Milford Storm Recovery Project

Report as of 30 January 2026

"Listen to the people, they know their own neighbourhood" - Milford resident

MILFORD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

COMMUNITY THINK

Background

The extreme weather events of early 2023 deeply affected communities across Tāmaki Makaurau – including Milford. In response, a community working group was established to support a coordinated recovery efforts in Milford.

Recovery isn't just about physical repairs; it's about restoring stability, belonging, and resilience.

Community Think (a community development collective) led the engagement process, partnering closely with the Milford Residents Association (MRA) and the Milford Recovery Group to ensure the process is grounded in local voices.

> *I wasn't personally impacted by the floods or storms, but I know people who were. It's great to put something like this out there for the community."*
> *- Milford resident*

> *"Flood recovery is a catalyst for building a better Milford"*
> *- Milford resident*

A locally led
recovery process

The process needed to be interesting and approachable – driven by locals, with community members both behind it and leading it.

The aim was to create a community recovery plan that felt genuinely shared – where people could see their voices and ideas reflected and feel part of the process. Energy went into making the engagement process inclusive, fun, accessible, and meaningful.

From the outset, the goal wasn't just to collect feedback but to ensure local voices played an active role in shaping and owning the recovery journey in Milford.

Meeting people where they are.

Engagement travelled to different streets and gathering spots within Milford. The approach focused on showing up where people already were, rather than expecting them to come to a single event or location. The engagement ideas themselves came from Milford residents, who also played a key role in delivering the activities.

This combination – going wide while also focusing on specific groups and areas where voices especially needed to be heard – helped build a recovery plan that is not only well-rounded but grounded in real experiences and priorities. The project used mainly face-to-face, in-person engagement methods, but also included a key online tool to capture responses and made it more accessible for everyone to have their say.
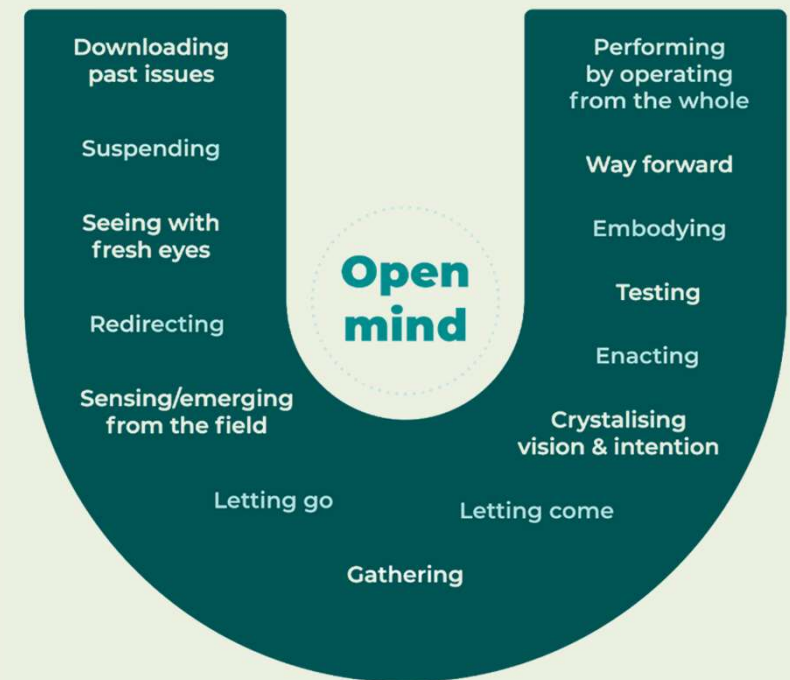
The approach

The Milford Storm Recovery Project was guided by the methodologies of Theory U, design-led thinking, and community-led development principles. These methodologies were used to understand challenges and generate people-centred solutions. The process was not about jumping from issue to solution — it involved immersion in the current situation to allow space for innovative thinking, new ideas, and connections to form. These ideas were then tested with those affected before anything was produced or actioned.

Design-led thinking followed the stages of discovery, meaning making, and testing, providing a framework for organising the process. Community Think, in partnership with the Milford Residents Association and Milford Recovery Group, delivered the following steps:

- **Readiness:** Assessed and determined what was needed for engaging and activating the community.
- **Discovery:** Gathered insights from data, lived experiences, real-time feedback, research, and best practices.
- **Meaning Making:** Reflected on everything discussed so far and began to make sense of what had been heard.
- **Testing:** Prototyped the ideas that had emerged and explored how they would function in practice, ensuring alignment with community input.
- **Design:** Developed a draft plan to share with the community.

A look at how the project took shape

How it all came to life: March 2025 - July 2025

Milford Storm Recovery Project
Reflecting on the floods, the recovery, and the future we're building together

1
GO

Community Think came on board and analysed what had been uncovered so far, completed community mapping, and helped identify key themes, gaps, and opportunities to guide the next phase of the project.
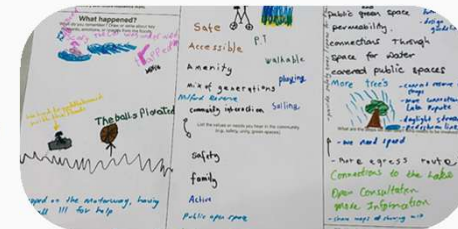
2

The Milford Recovery Project Group, the Milford Residents Association and Community Think came together to workshop the next phase of the project. Building on everything heard so far, the process shifted into testing and refining ideas with the community. A key outcome was the idea to create a local storyboard to anchor and communicate the project.

3

A project website was created, along with supporting communication materials to launch the engagement process. A communication plan was created to keep everyone informed, engaged, and connected throughout the project.

4

A "Coffee and Chats" - targeted activation took place on a street that was deeply affected by the flooding.

5

A community meeting was held to shape a shared vision for Milford's future. The session began with insights "what we've heard", followed by collaborative storyboard design workshop. People used words, drawings, and objects to express ideas and hopes for Milford.

6

The project group integrated ideas from the workshop and conversations into a cohesive storyboard and identified key trail locations, creating a storyboard trail map. Seventeen storyboards were displayed in high-traffic areas in Milford, and an online survey was launched to gather public feedback.

clear beach

our house

Share your thoughts with us today for the future of Milford!

Open your camera app and point your phone at the QR code. Wait for the camera to recognise the QR code. Click the link when it appears on your phone

or email chairs@milford.org.nz

A look at how the project took shape

How it all came to life: March 2025 - July 2025

7 On a sunny Tuesday, the Milford Recovery Project Group, Milford Residents Association and Community Think chatted to locals outside New World, offering free sausages and discussing the storyboard trail. Kids received fun maps to join the adventure!

Find the storyboard

We've put storyboards all around Milford! Look at the pins on the map to see where they are, then go on a fun adventure to find them!
At each storyboard, you'll spot a friendly little character asking a question like 'Where do you love to play in Milford?' or 'What's your favourite thing about your neighbourhood?'
Can you find them all and share your thoughts about Milford's future?

milford.thinkport.nz

8 Continuing the momentum from the storyboards, a pop-up spot at Milford Mall gave people the chance to ask questions and respond to the storyboard. Invitations were also handed out to encourage attendance at the community afternoon tea.

The Next Generation

The Milford Trail
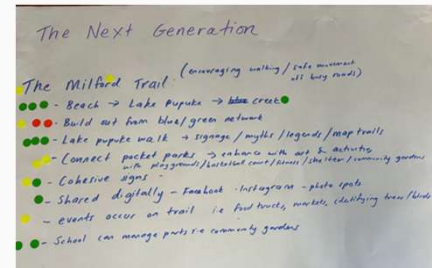
9 The project group and Milford Residents Association popped up outside the popular Milford Cruising Club, talking with locals, encouraging them to complete the survey, and inviting them to attend the community afternoon tea

10 To wrap up the engagement process, an open community afternoon tea was held where locals were invited to hear and work with the ideas collected so far, explore emerging themes, and collaborate on shaping Milford's community recovery plan and prioritising next steps.

Milford Storm Recovery Project

Reflecting on the floods, the recovery, and the future we're building together

Our community

Milford (Onemaewao) is a suburb with rich history as a beach resort. It is edged by the sea, the fresh water of Pupukemoana and Wairau Creek leading to a safe beach.

1

What happened?

On January 27, 2023, a four-hour deluge caused Auckland's worst floods in living memory. Milford suffered the city's heaviest property damage.

2

The balls floated

"I watched my backyard fill up with water."

In the Wairau creek, the volume of water was twice its capacity. Floodwaters swiftly overflowed drains, creeks, roads and engulfed homes.

3

"There were pieces of rubbish along Nile Road."

"I was trapped in my car in flood water getting on the motorway and emergency services told me they couldn't send help."

Our community was hardest hit, a fact still not widely known. We quietly came together to support family, neighbours, friends, strangers and businesses.

4

Where are we now?

"I noticed my neighbour clearing water with buckets. I helped with sandbags for 3 hours."

Long-term impacts are becoming visible—deconstructed homes scar our streets and children miss friends who've moved away—constant reminders of that traumatic night.

5

"Milford Cruising Club got flooded and there were lots of helpers to clean up."

"I still get up and look around when I hear the rain."

"We had to evacuate our 3 and 5 year old on a paddle board at night, and now we don't have a house to live in."

Now, heavy rainfall triggers trauma and intense anxiety. We are always preparing for the next rain event when we should feel safe in our homes.

6

"All I have heard is rumours for two years."

"I have a cross lease with 2 properties being bought out. I'm worried, what will happen to my house?"

"We don't know how lives are going to change."

This project is being led by the Milford Residents Association, working alongside a local Recovery Group of volunteers, with support from Community Think.

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MILFORD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

TĀMAKI MAKAURAU RECOVERY

NILE ROAD

148 cubic metres of debris was cleared by the community — including bulky furniture and full fences.

216 homeowners signed up to see if their flood-damaged homes qualified for a Council buy out.

Community groups across Milford — including Rotary, Pupuke Birdsong Project, Milford Mariners, and the Milford Residents Association came together to support those affected by the floods and to help organise community clean-ups.

141 homes were deemed an intolerable risk to life and are being bought by Council to be removed or demolished.

"Hugely stressful to live through the floods and the years afterward and the uncertainty."

"I love Milford. I don't want to leave. I've been here for 24 years. My kids started kindergarten here. It's our home. It's safe and peaceful."

60 homes were badly flooded but didn't meet the criteria for a buy out.

"Neighbours need to know what is happening with the properties around them."

"I am concerned about green space use."

"Need communication and transparency from the Council."

"We need more neighbourhood gatherings to get to know people, hear things, hear information."

It was very quick — after the rain started it was so quick and if it had been a high tide it would have been much worse.

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STOP

Come together, keep talking and plan community recovery priorities—from infrastructure to wellbeing. Let's take this chance to create a better Milford.

7

Once homes are cleared, Auckland Council will explore all possible uses for the land.

8

Milford has the highest number of high-risk homes in Auckland with many set for demolition.

Imagining the future

Encourage volunteering

Waiting for more green space to absorb these events

clean beach

Small cohesive community

being able to walk everywhere safely (and connect while on the street)

What will be the planting + landscaping? We want to know this?

Keep the creeks clear

more stormwater retention higher in catchment

More connection through people + places.

pet friendly

Safety
Sense of place
Sense of community
Children

Community come together and local board representatives were great!

More trees

Places to connect + share

Board walk — publicity about it

Connection to the environment.

open and public green space

Activities for Kids — sailing

Keep collective memory of these events alive

What we heard

More connection through people + places.

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small cohesive community

Waiting for more green spaces to absorb these events

pet friendly

The engagement process in numbers

6 Milford locals were on the project working group, driving the project.

30 people attended the storyboard workshop, where **storyboard ideas** were created by the groups.

17 storyboards were erected in high-traffic areas throughout Milford

50 coffees were given out, sparking conversations at the Coffee and Chats event

200 sausages were handed out during the pop-up outside New World, engaging locals in informal chats about the project.

50 people stopped by the Milford Cruising Club pop-up

50 locals popped over to the Milford Mall activation.

61 people shared their views by completing the online survey.

40 people came along to the afternoon tea.

487 people have engaged with the Milford Storm Recovery Project overall.

Ways the project reached the community

- Letterbox drops
- Flyer distribution in key locations
- Dedicated project website
- Regular Facebook posts on local community pages
- Editorial feature in the local newspaper
- Social media advertising promoting the survey and events
- Seventeen project storyboards displayed around Milford

- A map showing storyboard trail locations
- A bespoke activity map designed for children
- Two community meetings
- Four targeted pop-ups
- Bespoke kids activity map

The big ideas that kept coming up

Key themes that emerged from the engagement process

Bridge the gap

Communication that is inclusive, accessible, and reaches everyone effectively.

"People need opportunities to come together and share, feel, heal" - Milford resident

Grow green, stay blue

Protect and enhance Milford's green and blue spaces

The next generation

Family-friendly spaces and youth involvement

Come together

Bring people together across generations and backgrounds to deepen social cohesion

Be honest. Be clear. Let us shape what's next.

Frustration over flood recovery development in risk zones, and lack of communication. Clear communication from and to Council. Local voices that are heard — and make a difference

Be prepared

Flood protection & infrastructure

"More walkways and boardwalks connecting the lake, beach, and village" - Milford resident

Make it safer to move

Safe, walkable, and cycle-friendly Milford

"Just keep the information flow going and communication lines open for people seeking it" - Milford resident

From themes to action: community-led ideas

As key themes began to surface through the engagement process, so too did a range of ideas – all from community voices and shaped by local needs. Ideas have been filtered into three timeframes: Now, Next, and Future. From this process, three big ideas have emerged that act as umbrellas for several key themes. The Next and Future categories include additional ideas that could be developed or integrated further down the track as momentum and resources grow.
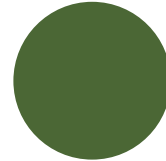
NOW

These ideas are the most fully developed so far and include clear steps to get started. You could focus on one or all. Each is unique and able to stand alone – but together, they complement each other and support a more connected, informed, and resilient Milford. You can hear the community behind them in the quotes that support each idea – a clear signal of local energy, insight, and readiness to get involved.
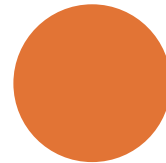
NEXT

What follows is a scatter of ideas that have come directly from Milford locals. They're not fully developed yet but each one could be picked up and fleshed out. Some could grow into longer-term projects, while others are perfect for one-off or seasonal activities. It's a flexible mix-and-match menu of possibilities, ready to be explored, adapted, or tested as capacity and interest allow.
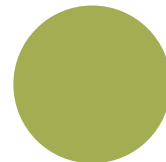
FUTURE

These ideas reflect Milford locals' hopes and aspirations for the future of their community. They are broader, visionary concepts that deserve a place in future planning – though they may take time to be fully realised.

NOW

Neighbourhood Connection
Workshop-in-a-Box Kit

What people are saying: People want more shared events, neighbour-to-neighbour activities, and welcoming spaces that bring together all ages and cultures. There's also a strong desire to feel more prepared for future extreme weather events – blending social connection with practical readiness.

The Idea: Create a "Be Prepared" Workshop-in-a-Box Kit that encourages neighbours to come together at a street level. This initiative helps build social cohesion while encouraging practical conversations about preparedness in an informal setting.

How it works: A micro-campaign will invite Milford residents to host a neighbourhood gathering – a BBQ, potluck, afternoon tea, or whatever feels appropriate for their street. A "street champ" can order a free kit, along with a $100 Prezzy card to help cover food or supplies (e.g. kai, printing, or equipment). The goal is simple: connect with neighbours and start conversations about community support and readiness.

What's in the Kit:*

- A guide to hosting a street gathering
- Printable invitations and signage
- Connection resources and magnets
- An icebreaker game to help people get to know each other
- Information and tips on staying connected and being prepared
- Ways to stay connected moving forward

- *See what tools and resources already exist.*

NOW

Neighbourhood Connection

Workshop-in-a-Box Kit

___

"Organisation of street or small area groupings to represent needs to local councils as was the original local democracy of small towns, contributing to neighbours actually meeting one another" - Milford resident

First Steps:

- Prepare a budget for this activation — decide how many streets to target initially, with the option to expand if it proves successful.

- Define the contents of the kit: identify what already exists, what could be sponsored, and what would need to be created from scratch.

- Determine who will deliver the project — will it be the working group, or should you bring in a delivery partner?

- Consider assigning a dedicated support person to help streets organise their events effectively.

- Establish how success will be measured and ensure there's a plan for accountability so that events actually take place.

"Checking in with each other, joining in on shared projects and getting to know each other through working together" - Milford resident

"Knowing all the people in one's residential streets" - Milford resident

NOW

Neighbourhood Connection

Workshop-in-a-Box Kit

"Getting to know people on your street and embracing the different cultures around you — even something as simple as saying hello or sharing a smile can make a big difference" - Milford resident

"Street/neighbourhood parties, block a street, bring out benches, beer and activities for kids" - Milford resident

Next Steps:

- Finalise and assemble the Workshop-in-a-Box kits.
- Identify a convenient pick-up spot (or spots) for the kits.
- Develop and execute a promotional plan to get the word out – think about whether there are specific areas you want to target and build that into your plan (e.g., local markets, letterbox drops in key streets).
- Provide a simple way for one person to register, order the kit, and coordinate with neighbours.
- Launch a local call-out inviting streets to get involved (through newspaper, social media, flyers).
- Think about timing – how long will you keep this open and available to people?

Expected Outcomes:

- Stronger, more connected neighbourhoods
- Increased community awareness and readiness
- Distributing responsibilities – more locals taking action and supporting the project

NOW

Joined-up communications: A coordinated local comms approach

What people are saying: People want clear, honest and timely updates in plain language, shared through multiple channels — including print, face-to-face, and translated formats. Council communication is causing frustration due to delays, poor clarity, and confusing decisions. They're willing to engage if their input shapes outcomes.

The Idea: Create a coordinated, inclusive community communication system that unifies local channels to keep all residents informed and engaged.

How it Works:

- Start with an audit of all communication channels currently active in Milford – from Council updates and community groups to social media, newsletters, newspapers, and noticeboards. Identify any gaps or areas for improvement, with attention to diverse needs (e.g. languages, age groups, and life stages – from schools to retirement homes).
- Use the findings to create a more joined-up, consistent communication strategy. The goal: ensure information is clear, accessible, and coordinated across platforms.
- Cast the communication net wide by engaging locals from diverse language groups and backgrounds to reach those who might otherwise miss updates.
- A key feature of this strategy would be monthly community sessions, both online and in person, where residents can receive updates directly from a Council representative and ask questions. These sessions could be branded: Milford Monthly: Your Council, Your Questions. Each month could focus on a topical or current issue or project, e.g., one month could highlight the phased plan for the wetland flood storage project.

NOW

Joined-up communications:
A coordinated local comms
~~approach~~

*"We need communication that reaches everyone,
including those with language or cultural barriers"
- Milford resident*

*"More transparent and regular communication from
Auckland Council about what is happening with the
flood recovery project" - Milford resident*

First Steps:

- Map all current local channels (digital, print, and in-person), identify overlaps, gaps, and communities currently missing out.
- Appoint a dedicated person or team to lead and manage the communication strategy, ensuring coordination, consistency, and responsiveness.
- Prepare a budget to support outreach through newspapers, social media, flyers, and noticeboards – covering the costs of design, printing, distribution, and digital promotion to boost community engagement.
- Explore the option of creating a dedicated Milford community webpage
- Establish a web of local representatives from diverse backgrounds to help share information more effectively than traditional channels alone.
- Engage Council representatives to take part in regular community updates and Q&A sessions.
- Provide incentives for participation, encouraging residents to join the communication network and take an active role in keeping their neighborhoods informed.

NOW

Joined-up communications: A coordinated local comms approach

"Multiple channels of communications in multiple languages. Have community representatives from local groups like a rep from Milford school, a rep to represent people on Nile Road for example" - Milford resident

"How do people find out what is happening over the back fence?" - Milford resident

Next Steps:

- Develop a joined-up strategy based on audit insights – defining who communicates what, when, and how across all platforms.
- Develop a clear content plan in plain language, with key messages translated into the most spoken languages in Milford
- Launch a pilot round of "Milford Monthly" sessions, evaluate attendance and feedback, and adjust the format if needed.
- Train local representatives on how to share updates effectively, use translation resources, and gather feedback from their networks.
- Report back to the community regularly on what's being done with their input and how communication is improving.

Expected Outcomes:

- Clearer, more accessible information for all Milford residents
- A coordinated, community-led communication system
- Stronger local engagement and trust

NOW

Milford Community Connection Trail

What people are saying: Locals are calling for more planting, native regeneration, and community gardens in unused spaces. They want walking tracks and environmental art that connect people to the land — and to each other. There's a strong desire for shared events and hands-on projects that build community connection and pride. Residents imagine a safer, more walkable, and cycle-friendly Milford where people and environment thrive together. People want local schools and young people involved in projects so they can too help shape the community's future.

The Idea: Bring people together from all ages and stages through creativity, storytelling, and place-making. Form a local working group to develop a Community Connection Trail — a pathway that links key sites around Milford or along the Wairau Stream. The trail could feature art, play, community projects, local stories, and history, creating a shared space that reflects the identity and values of the community.

How it works: Establish a community-led working group to kickstart the project and guide it from ideation to execution. This group will be instrumental in delivering the project and ensuring the community is brought along on the journey.

"I would like to see the Wairau as one of Milford's water taonga, along with the beach, lake and estuary" - Milford resident

"If a new shared path was created connecting green spaces where houses previously were, storyboards could be provided along the walk which share the experiences of those who were in those houses/ others who were impacted" - Milford resident

NOW

Milford Community Connection Trail

"Children's outdoor nature activities such as bug hunting and orienteering" - Milford resident

"I would love to see the Wairau creek where the houses have been bought turned into a beautiful green corridor with fruit trees that could be cared for by local kaitiaki. This could be such a wonderful space for our local neighbourhood to connect and care for our natural environment together" - Milford resident

Next Steps:

- Form a Working Group – bring together interested locals, mana whenua, community groups, schools, university students, and others to shape the vision and purpose of the trail.
- Review existing engagement data – gather all the ideas that have already been shared through consultations and conversations; reconnect with people who expressed interest to involve them in the project.
- Hold a kick-off meeting – invite the group to map potential trail routes, identify key sites, and brainstorm features and activities for the trail.
- Co-design the process – define how the group will work together and identify immediate next steps

"Milford has a great community, but it is still divided. Divided in areas/age and ethnicity. We need places to bring these things together" - Milford resident

"Safe bike lanes for young and old. Walkways through the estuary" - Milford resident

NOW

Milford Community Connection Trail

"Organisation of street or small area groupings to represent needs to local councils as was the original local democracy of small towns, contributing to neighbours actually meeting one another" - Milford resident

Checking in with each other, joining in on shared projects and getting to know each other through working together" - Milford resident

Next Steps:

- Engage with Council – discuss the concept, explore feasibility, and clarify what support (technical, funding, approvals) might be available.
- Host a community day – invite residents to learn about the idea and contribute through workshops, collaborative art-making, and planting events.
- Gather local stories – especially from those impacted by past flooding – to include along the trail as part of the shared community narrative.
- Develop a project plan – outlining potential trail routes, design ideas, materials needed, and estimated costs.
- Seek funding and partnerships – apply for grants and approach local organisations to support physical works, signage, materials, and creative commissions.
- Pilot a small section – test the concept by building one part of the trail (e.g. a community garden, mural, or art installation) to build visibility and momentum.

Expected Outcomes:

- A greener, more walkable Milford
- Stronger community connection through shared spaces and stories
- Strengthened local leadership and collaboration

NEXT

A Mix-and-Match of Community Ideas

A flexible set of early ideas from Milford locals – ready to test, adapt, or grow as interest and capacity allow

Pilot a series of seasonal events (e.g., Matariki, Easter)
Start with small, community gatherings that bring Milford together. Host summer picnic events, winter potlucks, or casual beach meet-ups tied to seasonal occasions.

Tree planting and clean ups
Run community planting and clean-up days followed by a shared meal. Involve tamariki and local groups in revitalising green areas.
"Get Milford School students involved in planting and community days or clean-up days." - MIlford Resident

Coffee & Chats
Host regular drop-ins or morning teas to gather ideas, listen, and check in.

"Organise informal meet-ups like coffee and chats to listen to residents." - Milford resident

Movies, music and kai in the park
Bring people together at the beach or reserves with outdoor movies, acoustic music, and shared kai.
"More community activities like movies and music in the parks near the beach." - Milford resident

Flood Commemoration
An annual gathering at Milford School Field or the Reserve, with stories, food, and reflection.
"Remembering and sharing stories helps us move forward as a community." - Milford resident
"An event like this is great to bring the community together and help with healing." - Miford resident

NEXT

A Mix-and-Match of Community Ideas

A flexible set of early ideas from Milford locals – ready to test, adapt, or grow as interest and capacity allow

Bring the street together

Support small-scale gatherings led by streets. *Potentially tie into Neighbours Aotearoa in March.*

"Create informal spaces to connect — share food and meet face-to-face." - Milford resident

Milford Youth Ambassadors

Get rangatahi more involved by forming a youth leadership group to co-design community activities and green projects.

"Teenage spaces, cafes open after 3pm, sandpits in Main Street." - Milford resident

All-Ages Community Days

Events designed to fill community needs by offering activities for kids, social spaces for older people, and skill-sharing workshops. Run local workshops on gardening, composting, bike repair, cooking, or arts – led by and for the community.

"Milford has a great community, but it is still divided. Divided in areas/age and ethnicity. We need places to bring these things together."

Shared spaces

Locals have the opportunity to take responsibility for small green areas – for weeding, planting, shared garden or mini art installations.

"Invite locals to adopt part of the blue-green network — help with planting and keep it clean." - Milford resident

"Make a lovely, interactive community garden that reflects the people who live here." - Milford resident

FUTURE

Broader ideas from Milford locals – future-focused and worth considering in long-term planning.

All-ages spaces

Add seating, sandpits, and informal play areas to Main Street and green spaces to encourage spontaneous play, connection, and intergenerational mingling.

"Milford Centre needs to be more kid-friendly... informal play space enticing people to stop/interact." - Milford resident

"Promote child-and elderly-friendly improvements – safe walking paths, scooter parks, and rest spots." - Milford resident

Annual Community Event

Create a signature yearly celebration that brings the whole Milford community together –whether it's a festival, parade, big breakfast, or community day.

"Big breakfasts, school fair days, and art in public places would be awesome!"- Milford resident

"Community art projects and festivals – music, performance, and visual arts."

Summer Street Closures

Reclaim space for people by transforming roads into celebration zones. Host summer parties, festivals, or parades featuring music, kai, and activities.

"Street parade with music and costumes and sculptures..." - Milford resident

Better amenities for young people

Make fun outdoor spaces for young people to play and come together

"Bike and scooter park." - Milford resident

"Basketball courts!" - Milford resident

Things to Consider

- Offer a mix of day and evening events to suit different schedules,
- Promote and build on existing successful groups and activities rather than creating new ones unnecessarily.

Acknowledgements

Prepared by Community Think, this report is a living guide to support the Milford Recovery Group and locals as they head into the next phase of the project. A big thank you to the Milford Residents Association, Milford Recovery Group, Milford locals, and everyone who helped shape it.

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