

THE STATE OF OUR COMMUNITIES



2020 Rotorua | Johnsonville | Queenstown

One of The Salvation Army's founders' William Booth would carry out community surveys to identify the needs of the community and this is how some of the services the Army offered were identified and created. The 'State of our Communities' (SOOC) was initiated with the same principle, to ensure that our communities were given an opportunity to share their thoughts and insights about their communities.

The SOOC 2020 is the third SOOC report to be released by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit (SPPU). Previous SOOC reports have been a comparison between communities, however, given the vast differences between these three communities—Rotorua, Johnsonville and Queenstown—SOOC 2020 is an individual analysis of each community. Rotorua has a significant Māori population; Johnsonville is a small and diverse community; Queenstown is a tourism mecca with a large migrant worker population. The Salvation Army is active and integrated in all these communities, especially during the original lockdowns. SOOC 2020 places particular focus in light of the current pandemic on the impacts of Covid-19 on the local communities and the social issues communities are prioritising with Election 2020 around the corner.

On a national scale the impacts of Covid-19 have been well documented; government ministries have been releasing updates on the economic impacts and amount of financial hardship grants accessed. The Salvation Army has released a series of Covid-19 Social Impact Dashboards, which started on the 6 April 2020. These dashboards monitored five key social progress areas throughout the country: food security, financial hardship, addictions, housing, and income support and unemployment. Despite the pursuit of government and non-governmental agencies to document the impacts of Covid-19, nationally there has been minimal

reporting on the impacts on our communities. SOOC 2020 hopes to capture the faces and stories of communities in the current Covid-19 world.

Despite the differences of these communities, there were key themes that were synonymous across these communities.

Mental Health

All three communities talked about the decline in mental health and the limited mental health services. Rotorua's mental health needs preceded Covid-19; the demand for mental health services has always outweighed the supply. The same concern is identified in Johnsonville, placing particular emphasis on the mental health of young people. Queenstown, in a *Quality of Life Report 2018*, showed mental health services were the greatest need in the community despite only 35 percent trying to or accessing mental health services. Even though the limitations on the capacity of mental health services in Queenstown preceded Covid-19, the current impacts on employment and income in a community with high living costs has had detrimental effects on the mental wellbeing of many locals. The impact of Covid-19 on employment and income has exacerbated the strain on mental health services in these communities.

Housing

Housing is an issue across all communities—the availability, affordability and quality. The common theme across the communities was affordability of housing as a driving factor for poverty or financial hardship. Rotorua placed an emphasis on emergency and transitional housing for the growing homeless population, Johnsonville emphasised the growth



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in housing developments and the need for housing to mirror the infrastructure. Queenstown talked about affordability and quality of housing driving overcrowding and financial hardship.

Employment and Income

The direct impact of Covid-19 on employment and income is the underlying attribute to many of the other issues that locals have identified. Queenstown is fuelled by tourism and, as a result of the pandemic and border closures, had forecasted to lose 7900 jobs by March 2021, and have an unemployment rate double the national average. Rotorua's primary industries of tourism and forestry also have been impacted by the pandemic, with many in the community losing employment or income. The key differences in employment loss due to tourism for Queenstown and Rotorua are that many losing jobs in Queenstown are migrants and unable to receive monetary support from the Government, whilst Rotorua locals are already impacted by other social issues. Johnsonville also had many in the community that had employment and income loss. They talk about the underlying poverty in their community and how employment loss has disproportionately impacted the low-waged workers and only amplifies the level of poverty.

Community

When asked what they liked most about their community, 'the people' was the main answer across all communities. Friendliness, supportive, and caring are just a few characteristics that locals talked about. Queenstown locals appreciated the diversity of their community, Rotorua talked about the inclusiveness of their community, and Johnsonville locals appreciated the close-knit nature of their community.

Covid-19 Recovery

The impacts of Covid-19 in these communities are similar in regard to loss of income and employment, however, how these impacts translate in each communities' context is different. In recovery for each community, we need to consider the pertinent issues, the context and the capacity of the community. Each community and their key informants put forward ideas to support their communities through this economic recession, such as redevelopment of the Johnsonville Shopping Centre (mall), diversification of the Queenstown economy, or iwi-led initiatives in Rotorua.

Election 2020

The consistent social issues across all communities were housing, employment and healthcare services. Other issues included Covid-19 recovery and addressing poverty. Communities also identified issues that were relevant for their community; for Rotorua drugs and gangs, whilst a key issue for Queenstown is immigration.

These are some of the key themes in our communities

Rotorua

One of the key concerns for the community is homelessness; many of the locals talked about the challenges with affordability and availability of homes. Housing unaffordability drives financial hardship and poverty, which is associated with gangs, addictions, accessing adequate healthcare services and unemployment. Te Arawa was a significant theme of support during lockdown and, moving forward, Maori-led solutions to complex issues cannot be underestimated.

Johnsonville

Johnsonville is a small and diverse community that is growing. Some of the themes locals talked about were the Johnsonville mall and supporting the pockets of poverty in their community, which are predominantly refugees and minority populations. The locals also highlighted the challenges for young people in the community and the difference community events would make to the community and youth engagement.

Queenstown

The plight of the migrant worker is one of the key themes from the Queenstown community. Employment and income loss in a region where living costs are already high has taken a financial and mental toll on many locals. Accessing supports such as mental health and health care is also limited. The diversification of the Queenstown economy has also been a strong theme for locals and key informants and will be essential for building resilience and recovery.



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