is a systems model that shows the connection of interdependent parts that make up the whole. As with systems thinking, a total programme is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

The research approach was a mixed-method qualitative study with focus group discussions, individual interviews, and observations completed in-person or remotely using Microsoft Teams software. A range of Commonspace actors' voices was sought for this research to provide a comprehensive picture of the project, including Mouthfull, kaitiaki, artist facilitators, and attendees.

The group discussions and individual interviews included questions that delved into understanding the logic model flow of the Commonspace project (inputs, activities, outputs, and indicators/outcomes). The aim was to provide learnings and insights for the Council to deliver safe and inclusive youth hubs and support the connection of creative communities.

The semi-structured nature of these interviews enabled the researcher to deal with nuance and complexity while providing the flexibility to respond to emergent themes.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resources/2018/01/enhancing-program-performance-with-logic-models>



## Research participation

Interviews and group discussions were conducted in such a way as to preserve the anonymity of participants; this allowed the researcher to obtain the most candid views possible.

In total, there were:

- one group discussion with two Mouthfull project facilitators;
- four group discussions with seven Commonspace kaitiaki and artist facilitators; and
- individual brief interviews with 14 attendees.

The group discussions were held between 9 September and 21 October 2021. In addition, observations and attendee interviews were undertaken *in-situ* on the weekend of 16 to 17 October 2021.

