

# The social value of rescuing food, nourishing communities

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore the social value food rescue enterprises can create for both their stakeholders and the wider community “in the meantime” whilst longer term solutions to the problems of insecurity and waste are sought.

**Design/methodology/approach** – FoodShare, a New Zealand urban-based social enterprise specialising in food redistribution, served as a case study for this research. Semi-structured interviews ( $n = 13$ ) were conducted with FoodShare staff and key stakeholder groups (food donors, financial donors, recipient agencies and volunteers). In addition, an anonymous online survey ( $n = 40$ ) was completed by the wider organisational volunteer network. The interview guides were structured around a new social value evaluation tool, Social Return on Investment, which is increasingly used to demonstrate the impact of such programmes. Deductive methods were used to code the resulting transcripts to identify key outcomes experienced by FoodShare’s stakeholders.

**Findings** – The outcomes of FoodShare’s work differed for the various stakeholders. For food donors, outcomes included “more involved relationships with community”, and “improved perceptions of corporate social responsibility”. Identified key outcomes for the financial donors included “key promotional opportunity” and “do something good”. For recipient agencies, important outcomes were “greater volume of food” and “increased reach”. Volunteers reported “meeting new people”, “a sense of accomplishment in helping others” and “learning new skills”. There were also a number of nutritional and environmental outcomes for the wider community.

**Originality/value** – Given the dearth of evidence on the societal value that is created in redistributing unsold food to people in need, this novel perspective makes a significant contribution to the literature in this area.

**Keywords** Food waste, Social enterprise, Social value, Food security, Food rescue

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Food insecurity and food waste are symbols of inequalities and inefficiencies found within contemporary food systems (Midgley, 2014). Food security at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels occurs when individuals have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (UNFAO, 2015). Despite a universal human right to be food secure, nearly 800 million people worldwide do not have enough to eat, including developed countries (Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 2016). That means one in nine people is suffering from hunger. While many factors contribute to food insecurity, people are not hungry because of a shortage of global food supply as the world is producing more than enough food to feed every single person on this planet (Mirosa *et al.*, 2017).



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The FAO (2016) estimate that recovering just half of the food that is lost or wasted could feed every person on the globe.

Food waste represents one of the most fundamental examples of wasted resources and has a number of significant lifecycle implications for both food security and the environment in terms of energy and greenhouse gas emissions (Gustavsson *et al.*, 2011; Warshawsky, 2015; Blair and Sobal, 2006). Food waste is defined as all food produced or purchased that is discarded by humans (Gallo, 1980). Significant energy losses occur when food is discarded, including the energy used to produce and distribute the food, to process the waste, as well as the energy captured in the food itself. Wasted food can threaten environmental and community health through destruction of the biophysical environment, air pollution from decaying food, water pollution and run off or leaching, and rapidly growing landfills (Griffin *et al.*, 2009). Recent reports indicate that 30-50 per cent of all food produced for human consumption is wasted and hence not consumed (FAO, 2016). Globally there have been many developments aiming to reduce food waste at various points along the food system (Miroso *et al.*, 2017). For example, at the consumer level, campaigns such as the Love Food Hate Waste community engagement programme are encouraging consumers to reduce their domestic food waste. At the retail level, supermarkets are increasingly selling cheaper “ugly” (misshapen) fruit and vegetables at reduced costs, are removing promotions encouraging consumers to buy “two-for-one” deals, and are selling food due for expiration for a cheaper price. Food that the retailers are unable to sell is increasingly being donated to food rescue organisations that divert unwanted food from supermarkets to help feed the hungry.

This last initiative, food rescue (sometimes referred to as food banking), is an important development as it sits directly at the nexus of the two aforementioned global issues, food security and food waste. Food rescue is commonly used in the emergency food sector as a way to both reduce food waste and improve food supplies to frontline providers and their clients (Lindberg *et al.*, 2014). Food rescue is the practice of safely diverting edible food that would have been thrown out and redistributing this food to those in need or those who are food insecure (Reynolds *et al.*, 2015).

Despite the fact that the food rescue sector has been expanding rapidly over the last decade (Lipinski *et al.*, 2013), now operating in more than 25 countries on six continents (Making a World of Difference), there has been surprisingly very little scholarly attention (Vlaholias *et al.*, 2015a). The literature review that follows explains that existing theorisations of food rescue have tended to apply either a food security lens or a political economy perspective. As Cloke *et al.* (2016) have pointed out, these kinds of interpretative frameworks tend to emphasise the negativities of food rescue (i.e. these organisations self-perpetuate poverty and are inextricably entangled with the forces of neoliberalism and the industrialised food system). The purpose of this paper is not to disagree with the perspectives from these food insecurity or anti-neoliberalisation scholars. We too subscribe to the idea that in an ideal world, food would not be wasted to begin with and there would be no need for these food rescue enterprises. There are much more economically viable and environmentally sustainable solutions for addressing both food waste and food insecurity. However, in the immediate future, where many food retailers are still generating a large amount of waste each day and large numbers of people continue to go hungry, food rescue looks to be one of the short-term solutions to addressing food waste and food insecurity while longer term solutions are sought. There is also reason to believe that this sector will grow exponentially in years to come. In 2015, a food waste law (L. 541-15-3) was passed that essentially bans large supermarkets from throwing out unsold food and obliges them to

give it to charities or food banks instead. While currently only enacted in France, there have been talks in other European countries and further afield as to whether similar legal rules might be applied. If they are, this will obviously stimulate the food recovery sector further.

So rather than subscribe to a politics of abandonment (Cloke *et al.*, 2010), the aim of this paper is to provide a more positive understanding of what social value perishable food rescue social enterprises can create for both their stakeholders and the wider community “in the meantime” (Cloke *et al.*, 2016) whilst longer term solutions to the problems of insecurity and waste are sought. Such an insight will allow both researchers and practitioners to start to think about how this value can be augmented to further generate improvements in the lives of individuals and society as a whole. Given the dearth of evidence on the societal value that is created in redistributing unsold food to people in need, this novel perspective makes a significant contribution to the literature in this area. To provide this understanding, we identify qualitative views from all key stakeholder groups about the social value that a perishable food rescue social enterprise creates.

In the remainder of the paper, a review of the literature on food rescue is first presented, followed by an introduction to FoodShare, a New Zealand urban-based social enterprise specialising in food redistribution that serves as a case study for this research. The qualitative interviews conducted with FoodShare’s stakeholders as well as the volunteer open-ended survey questions are described in the Section 2 and the Section 3 details key outcomes identified. The implications of the social value created are then presented in the Section 4.

### *1.1 Overview of the literature on the food recovery sector*

Some previous researchers have considered the strengths associated with the food rescue sector. Evans and Clarke (2011), for example, suggested that food rescue enterprises obtaining nutritious food can offer a practical way to make gains in the public health sector and change the current charity food environment of providing mainly processed, low-nutritional quality, food products (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009; Wicks *et al.*, 2006). Most of the literature, however, focusses on the weaknesses. These include: the minimal effect rescue has in reducing waste; a higher waste generation rate and a high economic activity cost of recovery compared to landfilling and composting; the nutritional inadequacy of the food; and its ineffectiveness in reducing food poverty in developed nations. Each of these critiques is now presented in turn. First, findings from Warshawsky (2015) suggest that food rescue only has a minimal effect in reducing food waste. Second, Reynolds *et al.* (2015) compared the economic costs of food rescue to landfill or composting and found, unsurprisingly, that food rescue has a higher waste generation rate, and high economic activity cost. Third, some scholars argue that the food charity sector is unsustainable due to the food being nutritionally inadequate, so many of those getting the food remain food insecure (Poppendieck, 1999; Warshawsky, 2015). Fourth, just as the beneficial effects of rescuing food on reducing food waste have been questioned, so too has its effects on reducing food poverty in developed nations. Riches and Silvasti (2014) provide an insightful overview of the difficult relationship between food rescue and food poverty in their work “Hunger in the rich world: food aid and right to food perspectives”. While acknowledging that food rescue (they use the term “charitable food banking”) fulfils the short-term urgent moral imperative to feed hungry people, they suggest that in the long term it can undermine food justice and the human right to adequate food

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and nutrition. This, they argue, is because the issue of hunger is essentially de-politicised and the solutions for fixing the issue are no longer the responsibility of the state but rather the responsibility of non-for-profit organisations, the private sector and civil society. Other scholars investigating food rescue and food banking put forward similar critiques; Booth and Whelan (2014), for example, argue that the underpinning problem is that food banking maintains food system efficiency and serves as “a neo-liberal mechanism to deflect query, debate and structural action on food poverty and hunger”, thus doing little help to solve food poverty (p. 1392).

Despite these weaknesses, the food charity sector continues to grow. There is currently limited evidence of benefits associated with food rescue (these include helping volunteers feel good and publicising the issue of food waste – Warshawsky, 2015). As such, a focus on the wider social value created by food rescue organisations will help make clearer why food rescue is increasingly being seen as such an attractive option by a wide range of stakeholders for dealing with issues of food security and food waste.

### *1.2 Context and introduction to the case study*

The case study selected for this investigation is FoodShare, a New Zealand food rescue social enterprise launched in 2012. In New Zealand there were six main food rescue programmes operating in 2015 (Fair Food NZ, FoodShare, Good Neighbour NZ, Kaibosh, Kaivolution, Kiwi Harvest). These programmes aim to deliver perishable food that is fit for human consumption to community charity groups. The rapid growth of this food rescue sector can be attributed to growing awareness of the food waste issue as well as the passing of The Food Act 2014, which provides “Immunity of Food Donors” so enterprises can donate their edible surplus food with limited legal risk. This legislation protects those who donate food in good faith should someone fall ill from its consumption, which had been a concern previously (Ministry of Primary Industries, 2014) and is similar to other “good Samaritan” legislation that is found elsewhere in the world (such as the 1996 act passed in the USA, Kantor *et al.*, 1997). One important point of difference between New Zealand and the USA is that businesses do not receive any special tax benefits for making donations of food to food rescue organisations like they do in the USA.

FoodShare is an urban-based social enterprise that specialises in perishable food redistribution. The enterprise redistributes surplus food from local businesses to agencies that support vulnerable clients. It is hoped that this will reduce food insecurity, empower and help others to rescue food, and create a resilient nationwide network of food rescue operations. FoodShare would be unable to achieve the outcomes they do without the involvement of their volunteers, food donors, recipient agencies and financial donors. Initially, FoodShare began with the collection and distribution of donated food on a very small scale; in the first month of operations, the equivalent of 1,000 meals were distributed amongst charities for their clients. In 2015, FoodShare collected surplus food from a growing list of providers and regularly distributed more than 30,000 meals each month (FoodShare, 2015). To better understand the value that this enterprise is creating in the community, this study employed a new social value evaluation tool called Social Return on Investment.

### *1.3 Social Return on Investment*

Social Return on Investment is a relatively new evaluation tool in the social sector that is able to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of programmes (Cooney and Lynch-Cerullo, 2014). It differs to many other organisational tools as it both quantitatively and qualitatively measures outcomes, combining evaluation and accounting (Brouwers *et al.*, 2010). This paper presents the qualitative results obtained through an empirical investigation of FoodShare's operations. The process of this social accounting activity involved in-depth interviews with FoodShare's staff and key stakeholders and produced incredibly rich qualitative data on the social value created, which is the focus of this current study. Quantitative Social Return on Investment results will be reported in a separate publication (Horne, 2015, manuscript in preparation).

## **2. Methods**

This qualitative investigation primarily explored outcomes key stakeholder organisations experienced as a result of their involvement with FoodShare; additional inputs required for these outcomes provided context for these findings. Semi-structured interviews and an anonymous online survey were conducted in early 2015. Research protocols were approved through the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (D15/072); informed consent was obtained from all participants.

### *2.1 Interviews*

Two FoodShare staff and 11 key stakeholder organisations were identified and invited to take part in a one-hour semi-structured interview. The interviews were designed to explore significant inputs, outputs and outcomes their organisation experienced as a result of FoodShare activities during the year ending 31 March 2015.

A purposive sampling method was employed. Four key stakeholder groups were identified (food donors, financial donors, recipient agencies and volunteers). Organisations and representatives within each group were selected based on their size, the volume and type of food they donated or received, and their role within the community. Participants included four local food donors: a chain supermarket (and its national coordinator), two bakeries and a residential college catering service. Three of four organisations that received the rescued food were social agencies (two food banks); the fourth recipient agency was a neighbourhood community group. The participating financial donors were a local corporate enterprise, who had provided financial support for the past two years, as well as a local city council representative. Clients at recipient agencies were excluded as FoodShare's involvement ended when they distributed food to these organisations. Organisations were contacted initially by e-mail and then by telephone to book an interview.

An interview guide for each stakeholder group was adapted from previous research (Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 2013) and piloted with FoodShare staff prior to use. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and coded through NVivo 10.2 for Mac. A deductive analysis was completed using grandparent nodes created for three components of a Social Return on Investment analysis (inputs, outputs and outcomes). Within each of these grandparent nodes, information was assigned to parent nodes, such as positive and negative outcomes. The coded data were summarised and prioritised according to the grandparent nodes, and exemplar quotes were identified from within each node.

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## 2.2 Volunteer survey

FoodShare volunteers with a known e-mail address ( $n = 68$  of 79) were contacted via e-mail to complete an anonymous online survey. The 12-item questionnaire requested information on their FoodShare contributions (time and/or money), motives and personal gains (positive and negative), as well as demographics. Data were collected and analysed using Qualtrics. The qualitative results of the open-ended comment questions in the survey are reported in this paper.

## 3. Results

The results from the interviews and survey are reported by stakeholder group in order to showcase the breadth of value being created by the FoodShare enterprise, and to allow between group comparisons. The results focus on the outcomes (gains or losses) for each stakeholder organisation, resulting directly from their relationship with FoodShare. Outcomes for the food donors (3.1), financial donors (3.2), recipient agencies (3.3) and volunteers (3.4) are described.

### 3.1 Food donors

Food donors donated large amounts of food which previously would have been destined for non-human use (e.g. as pig food) or landfill due to either expiring best before dates, not fitting aesthetics standards to be sold, or being surplus to requirements; this food was still edible and often of a high-quality standard. Food donors reported experiencing gains, no losses. They stated they felt pleased that they were able to help out their community as a result of their FoodShare donations. These businesses gained a sense of joy by being able to make a difference within the local community. Representatives from the businesses articulated these positive outcomes:

Obviously there is a great benefit in giving people who need food, food, so it's one of those win-win situations. But I think too, across our company, people feel really pleased and proud that we do what we do (National Communications Manager, Large Supermarket Chain, 24 March 2015).

It helps us, it helps so much. It makes our life easy, and yeah, it makes you feel quite good about yourself as well because you know that food is getting to those who are in need. Whereas, if you're just throwing it in the bin, you feel like, "this is really wasteful [...] it makes you feel like you're doing your bit for the community" (Bakery Owner Operator, 24 March 2015).

Participating businesses appeared to donate food benevolently; no concerns were raised about giving away this food at no cost.

Donor involvement in FoodShare activities raised businesses' awareness of social needs within their community and how they could help. The supermarket explained how they increased their community involvement through participation in a one-off cooking session that used donated food to make meals for those who were hungry within their community:

It's certainly raised the awareness of how much of a need there is in the community, which you know I guess before FoodShare, and being involved in it [we didn't know] [...] we had a cooking session out at the Polytech, where we actually utilised, we made about 50 meals that came from what we donated, and you know those meals were actually going to be distributed through to the community. So it wasn't until we did that, and realised through talking with other people who are involved with FoodShare, I guess to understand and really realise what level of need there is in the community (Supermarket Store Manager, 13 April 2015).

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This outcome was important as it encouraged donors to donate, reminding them of why they became involved with FoodShare to begin with.

Donating food to FoodShare was also beneficial to the food donors' corporate social responsibility image, especially for the large chain supermarket:

I think it's just another aspect of being a large organisation. It's deemed as part of our CSR, so at least we can give something to the community that otherwise will just get disposed of, so it's just a good thing to do (Supermarket Store Manager, 13 April 2015).

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Donating to FoodShare could help to improve the food donor's image in the minds of the public and in some instances may lead to increased customer patronage and sales revenue as a result.

Food donors identified a small reduction in waste removal costs. Donors stated that prior to their involvement with FoodShare, their surplus food was either removed to landfill or collected by pig farmers. Several food donors reported decreased waste removal costs but the supermarket did not experience a considerable reduction in waste costs, perhaps ascribed to long term or national waste removal contracts that have yet to change. Infrequent food donors did not report a reduction in waste costs, as there was minimal change to their volume of waste.

### *3.2 Financial donors*

Similar to food donors, the local business financial donor felt they gained the opportunity to do something good for their community. This was one of the main reasons for getting involved with the organisation to begin with:

The main thing is that we have wanted to do some good. I think it's been good for our staff to have the opportunity to do something good (Lawyer, 20 March 2015).

This type of social enterprise might appeal to businesses looking for philanthropic opportunities.

Through its regular financial contributions to FoodShare, the local business donor also gained branding and promotion opportunities:

We've got branding, branding on the [FoodShare] van. [Our company] always gets a mention, and with whatever functions they're having, they're always inviting us along, and usually pick us out as people who are supporting them [...], if you just viewed it as a pure marketing thing, then we more than just have our coverage"; and "Financially, if you just viewed it as a financial investment, it's been more than satisfactory (Lawyer, 20 March 2015).

It was evident that their relationship with FoodShare had been worth the investment, through all the benefits gained.

The local city council also awarded various grants and funding to FoodShare, believing it generated positive outcomes for the council and greater community. The main benefit the council gained through this relationship was help in achieving their waste minimisation vision:

They're [FoodShare] definitely a pivotal relationship in helping us achieve what we want for the city, so we continue to foster that relationship". And "we'll be proactively promoting them. Not as though they were a council service, but in alignment with our objectives, so they will become really a part of our strategy. And we will be diverting customers to using them (Solid Waste Manager, 26 March 2015).

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This quote highlights the mutually beneficial relationship between the two organisations.

The spokesperson for the local city council highlighted the large amounts of organic waste, including food waste, currently heading to landfill and its environmental impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions:

Organics, vegetation and food waste is around 23% of what goes to the landfill, so it is a significant quantity, and I can imagine that a large proportion of that would be food waste because a lot of the vegetation goes through the composting site. From refuse bag collections (so that's our own [council] collections), food waste is between 35 and 40% of what's disposed of. And from commercial collections [...] it's much higher (Solid Waste Manager, 26 March 2015).

The council had to purchase carbon credits as part of the Emissions Trading Scheme; therefore, it had a financial incentive to recover waste. The spokesperson actively promoted FoodShare's work as part of their strategy to reduce food waste going to landfill.

### 3.3 Recipient agencies

Similar to donors, recipient agencies reported only positive (no negative) outcomes from their involvement with FoodShare. Recipient agencies, especially food banks, benefited from having an increased volume and range of nutritious, fresh food for distribution to their clients. The food bank that fed ~350 families a year commented:

FoodShare has given us a wider amount of stuff to be able to hand out", and this meant: "More food per family, per client who comes in the door, because now we have [...] plenty of fresh fruit and veggies [...] FoodShare has just really meant that we can give a whole lot more in the way of this fresh stuff to our clients (Food Bank Coordinator, 23 March 2015).

This food bank valued giving a lot of fresh produce to their clients, and believed it would improve the nutritional quality of their diets:

Well it's fresh fruit and veggies that we need. Because our clients don't have that; they can't afford to have that [...] It just doesn't happen. And the kids need that [...] for the vitamins and sustenance (Food Bank Coordinator, 23 March 2015).

Clients who regularly consume a greater amount and variety of fresh produce and nutrients, are likely to have better nutritional status, which could ultimately reduce their risk of cardiovascular diseases (Wang *et al.*, 2014). Improved client health and well-being is a potential outcome.

Giving away a lot of nutritious food could also enhance a social organisation's reputation or image. The community group gained a stronger reputation from distributing healthy food to those in need:

We want people to know that this is a place where we encourage [...] inclusiveness of the community and also help to promote healthy environments and healthy families, so I guess that's what we get out of it, is recognition somewhat of the things we do (Community Trust Project Manager, 13 March 2015).

Because this group had regular access to free nutritious food, they were able to create a healthier food environment within their low-socioeconomic neighbourhood.

Increased access to food donations allowed recipient agencies to increase their reach within the community. Several agencies reported increased reach as a result of increased food supply. An organisation aiming to reduce family violence felt the offer



of free food gave them access to more vulnerable people and increased the reach of their services:

The consequence of that [increased food supply], is that more people move through our doors and that's what we want [...] It allows us to reach those in harder to reach areas. They're not the type to knock on our door and say, "look, can you please help me?" (Crisis-line Telephone Service Manager, 17 March 2015).

The knowledge that surplus perishable food will go to waste if no one takes it could encourage participation from apprehensive households.

Charitable food provision is a generous act, which helps build connections, relationships and a sense of community. Along with increased reach, recipient agencies reported having closer relationships with their clients through the food they were providing. The community group explained the social dynamics:

Yeah, it's about getting a box of food every week, but it's also about connecting with people who have come to get the food and reaching out to them if they want. I mean we're never really pushing it [volunteering] on anybody. But when they drop in, if they're receptive to doing some volunteering, then you know, it's just establishing those connections (Community Trust Project Manager, 13 March 2015).

Food provision may encourage reciprocity.

The final outcome experienced by recipient agencies aiming to enhance life skills was the opportunity to develop more food-based initiatives for vulnerable clients. For example, new group cooking activities to make use of excess produce encouraged problem solving and active learning, with one social agency identifying these activities gave vulnerable clients a "self-esteem boost" and noting it did "wonders for their confidence" (Crisis-line Telephone Service Manager, 17 March 2015). Prior to their relationship with FoodShare, this agency did not prioritise the cost of this programme.

### 3.4 *Volunteers*

FoodShare's volunteer coordinator was interviewed to understand the positive and negative outcomes volunteers experienced through their relationship with FoodShare. According to the coordinator, FoodShare's volunteers gained many benefits in contributing to the work of the organisation such as learning new skills and meeting new people. Those who donated time or money reportedly gained a sense of accomplishment from helping others. The volunteer coordinator described what the volunteers gained through their work with FoodShare:

Volunteers gain altruism, a sense of community involvement, along with the many friendships which are formed within FoodShare. For those volunteers wishing to go into paid employment, we are happy to provide a reference (Volunteer Coordinator, 27 March 2015).

Results from the volunteer survey supported these views.

Of the 68 FoodShare volunteers asked to participate, 40 completed the online survey (59 per cent response rate). Volunteers outlined their main contributions to FoodShare as their time; professional knowledge and skills; and finally their use of car and therefore petrol. The benefits volunteers experienced included the ability to meet new people and form connections with other volunteers, as well as staff at the different donor agencies, for example two respondents commented:

I've had laughs and conversations with others involved in running i" (General Volunteer at Food Rescue Headquarters, 9 April 2015)

and:

[...] meeting and getting to know workers at cafes and supermarkets (Driver, 4 April 2015).

Most participants reported experiencing emotional benefits through working with FoodShare including the feelings of satisfaction and achievement associated with making a positive difference within the local community and being involved in an important cause:

I feel a sense of achievement that I'm contributing to a worthwhile project (General Volunteer at Food Rescue Headquarters, 7 April 2015),

[...] enjoyment from helping others and knowing I am doing something to make a difference to the life of another person (General Volunteer at Food Rescue Headquarters, 3 April 2015)

and:

[...] knowing I'm helping others makes me feel good (General Volunteer at Food Rescue Headquarters, 1 April 2015).

Because of this work with FoodShare, it also meant that volunteers felt, "more of a part of the local community (General Volunteer at Food Rescue Headquarters, 1 April 2015)". It also enabled them to have increased awareness of businesses making a positive difference within their community:

I now have a greater appreciation for businesses within our community who are making a big difference in people's lives (General Volunteer at Food Rescue Headquarters, 3 April 2015).

Of the 40 respondents who completed the volunteer survey, only two mentioned negative outcomes, both related to the nature of the industry. One volunteer noted:

There is a lot of time wasted waiting for the food deliveries, however I appreciate that this is part of the parcel of how FoodShare is run and cannot be changed. It is not too big an inconvenience (General Volunteer at Food Rescue Headquarters, 13 April 2015).

The other respondent commented on negative attitudes of some recipient agencies when larger amounts of food were delivered. It was clear, however, that the benefits volunteers experienced far outweighed these negatives.

#### **4. Discussion**

The case study examination provided qualitative evidence of the social value created by a food rescue enterprise. Key stakeholders perceived FoodShare's activities created considerable value for themselves or their organisation as well as for the wider community, with minimal negative outcomes reported.

The diverse outcomes FoodShare created with its stakeholders address many of the criticisms of food rescue programmes discussed in the previous literature. While FoodShare did rely on both food and financial donations from businesses, which is suggested to be a problem by both Poppendieck (1999) and Warshawsky (2015), these donors reported that they gained a lot of benefits through their relationship with FoodShare. Poppendieck (1999) also suggested that food coming from the emergency food sector is not of high-nutritional quality and therefore not helping to combat the issue of food insecurity. FoodShare, however, prioritised gaining nutritious, fresh foods from donors and distributed fresh

fruit and vegetables to the wider community. Recipient agencies targeted lower socioeconomic and vulnerable groups, who are most at risk of low fruit and vegetable consumption, so increased consumption could enhance the health and well-being of the local community.

In terms of positive outcomes coming from a food rescue enterprise's activities, Lindberg *et al.* (2014) found that an Australian food rescue enterprise, SecondBite, generated a number of benefits within the community such as "providing healthy food", "empowering community agencies" and "reducing food waste". These beneficial outcomes were also observed in this New Zealand case study.

FoodShare's operations are creating significant social, nutritional and environmental value within the local community. It was surprising the majority of stakeholders failed to identify the environmental outcomes associated with their work and their relationship with FoodShare. One explanation for this is FoodShare's focus on nutrition and helping to combat food insecurity, which lends itself to compelling non-political narratives on human hardship and how it can be alleviated with improved food access. This philanthropic framing had widespread appeal with all stakeholder groups interviewed. If enthusiasm for this approach wanes or FoodShare wishes to attract a wider range of stakeholders, then they could also promote the environmental impacts associated with a reduction in food waste to highlight the full impact the organisation is having within the community. This approach could also help raise public awareness of the significant food waste problem, and help retailers monitor the effectiveness of their food waste reduction initiatives.

While other studies have looked at the quantitative value in terms of the amount of food rescued, the social and emotional value has not been reported. From the stakeholders' perspectives, food rescue appears to be a win-win situation; reducing the amount of food destined to landfill leads to less food being wasted, it helps the food insecure and provides these individuals with better nutrition. Many stakeholders stated they felt good about doing something worthwhile for the community, and collectively this initiative generated social capital.

An obvious way that food recovery enterprise staff might practicably use this information is as "evidence" of the worth of their activities. Many social enterprises and non-for-profit organisations working in the food rescue sector have difficulty obtaining long-term sustainable funding. Information on the social value they create, therefore, will likely be helpful in their communications with potential financial donors to attract additional funding for their operations, for example, to more convincingly demonstrate to the potential "donor" what their investment money is worth (Personal Communication, CEO of a food recovery enterprise, 2015).

FoodShare's focus on collecting and redistributing nutritious foods may help to improve the health of individuals relying on these food supplies. The information gained through this study showed that the social value created is largely dependent on organisations distributing the rescued food to those in need. While food banks are likely to benefit most from this intervention, other social agencies developed innovative food-based activities to address their clients' needs. Sharing stakeholder stories such as those represented in this paper may help to attract participation from a greater number and variety of recipient agencies.

Other social enterprises can use this study as a template to investigate the social value their organisation generates to help further their aims and ambitions. The apolitical nature of the case study organisation appears to have

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been successful in terms of getting commercial businesses, social agencies and local governmental agencies to work together. This case study therefore is a good example of how to get agencies with different agendas to work together and create social value through win-win relationships. This learning can be shared and replicated in other places and with other efforts that aim to create social capital within a community.

It is important to note stakeholders did not identify many negative outcomes. For example, while there was little mention of negative outcomes for the volunteers, Tarasuk and Eakin's (2005) observations of workers in food banks in Canada showed that the work of handling food donations could be really unpleasant, particularly when damaged or rotten foods were received. In a similar vein, there were no comments or critiques from the case study stakeholders about the nature and consequences of food rescue more generally, despite it being reported in the literature that even many food bank workers see food banks as only temporary and partial solutions to what are deeper structural problems such as low wages, job insecurity and social inequality (Lindenbaum, 2016). As Lindenbaum (2016, p. 382) explains, food bank volunteers in the USA "correctly understand that food banking lessens the disastrous effect of food insecurity without constituting an adequate solution". This lack of identification of negative social value outcomes is consistent with the literature that reports low identification of negative outcomes within Social Return on Investment analysis reports (Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 2012; Krlev *et al.*, 2013). This may be due to a lack of negative outcomes experienced by stakeholders within all organisations, or organisations failing to report negative outcomes as they fear that this will reflect on them and or their organisation unfavourably. For this reason, an ethnographic approach, along the lines of that taken by Tarasuk and Eakin (2005), may reveal additional insights that were not captured in the stakeholder interviews and volunteer survey. Future researchers using stakeholder interviews to explore the outcomes resulting from a food rescue enterprise's activities might also consider employing similar observational methods for data triangulation purposes.

## 5. Conclusion

This qualitative investigation explored the social value created by a perishable food rescue enterprise, FoodShare. Through stakeholder interviews and a survey, rich qualitative data were produced in terms of outcomes stakeholders experienced as a result of their relationships with FoodShare. All participating food and financial donors, recipient agencies as well as volunteers experienced a number of beneficial outcomes that far outweighed any negatives experienced. The main benefit reported across stakeholder groups was the positive feelings and emotions associated with being able to make a difference within their local community.

In summary, by focussing on the social value created by a food rescue social enterprise, this study has made a positive and progressive contribution to the literature. The study is intended to complement, not compete with, the dominant critiques of food rescue and food banking that other scholars have provided in terms of the adequacy of these enterprises to address the issues of food insecurity and food waste. Its main contribution is that it explores the social value food rescue enterprises can create for both their stakeholders and the wider community "in the meantime" (Cloke *et al.*, 2016) whilst longer term solutions to the problems of insecurity and waste are sought.

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