

Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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KEY INSIGHTS

Much has changed in New Zealand since the New Zealand Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Research³ undertaken by social researchers from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment provides insights into how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that means for their, and New Zealand's, continued well-being.

Urban Green Spaces

There is growing recognition of the importance nature has for human well-being:

...those morning walks were really significant for me. Rather than a fitness walk they were a nature experience walk, and so I just felt they helped me feel really grounded. I think what is needed is people really getting a sense of...how connected we are with [the environment] and how we are the environment, and the environment is us... (MWB76).

And I think a lot of people are also turning to nature as a remedy for health. Now gardens have been proven time and time again to lower blood pressure, relieve stress, ...[and] everything else you can possibly imagine (MWB10).

I just hope...people will get more, like, notice more about our connections with nature, and if you have a better connection with nature, you'll have a better well-being (MWB27).

The well-being benefits of connecting with nature were a common theme from our interviews, and the movement restrictions of lockdown highlighted the important role urban green spaces play in this:

I think people have recognised that healthy urban environments are essential,...that greenery has a vital role in human well-being (MWB10).

I would always walk down to [the] park, which is around the corner from my house, and it's a beautiful remnant bush area along the river..., and whenever I would go there, I just found a lot of peace there, and a lot of serenity...(MWB74).

I think we all realised how important our local parks are... (MWB4).

³ A background and methodology report is available from StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz

That increase of sense of place and that local knowledge has really strengthened the chance for people to connect with nature and their local area, it's really given people a more grounded feeling about where they are and what they can do for their own well-being (MWB89).

I guess we all spent more time in nature as a result of the lockdowns, even if it was just in our backyards or that we live a short walk from the bush so we're able to go out into that for a bit....I think there will be more gardeners as a result of this. I'm on some Facebook gardening pages and they've been flooded with people who have taken up gardening... (MWB13).

And every day the park, probably 3 o'clock onwards, was just full of people, all in their own little groups, keeping apart, but you could still chat, and in its own way it was quite nice. And we made sure to spend more time out, especially with the kids, outside and in nature, and exploring the gully that we have at the back of our section a bit more (MWB71).

Given heightened awareness of their benefits, participants advocated for more quality green spaces in urban environments:

I think if you have a house with lots of space, or a green area, I think you probably had a nicer time. I had a bit of space, but not heaps, and lots of green space available to me...,so that was really lucky, but I think if you were in a tiny flat in the middle of the suburbs, or city, that would be really tough....I'd love to see us saying we've got to make sure everyone has green space,...not just in COVID, but always (MWB79).

I think developing more quality urban parks, that really focus on biodiversity and nature. I think that would be massive, and massive for areas in lower socio-economic areas, because they don't have the same access necessarily. I think that that would be huge (MWB74).

But what I think really would be beneficial to more people...is if there is quality greenspace near everybody,...not just big open green fields, that's not the sort of park I mean. I mean like with trees and birds (MWB91).

Furthermore, participants hoped that this increased connection with local green spaces and awareness of the benefits nature provides to people would lead to a stronger environmental ethos in the population:

...for a lot of people over lockdown...their only out, literally, was to go outside and have a walk and kind of engage with nature on some level. So, you'd hope that maybe people who wouldn't have normally done that who have started doing that, might now have a little bit more awareness of their own impacts on the environment or products that they buy or what kind of government they're going to vote in (MWB57).

I hope that people have connected with nature and the environment and realise it's pretty amazing and we've got some really special places and flora and fauna in New Zealand that needs looking after,...that when we take [care of it] then we do better as well. I hope that perhaps it's put a bit more of a lens on that (MWB41).

...it'd be really good if all the other people who I saw out in nature, I've never seen the bush so crowded, will do something to preserve that nature as a result of spending more...time in it. I'd like to think that would happen. It'd be nice (MWB13).