



Inspired by others

Waimakariri Age Friendly case study

Staff at Waimakariri District Council were inspired to create an age friendly plan after participating in their first Age friendly forum in Aotearoa/New Zealand. After seeing how even small changes could make a big difference, staff wanted Waimakariri to be a part of that. A Community Connects Grant from Office for Seniors set them in motion.

Hot tips from Waimakariri

1. Keep it Simple.

“This is a council plan and we have some complex structures. Create processes that don’t involve people having to work inside Council structures (eg, public submission process) to ensure people’s energy doesn’t get bogged down in red tape.

Madeleine Burdon, Waimakariri District Council

2. Listen to your community.

“Believe in and trust in the wisdom of you community. They live it, they know it. Demonstrate your belief with every interaction and action so we role model the values of respect and community belief.”

Madeleine Burdon, Waimakariri District Council

Waimakariri is one of the fastest growing districts in New Zealand with a population of over 60,000, set to increase to over 80,000 within 30 years. When this happens, nearly 30% of the population will be 65 years and over. North of the Waimakariri River, there are a number of towns, villages, beach settlements and tracts of rural area set to increase in population. Looking ahead, staff at Waimakariri wanted to start making the changes that would help their older people and, by extension, their communities thrive.

“Clearly, the proportion of older people in our community will continue to rise and in many ways Waimakariri will be richer for it. Many of our community groups depend on the inspiration and work of people in or approaching their retirement years so it is important that our wider community makes it easy for that to continue.”

David Ayers, Mayor of Waimakariri District from 2008 to 2019

Getting started

After getting council approval, staff worked to develop a checklist of age friendly activities and initiatives that were already happening or planned in the community. As a steering group, they also looked up information available from the Office for Seniors website, the [WHO Age friendly cities](#)

[checklist](#), [Inspiring Communities](#) case studies and age friendly strategies in place throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. Staff at Waimakariri District council found out what was working well in other places and built upon this foundation. From here, they began shoulder tapping leaders of local groups and canvassing their communities to learn more about what was needed. The resulting [Age friendly Waimakariri Plan](#) is set to act upon these areas of need.

Cooperating with iwi and other local groups was fundamental

Waimakariri sits within the territory of Ngāi Tūāhuriri and includes the famous Kaiaipoi Pā – a major capital and trading centre of the South Island. Since 2003, the Waimakariri District Council has had a formal partnership with Ngāi Tūāhuriri. In building their knowledge and relationships for age friendly planning, staff approached iwi, along with Grey Power, Senior Advisors at Work and Income as well as emergent and disadvantaged communities. Cooperating with local groups was fundamental to uncovering the true needs of communities in Waimakariri.

“As a small, well-connected community, we are very embedded and able to collate issues and shoulder tap for a steering group. Often that’s the way in a small centre where you can respond bottom up from the community.”

Madeleine Burdon, Waimakariri District Council

Community consultation

Seeking input from the local population, staff developed the consultation process which included presentations to key organisations, face-to-face meetings with residents across the district and a community survey. Local participation included 373 survey respondents, 100 people participating in community workshops and 120 people in the community presentations.

The workshops and presentations were a key highlight of the process. They were held across five local community venues, hosted by local groups and facilitated by a professional facilitator. They were short, interactive and always included tea and coffee. Participants had the opportunity to talk in small groups about what an age friendly Waimakariri would look like for them.

All this material was recorded and organised to create a resident survey, the results of both being shared with stakeholders for feedback and Councillors for decision-making. Common themes quickly emerged as priorities for Waimakariri’s ageing population including respect, being free to live the life you want, accessibility (including transport), communication, signage, toilets.

While 94% of respondents said that, “Waimakariri District was a very good place to live and retire in,”¹ they often followed with the criticism that lack of transport was the area’s major challenge for older people. There had already been some staunch lobbying about this issue and it was clear to the steering group that actions around transport would be a key part of the age friendly plan.

Lessons learnt about the community consultation process

¹ [Age friendly Waimakariri Plan, 2019 - 2021](#)

Timing

Striking a balance between keeping the project moving over summer and working with integrity was a key challenge for the project. They also needed to get to council at the right time in the right way.

“We wanted to work with integrity and be accountable back to the community. Those are always high aspirations but important to keep trust with people. People know you, everyone knows the councillors, and the board members and staff because we live here. Occasionally you’d meet people who would say ‘Well I suppose council will do what it will do anyway’, but mostly people were very engaged and trusted us with their time and ideas.”

Madeleine Burdon, Waimakariri District Council

Community reach

To make sure they communicated widely about the planning process, the steering group worked through their local agencies’ networks. This meant piggy-backing on group newsletters, advertising, website page, media interviews, making themselves available to go out and speak to groups personally and connecting with people wherever possible.

Prioritising accessibility

“Accessibility is not just about wheelchair access. We need to be modelling the best we can when we work with people. So we’re not saying you can only submit on-line, have to appreciate how challenging that is and will be for some years to come. Physically, some things are really challenging – like some shop doors, almost nearly impossible for people in a wheelchair.”

Madeleine Burdon, Waimakariri District Council

The steering group chose to run a number of small meetings in community venues, including the local marae. Rather than one big public meeting, staff worked with locals to host and promote these meetings. Hiring a skilled facilitator to run the meetings, the steering group was able to learn in great detail the needs of a wide range of its population.

Staff also worked hard to ‘reach in’ to communities. For example, staff leafleted every member of their social housing units about their local community consultation meetings. Channelling the voices of many, the steering group created the [Age friendly Waimakariri Plan](#).

Looking ahead

Community or Council-led

An on-going issue for this plan will be identifying the areas of council-led, community-led, co-designed and partnered projects. For example, in housing, an emerging trend is the decrease in home ownership for older people. No one agency can manage this issue and it will need input from a cross-section of local and central government, as well as local community agencies and developers.

As a result of this process, Council now has a dedicated part-time staff member to oversee the age friendly work. By bringing in dedicated staff, Waimakariri can take advantage of the already strong engagement from its community and its council staff. For example, most members of the original

steering group have become so invested in the project that they are continuing on as part of its advisory group. This enthusiasm speaks to the strong bonds already in Waimakariri and the sense that its age friendly plan can solve the challenges so passionately shared during consultation. Councillors, local groups and community members all want to make sure these changes happen.

“People on our steering group are all active in their own communities. A lot of them are both champions for this project and run or are a rep of their own organisations. They take action and are advocates on all sorts of things in the community. The mayor came along [to steering group meetings] and that was a terrific support because he’s lived here all his life, I don’t know how many generations and he had really good oversight - he’d been the mayor for eleven years, so when he was free to come he did come and would also add to the suggestions.”

Madeleine Burdon, Waimakariri District Council

More hot tips from Waimakariri

1. Take time to learn from others – for example the Office for Seniors website, the [WHO Age friendly cities checklist](#) , [Inspiring Communities](#) case studies and other places in Aotearoa/New Zealand that have developed age friendly plans and strategies. Don’t try to re-invent the wheel.
2. Put relationships first – you can never put relationships second in this kind of process. Follow up, be genuine, don’t waste people’s time.
3. Listen.

“Our District has so much happening and it was inspiring to hear about others and the big difference you can make with small changes.”

Madeleine Burdon, Waimakariri District Council