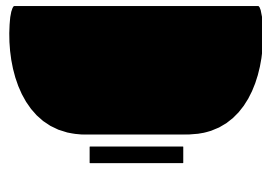


**ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2025**

**THE  
KITCHEN  
PROJECT**





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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BUILDING COMMUNITY WEALTH THROUGH FOOD: HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2024–2025.

Launched in 2018, Auckland Council's food business incubator, The Kitchen Project (TKP), empowers early-stage food and beverage entrepreneurs across Tāmaki Makaurau. The programme champions diversity, cultural identity, healthy food, and sustainability, all underpinned by a commitment to building community wealth.

### A Year of Expansion and Impact

In the last 12 months, TKP supported 20 new food ventures across Auckland, with cohorts delivered in both the central city and Pukekohe. Alumni were celebrated nationally, winning seven medals at the 2025 Outstanding Food Producer Awards, including the prestigious New Boutique Product Champion title, and catering signature events such as The Lewisham Awards.

One standout milestone was alumni Julie Vu opening her own restaurant, *Phở Yến*, continuing the legacy of her Vietnamese heritage offering diners a bold, flavourful experience. Her success story reflects the programme's long-term impact and the strength of our alumni network.

### Deeper Community Engagement

Place-based initiatives like *Kai Franklin* activated Franklin's food scene through celebratory farm to table dinners on long-tables, vibrant street-style food stalls and roaming feast experiences.

Our Whare Kai store, open since October 2023, rescued and redistributed more than 25,000kg of produce, while our Cookie Box initiative brought joy to community wellbeing centres across Auckland. TKP entrepreneurs also featured at food markets and festivals throughout the city, key spaces for testing, building confidence, and growing loyal audiences.

### Laying Foundations for the Future

This year also saw early steps towards deepening our support for alumni and forging closer ties with our Learning Quarter community. As we look to scale our model, support food entrepreneurs, and deepen partnerships, The Kitchen Project remains committed to community wealth building. We will continue to deliver community-led food experiences and systems that transform the way Auckland grows, celebrates, and shares kai.

7	Years operating The Kitchen Project
20	Cohorts completed TKP programme
90+	Businesses have gone through our Programme
23%	Māori / Pacific food businesses
70%	Indigenous or migrant food businesses
5	Businesses in their own premises
11	Markets across the motu
7	Food award medals including boutique champion in 2025
25,814 <sup>Kgs</sup>	Rescued & redistributed food via the Whare Kai Pop-up Store
18	Student cooking classes held for University of Auckland
520	Students participated in cooking classes at University of Auckland
2	Commercial kitchen spaces
10	Businesses utilising our commercial kitchens
15	Businesses using their own kitchens
3	Kai Franklin place-based events in Pukekohe
3	Businesses catering The 2025 Lewisham Awards
5	Alumni showcased at 2024 Auckland Food Show
4	Businesses showed at World of Culture

# 2. OUR PURPOSE IN ACTION

## THE KITCHEN PROJECT HAS DEEPEDED ITS IMPACT, STRENGTHENED CITYWIDE PARTNERSHIPS, AND IS LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A BOLD NEW VISION.

### Nurturing Enterprise. Building Equity. Transforming Food Systems.

The Kitchen Project was founded with a bold goal: to make Auckland's food system more inclusive, more sustainable, and more reflective of the people who call this city home.

In 2025, our kaupapa continues to evolve, shaped by the needs of our communities, the challenges facing emerging food and beverage entrepreneurs, and the opportunities that food presents to build something better.

### A Year of Purpose-Driven Growth

This year's report reflects a purpose-driven phase for TKP. We've grown in capability, reach, and impact, delivering our 20-week training programmes in both the city centre and Pukekohe supporting more than 90 food and beverage emerging entrepreneurs.

We've launched new partnerships, continued to grow existing initiatives, and expanded our presence across Auckland's dynamic food landscape.

From rescuing produce through Perfectly Imperfect and making available through the Whare Kai Store to activating community spaces through Kai Franklin, and building fresh collaborations with AUT and the University of Auckland, every action this year was guided by the same mission: to build community wealth through food.

We've also continued to support alumni beyond graduation, through catering and event activations, store and hospitality opportunities, and collaborative product bundles.

Where the journey for a startup food entrepreneur can be daunting—especially without capital, networks or a clear path forward, The Kitchen Project remains a steady guide and champion, helping to turn bold ideas into real, thriving businesses.

### Diagnosing the Systemic Challenges

Many aspiring food entrepreneurs face significant barriers. Through insights from our alumni and wider industry partners, we know these challenges span access to suitable premises, staffing and suppliers, navigating logistics and manufacturing, limited capital and business confidence, and restricted pathways into marketing and retail opportunities.

These challenges include:

- Inequitable systems that favour large, well-resourced businesses and overlook grassroots enterprise, including the high cost of scaling production, staffing, and leasing commercial premises.
- Complex regulations, high compliance costs, and licensing barriers that are difficult to navigate without expert support.
- Limited access to startup capital, funding, commercial kitchen space, reliable distribution channels, and opportunities for marketing and retail placement.
- A lack of culturally aligned food business support that reflects the realities of Māori, Pacific, migrant, and women entrepreneurs.
- The emotional toll of juggling personal commitments, financial insecurity, and professional uncertainty.
- Local food environments that often do not reflect the needs or tastes of the communities they serve.
- Sustainability challenges, both environmental and social, that are frequently overlooked or deprioritised in traditional business models.

The result? A food landscape that too often excludes the very people who hold the skills, stories, and flavours that make Auckland vibrant.

Our response? We are actively exploring new ways that address these challenges from the ground up, supporting aspiring food entrepreneurs through relational guidance, hands-on learning, and place-based opportunities. By centring culture, identity and community, we aim to demonstrate how food business can be a catalyst for inclusion, wellbeing and local wealth.

**“I believe the truest form of community wealth building is making sure our communities not only eat well but any wealth generated from feeding the community stays in the community it feeds.”**

Connie Clarkson, Manager, The Kitchen Project

These efforts also align with Auckland Council's broader sustainability priorities, including zero waste, social equity and building resilient, low-carbon local economies.

### A Launchpad for Aotearoa's Food Future

Auckland plays a pivotal role in shaping the food story of Aotearoa. As the country's largest urban population and commercial hub, it often serves as the testing ground and launchpad for new food concepts that go on to scale nationally and, in some cases, internationally.

For emerging food entrepreneurs, success in Auckland can open doors to broader distribution, brand recognition and export potential. Yet the current system too often limits that opportunity to those with the capital, connections, business experience and brand polish to navigate its complexity.

That's where initiatives like The Kitchen Project come in, supporting early-stage entrepreneurs to enter the market confidently, backed by industry mentorship, business training, and storytelling support that positions them for long-term growth.

Globally, cities like Melbourne, London, and Copenhagen have shown what's possible when cities invest in grassroots food entrepreneurship.

In Melbourne, local councils have fostered thriving multicultural food precincts, combining start-up incubation with strong ties to tourism, placemaking and hospitality. In London, borough-level food policies support small producers, community

markets and circular food initiatives that feed into the city's broader identity as a food capital. Copenhagen, meanwhile, has used gastronomy as a cultural and economic driver, attracting global attention through world-leading restaurants and a strong farm-to-table ethos.

At a national level, Denmark's Food Nation is a standout example. This public-private partnership showcases Danish food excellence through a central visitor centre and global-facing strategy. It is a gateway that connects agrifood innovation, sustainability, and export readiness into one coherent national brand. For Aotearoa, the potential to create something similar, rooted in Indigenous values, local produce and food sovereignty, is real and growing.



Auckland could lead that journey by establishing a physical hub that connects food innovation, food tourism, enterprise, culture and community – a destination for industry, visitors and entrepreneurs seeking insight into New Zealand's food producers.

This hub could serve as both a platform for our food story and a catalyst for a national food innovation and growth strategy. It would elevate local ingenuity to global audiences and create a sustainable pathway for small food brands to scale.

The Kitchen Project, through a wider lens, is exploring how it can play a critical role in helping Aotearoa define and grow its national food identity — one that reflects who we are, where we come from, and where we're headed as a nation of producers, growers and makers.



## 3. OUR COHORTS

### CELEBRATING THE ENTREPRENEURS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF FOOD IN AUCKLAND.

#### A Table Full of Flavour

The Kitchen Project delivered four cohorts across Tāmaki Makaurau in the past 12 months. We supported aspiring food entrepreneurs from Central Auckland to Pukekohe. These cohorts reflect the strength of our kaupapa, local talent building businesses grounded in identity, culture, and care for community.

This year's founders brought a wide mix of flavours and stories to the table, each reflecting their own heritage and vision to the local food scene. From Māori and Pasifika food traditions to Hong Kong-style dumplings, Niuean dishes, Laotian comfort food, Singaporean snacks and Kiwi frozen treats, their work reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. Together, they show how vibrant the future of food in the region can be.

#### Confidence, Connection and Community

For many, TKP offered more than business skills. It gave them a sense of belonging, support, and confidence to grow. As Rose Hamlin, founder of Angel Treatz, an Ōtara-based dessert business, and graduate of Pukekohe Cohort 18, shares:

**“I really enjoyed The Kitchen Project, it was the best decision I could ever make for my business. I had the best support team along with the best guidance. I would highly recommend it to anyone struggling or just needing that push in the right direction to further your business.”**

Rose Hamlin, Angel Treatz

#### Collaboration Beyond the Programme

What's emerging now is not only strong individual businesses, but a growing culture of collaboration. TKP alumni are increasingly joining forces to blend skills, products and energy, co-creating pop-ups, new flavours and cross-cultural menus that are more than the sum of their parts. From joint catering events to ingredient sharing and seasonal bundles, relationships and mutual support between entrepreneurs continue well beyond training.

Take Sips and Spuds, run by Tyson and Sini Ropeti, who recently teamed up with K-Bone Kai founders Trina and Ralph Pereira to cater for the Te Atatū Rugby Club. Together, they created a slow-cooked lamb spud that quickly became a crowd favourite. Another flavour-filled partnership came from Ginger's Pantry and Comfort Bowl, who combined Korean kimchi with handmade Hong Kong-style wontons. Over in Franklin, Madd Pies founder Emily Maddren used The Smoke Shed's silver medal BBQ sauce in one of her signature handmade pies. These collaborations are tasty examples of what happens when TKP entrepreneurs know and trust each other's food. They show how alumni are supporting one another, creating new flavour combinations and building strong foundations for the future of food.

#### Meet the 2024–2025 Entrepreneurs

##### Central Cohort 17

Javana Hone – *Mama Jae's*  
Sini and Tyson Ropeti – *Sips & Spuds*  
Lila Leolahi – *Goodness Gracious*  
Maisan Leung – *Comfort Bowl*  
Catherine Liotapumanaia – *Basically Buns*

##### Pukekohe Cohort 18

Emily Maddren – *Madd Pie's*  
Jayde Lane – *Smoke Shed*  
Rose Hamlin – *Angel Treatz*

##### Central Cohort 19

Yuval Krauze – *The Original Zesty Xpress*  
Francheska Segedin – *Bone Broths & Ferments*  
Sam Tibbutt – *The Mean Feed - Beef Jerky*  
Nor and Rizal Latip – *Jom Makan*  
Analiza Badilles – *Umamibee*  
Boonlang Laphakhis – *Dumplings*

##### Central Cohort 20

TJ Tuta'i – *Vivi's Frozen Treats*  
Thom Gabites – *Saint Thoms*  
Anh Do – *Yogi Bakery*  
Andrea De la vega – *Dandelion Kitchen*  
Bradley and Miriam Bull – *Focca*  
Natasha Buchalter – *Grow-nola*





## 4. TKP ALUMNI: JULIE VU

### OWNER OF PHỞ YẾN, VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT.

#### A Family Recipe, a Full House, and a Dream Realised

When Julie Vu first joined The Kitchen Project in 2023, she brought with her a quiet confidence and a dream that had simmered for more than a decade. That dream became reality with the opening of Phở Yến in April 2025, a cosy Vietnamese eatery on Auckland's Dominion Road that has quickly become one of the city's most talked-about spots.

**“This little restaurant has been a dream in the making for 10 years. Built on 35 years of our mum's delicious phở and the love she poured into every bowl. Now, we're bringing those same family recipes to life right here in Auckland.”**

— Julie Vu, Vietnamese food entrepreneur



Through the TKP programme, she gained the business skills, food safety certification and mentorship needed to turn her dream into a viable venture. With support from TKP and encouragement from a community that believed in her, Julie — alongside her partner Bodi — transformed her kitchen knowhow into a brand with real potential. Julie grew up watching her mother prepare deeply nourishing phở in their family kitchen, a recipe perfected over generations.

The broth, simmered slowly for more than 18 hours, is the heart of every bowl. Today, those same rich, aromatic bowls are drawing long queues and five-star reviews, with regular sell-outs and rave responses from diners.



One review reads, “Hands down the best Vietnamese phở I've had in Auckland. The rich aroma of the slow-cooked broth hits you even before you walk in — a clear sign of something special.”

Another fan raved, “They do one thing, and they do it perfectly: PHO! My oxtail phở was next-level — the umami is out of this world. This might just be the best phở in Auckland.”

Julie's journey from idea to bricks-and-mortar is a testament to what happens when passion meets preparation. From testing her phở at local markets to refining every detail through The Kitchen Project, she built a loyal following one bowl at a time. Today, Phở Yến reflects everything TKP stands for, celebrating culture, creating pathways to ownership, and building community through food. With a permanent home on 617 Dominion Road and nights that sell out, Julie's story proves that with the right support, hard work, and heart, dreams can be realised.





## 5. RISING FOOD STARS

### TKP ALUMNI RECOGNISED AT THE 2025 OUTSTANDING NZ FOOD PRODUCER AWARDS.

#### Celebrating alumni success on the national stage

Four talented alumni of The Kitchen Project: *The Smoke Shed*, *Long Dog Sauce Co*, *Little Pips*, and *Banu's Spices*, shone brightly at the 2025 Outstanding NZ Food Producer Awards.

Together they took home seven medals, including four golds, two silvers, and the prestigious New Boutique Product Champion title. With more than 400 entries from across Aotearoa, earning this level of recognition is no small achievement. It's a testament to the passion, skill, and creativity these entrepreneurs bring to every jar, bottle, and bite. Their success is a reminder of what's possible when great food ideas are backed by community, confidence, and craft.

#### The Smoke Shed

##### **New Boutique Product Champion and Gold Medal for Bunney's Worcester Sauce, and Silver Medal for BBQ Sauce**

Jayde and Andrew Lane didn't just collect a silver and a gold, they were crowned New Boutique Product Champions for their Bunney's Worcester Sauce, a beautifully balanced heritage recipe with roots in Wales and a home in rural Pukekawa. Crafted using traditional methods and Kiwi ingredients, The Smoke Shed's small batch sauces are all about bold flavour and family connection. This recipe in particular has been passed down through generations and now proudly wears a champion medal.

#### Long Dog Sauce Co

##### **Gold Medal for Corndog Sauce**

Tim Parsons has been steadily building a name with his fermented hot sauces, and now the judges agree. His Corndog Sauce, a sweet and tangy blend of fermented chillies, corn, pineapple and lemon, took home a Gold Medal. Long Dog's vinegar-free, naturally preserved sauces are making

waves with flavour lovers who want heat with depth and complexity.

#### Little Pips Soda Syrups

##### **Gold Medal for Black Doris Plum Syrup**

Pip Malpas has bottled nostalgia with her range of handcrafted soda syrups, and her Black Doris Plum Syrup has earned a Gold Medal. What began as a family recipe shared with friends has grown into a beautiful business built on fresh New Zealand fruit and a whole lot of love. Each bottle is hand poured and made in small batches, perfect for summer drinks, baking or thoughtful gifting.

#### Banu's Spices

##### **Gold Medal for Mango Chicken Sauce and Silver Medal for Goan Fish Curry Sauce**

Adding extra spice to the medal count, husband and wife duo Banu and Sidarth brought home two medals for their vibrant, handcrafted sauces. Their Mango Chicken Sauce is a sweet and savoury triumph with wide appeal. Judges praised its "beautiful colour, rich appearance and good spicing," calling it "delicious" with a thick, satisfying texture.

Their Goan Fish Curry delivers the heat and complexity of South India to Kiwi kitchens. Judges admired its "beautiful rich colour, thick and spicy consistency," with "great balance" and "nicely judged vinegar and sugar levels." Bold, aromatic and full of character — a true standout.

These award-winning products are more than delicious. They represent the heart, heritage, and hard work behind every small food business in our community.

For The Kitchen Project, it's a proud reminder of what's possible when local talent is supported to thrive. We celebrate these alumni not just for their medals, but for the mana they bring to the table: bold, creative, and uniquely Aotearoa.

# 6. FLAVOURING LOCAL FOOD MARKETS

## FOOD MARKETS POWER THE RISE OF OUR ENTREPRENEURS.

### Presence Across Tāmaki Makaurau

Every weekend across Tāmaki Makaurau, something delicious is on the go. The Kitchen Project entrepreneurs are out in force, whether it is a neighbourhood farmers market or a special community event, our alumni are showing up, serving kai with culture, purpose and pride, and selling out. At The Shed Collective in Oratia alone, four TKP businesses trade most Saturdays. Elsewhere, you will find graduates working side-by-side with other local artisans at Grey Lynn Farmers Market, and beyond. On any given weekend, our entrepreneurs are active in neighbourhood markets all over the city, building customer bases, testing new products and gaining confidence one serving at a time.

### Why Markets Matter

Food markets have long been one of the most accessible and powerful springboards for our food businesses. They offer what formal retail often cannot: direct, face-to-face connection with customers, instant feedback and real-time validation of product, pricing and packaging. For our entrepreneurs, markets provide an opportunity to refine their offer in a low-risk environment, share their culture and business journey, and build a loyal following in their own communities. Markets are more than a sales channel. They are not only a training ground and a launchpad, for some they are a permanent home for their business and income.

### Community Roots, Real Growth

From Israeli street food to Samoan spuds and Hong Kong dumplings, the stalls led by TKP graduates are packed with authentic, grounded flavours that reflect who our entrepreneurs are and where they come from. Markets also provide a practical, culturally inclusive pathway to business ownership, one that does not require a large budget to get started. For many, the market is just the first step. In as little as one to two years, we have seen entrepreneurs make the leap from stall

to retail space, like Bertrand Jang who opened cakery 'Sweet & Me' on Church Street, Onehunga and Phở Yến opened by Julie Vu on Dominion Road. Others, like Pip Malpas, have scaled their businesses into retail supply, with Little Pips Soda Syrups now stocked in Farro. What begins with a single table and a good idea can evolve into a fully fledged business, with markets serving not as a temporary fix but as a credible, long-term pathway for food entrepreneurs to thrive.

### A Mission-Aligned Platform

For The Kitchen Project, markets are a powerful delivery point for our wider kaupapa. They support Māori, Pacific, migrant, and women entrepreneurs. They promote circular, low-waste, sustainable food practices. They celebrate cultural expression as both income and identity, and they help build community wealth at street level in neighbourhoods, creating meaningful jobs and income pathways.

**“It is not just about sales. It is about visibility, belonging and momentum. Food markets give our entrepreneurs a way to meet their customers, share their story and build loyalty in a way that feels human. You can try, learn and grow. And you do not need a big budget to begin.”**

*Connie Clarkson, Manager, The Kitchen Project*

### More Than Just a Market Stall

Markets are not a silver bullet. But they are a powerful and practical step for many food founders. They help businesses take root, build resilience, and grow in a way that strengthens communities from the inside out.

So next time you visit your local market, keep an eye out for one of our graduates in a The Kitchen Project apron or wearing a TKP button badge. What you are tasting is more than just great food, it is someone's story, their ambition and a whole lot of heart.



THE  
**KITCHEN  
PROJECT**

**CHEN  
PROJECT**

**Auck  
Co**  
Te Kaunihera o Tairā

SMOKED  
MEAT!  
Brioche Sliders  
\*BRISKET  
\*Pulled Pork

LOS ANGELES

THE  
**KITCHEN  
PROJECT**

THE  
**KITCHEN  
PROJECT**

THE  
**KITCHEN  
PROJECT**

# 7. CATERING THE LEWISHAM AWARDS

## OUR ALUMNI SHINE AT AUCKLAND'S BIGGEST HOSPITALITY CELEBRATION.

### A Night to Remember

The 23rd Lewisham Awards lit up the Viaduct Events Centre on Sunday, 2 June 2025, drawing hundreds of chefs, suppliers, and hospitality leaders from across Tāmaki Makaurau. Often dubbed the 'Oscars' of the industry, the event is a high point in Auckland's culinary calendar, celebrating the people and businesses shaping the future of food. With music, food trucks, cocktails and celebration, the energy was high and the after-party buzz was electric. Right at the heart of it all were three food ventures born and nurtured through The Kitchen Project: **K-Bone Kai**, **Comfort Bowl**, and **The Cinnamon God**.

Together, they served up not just delicious food, but a powerful reminder of what early-stage entrepreneurs can achieve when they are supported, visible and connected. Each of these ventures brings something bold and unique to the table and shows how far a small food business can go with the right support, community, and momentum.

This marks the third time The Kitchen Project has been invited to cater The Lewisham Awards, a sign of growing recognition for the programme's impact on the local food ecosystem and the calibre of businesses it helps bring to life.

### Low, Slow and Full of Soul

K-Bone Kai is the brainchild of Trina and Ralph Pereira, a West Auckland couple bringing their love of low-and-slow barbecue to the table with a bold Island twist. Both born and raised in Samoa, Trina and Ralph now live in Te Atatū Peninsula with their two sons and Trina's mother, who helps care for the kids while they pursue their food dreams. Their food story started with weekend camping trips, where their slow-smoked meats quickly became popular with fellow campers drawn in by the scent. That interest turned into paid requests, and eventually the seed of a business idea: Island-style smoked meat platters with homemade sides, starters and baked goods designed to be shared.

While Trina comes from a long line of home bakers, Ralph trained in food tech back in Samoa and brings a deep, intuitive understanding of flavours and cooking. Together, they joined The Kitchen Project to gain formal knowledge about food safety, pricing, marketing and business structure.

With help from The Kitchen Project, the couple learned everything from costings and compliance to menu development and social media, turning their smoky passion into a growing business. Their Lewisham debut was both a celebration and a turning point. As Trina shares:

**“We started out just cooking for fun. But people kept asking for more — so we thought, why not? The Kitchen Project gave us the tools to take it seriously. The Lewisham Awards was our first big industry event, and it made us feel like we belonged.”**

They served brisket and pulled pork sliders on brioche buns, smoky, rich and cooked with care. “This experience was invaluable,” says Trina. “It gave us confidence and motivation, and we're grateful for the friendships we've made along the way.”

Currently offering catering through word-of-mouth and church networks, K-Bone Kai is also developing an online ordering system. Their long-term vision? A relaxed backyard-style eatery where friends and whānau can gather for a shared barbecue feast.

### From Market Stall to Centre Stage

At the heart of Comfort Bowl is Maisan Leung, who has loved cooking for as long as she can remember. Growing up in Hong Kong, food wasn't just fuel, it was a shared obsession and cultural language. One of her lifelong favourites has been a rich, flavourful wonton soup, but when she moved to New Zealand, she found that most versions were based on Northern Chinese styles, not the warm, delicate seafood-based broths of her



childhood. Determined to recreate the taste she missed, Maisan and her husband (a trained chef) spent four months refining their own version: a slow-cooked broth made with dried flounder, fried shrimp and a local dried parma-style ham, paired with their own handmade wontons and delicate pastry. The result? A dish that evoked memory, comfort and culture in every spoonful.

After completing The Kitchen Project, the couple launched Comfort Bowl, taking their unique offering to food markets around Auckland. They've been met with enthusiasm not just from fellow Hong Kongers missing home, but from New Zealanders curious and excited to try something new. "We love bringing our food to places where migrant flavours aren't common," Maisan says. "It's not just about the soup, it's about connection."

Their appearance at The Lewisham Awards was a proud full-circle moment, and a clear signal that small food businesses rooted in authenticity can belong at the highest levels of the industry. As Maisan shares: "We were incredibly honoured to be catering the 2025 Lewisham Awards – the ultimate celebration of Auckland's hospitality industry." On the night, the couple served steaming bowls of their signature Hong Kong-style wontons, hand-folded parcels filled with flavour and love, to a lively crowd of industry professionals.

**"As a graduate of The Kitchen Project by Auckland Council, this moment is more than a milestone, it's proof that TKP empowers. It opens doors, builds bridges, and offers unmatched opportunities for small food businesses like ours to thrive."**

As the only Hong Kong food business catering the event, the moment held cultural significance too. "We're also proud to be the only Hong Kong people feeding the crowd this year. Bringing the taste of authentic Hong Kong comfort food to an event that honours those who have spent their lives feeding us." Comfort Bowl has quickly become a standout at Auckland's food markets and pop-ups. The Lewisham Awards marked a new chapter for the couple, confirming their place in the wider hospitality landscape.

### **Handmade Sweetness, Market to Menu**

If you've spent time at Auckland's night markets, you may already know The Cinnamon God. Founded in 2021 by best friends Rachel Campion and Niamh O'Dwyer, this home bakery specialises in pillowy, handmade Irish-style cinnamon buns that look like art and taste like home, topped with imaginative flavours like Nutella, Biscoff, Apple Crumble, Snickers, Caramel Pecan and only on Valentine's Day White Chocolate Raspberry Ripple.

**“We’ve spent years developing our recipes and growing our following at markets and events,” shares Rachel. “To be part of The Lewisham Awards was such a proud moment — not just for us, but for everyone who’s supported us along the way.”**

Known for their creative flair and loyal fanbase, The Cinnamon God’s growing success is proof that small-batch, soul-filled baking has a place on even the biggest stages.

Their signature “Mix and Match” box, lets customers pick their favourites, creating a shareable, made-to-order treat perfect for families and weekend indulgence.

Operating from their base in Mount Wellington, the pair have built a loyal customer base both online and in person, known for their warm service and serious attention to quality.

At The Lewisham Awards, Rachel and Niamh served up tray after tray of their freshly baked rolls, sharing a taste of comfort food that sparked countless smiles and return visits.

Their success is a blend of classic technique, modern flair and community spirit, all baked into each swirl and drizzle.

## Visibility, Confidence and Belonging

For all three TKP alumni, The Lewisham Awards offered more than catering exposure. It was a rare chance to build visibility, make connections, and stand shoulder to shoulder with industry leaders, networking with chefs, venue owners, decision-makers, fellow food creators and media in a fun, high-energy setting.

It reinforced a core belief at The Kitchen Project: inclusion means being seen, heard and celebrated where influence happens. A testament to the programme’s power not just to grow skills, but to open doors and reshape who is visible and valued in the industry. As TKP Manager Connie Clarkson puts it:

**“It’s amazing to see our alumni businesses not just holding their own, but truly shining at events like this. We want them to feel seen, to be heard, and to know they belong, right in the heart of Auckland hospitality.”**

Whether offering sweet, smoky or savoury, each of these food businesses stood tall, proud and prepared on one of the biggest nights in Auckland hospitality. Their stories speak to what’s possible when culture, passion and community are backed by opportunity and support.





Feeling left out or experiencing food  
insecurity? Come shop with us!  
Embrace imperfection, find good, tasty  
food, and nourish our community.  
Let's build a stronger future together.

## 8. IMPACT OF THE WHARE KAI STORE

### RESCUE. REIMAGINE. REDISTRIBUTE. TWELVE MONTHS OF TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD WASTE WITH THE KITCHEN PROJECT AND PERFECTLY IMPERFECT.

#### Tackling Food Waste Through Local Action

Food waste is a global issue, but solutions often begin at the local level. In October 2023, The Kitchen Project partnered with Wendy Zhou's social enterprise Perfectly Imperfect to bring rescued produce into the heart of Auckland.

Based at The Kitchen Project's Whare Kai HQ in Albert Park, the Perfectly Imperfect food store opened five afternoons a week. It offered affordable fruit and vegetables that would have otherwise gone to waste, providing access to fresh food for students, locals and city workers.

#### A Store With a Purpose

This was more than a typical food rescue initiative. It was founded on a powerful idea: to redistribute rescued food with dignity and create opportunities for learning, enterprise and connection. Designed to look and feel like a neighbourhood grocer, the store was run by volunteers who offered a friendly face to every visitor.

By December 2024, the store had rescued and redistributed 25,814 kilograms of produce. This impact was made possible by 60 dedicated community volunteers, who welcomed more than 1,600 visitors in search of healthy, low-cost options.

#### From Landfill to Learning

This initiative did more than reduce waste. It sparked conversations, encouraged new habits and created learning moments. Rescued produce featured in University of Auckland cooking classes, The Kitchen Project's Soup Thursdays, and product ranges developed by several alumni.

Pip Malpas of Little Pips Soda Syrups uses blemished fruit in her syrups. Fermentation entrepreneur Francheska Berry incorporates imperfect vegetables into her small-batch products. These stories highlight how small food

businesses are leading a shift in how sustainable food production is defined. For many, Whare Kai made it possible to access affordable ingredients and experiment with low-waste approaches.

#### Delivering on a Zero Waste Future

The initiative also supports Auckland Council's climate and sustainability goals. With a commitment to zero waste by 2040, the Council promotes partnerships that lower landfill waste, reduce emissions and build equity. As a Council-led programme, The Kitchen Project is proud to help deliver this vision through everyday action.

**“Rescuing food is not just about waste reduction. It is also about making sure good food reaches the people who need it and showing how rescued ingredients can still inspire amazing meals.”**

Connie Clarkson, Manager, The Kitchen Project

#### More Than a Storefront

Whare Kai became more than a place to access food, it grew into a space for learning, partnership, and exchange. Whare Kai was spearheaded by The Kitchen Project and inspired by the research of University of Auckland PhD student Dr Anthonia Uzoigwe which found students were often facing food challenges with three out of every four students skipping fruit and vegetables due to lack of access and pressures of the cost of living.

#### Students Get Cooking

Throughout 2024, The Kitchen Project teamed up with the University of Auckland to run a series of hands-on cooking classes aimed at one delicious goal: helping students learn how to cook with what they have. Each class started with a food box and ended with full bellies, new skills, and plenty of good vibes. Using Whare Kai's Perfectly Imperfect produce boxes, more than 520 students learned how to prepare simple, affordable meals. The sessions focused on building confidence in the



kitchen, showing that cooking from scratch doesn't require expensive ingredients or formal training, just a bit of curiosity and the right support.

The fruit and vegetable boxes came straight from the Whare Kai pop-up store, located just a short walk from campus. Students learned to make quick stir-fries, dumplings and other everyday meals, while picking up knife skills and storage tips. The University of Auckland funded four produce boxes per class and encouraged students to keep the extra ingredients to experiment with. The sessions were relaxed, joyful, and highly practical reinforcing the idea that healthy, seasonal food can be accessible to all.

For The Kitchen Project, the collaboration also demonstrated the value of working alongside like-minded partners in the Learning Quarter such as the University of Auckland and Perfectly Imperfect to support food learning across different parts of the community.



### From Tasting Table to Sellout Success

The partnership also opened doors for TKP entrepreneurs. During a Cohort 20 tasting session, University of Auckland staff met Natasha Buchalter, an 18-year-old gap year student developing high-protein granola she wished existed.

Impressed not only by Natasha's granola but also by her clarity of vision and entrepreneurial spark, they invited her to take part in the University's on-campus Market Day in April. Held in the Quad with music, giveaways and crowds of students, Natasha's stall was a hit. She sold out of her

granola by the end of the day. The buzz from the market gave her the momentum to finalise her branding and prepare for her first official launch, packaging, presence, and all. It's a standout example of what can happen when a good idea meets the right platform and community.



### Shared Outcomes, Stronger Communities

These collaborations show what is possible when values align and people work together. For the University, it meant connecting students with practical life skills and supporting circular food systems. For TKP, it meant seeing the kaupapa of Whare Kai come to life in new spaces, reaching students, strengthening community ties, and offering a platform for emerging entrepreneurs to thrive. As awareness of food waste grows, Whare Kai continues to be a powerful model, bridging climate action, food education, enterprise, and access in one place.

The Whare Kai Pop-up Store initiative also aligns with Auckland Council's food priorities: championing sustainable food production, reducing waste, and promoting local, seasonal, and low-carbon food.

### What's Next

The Kitchen Project will continue to grow this work. Plans include expanding food education initiatives, forming new collaborations, and supporting more entrepreneurs to access surplus produce. Our focus is also on building systems that nourish people, reduce waste, and strengthen our communities from the ground up.

# 9. COMMUNITY WELLBEING

## THE KITCHEN PROJECT COOKIE BOXES: A TREAT FOR COMMUNITY SPACES

### A delicious, do-it-yourself activity that's baking up smiles across Tāmaki Makaurau

In February 2025, The Kitchen Project launched a heartwarming initiative that's brought colour, creativity, and calm to community spaces across Auckland: The Kitchen Project Cookie Box. Designed as a simple, ready-to-go activity, each box contains everything needed to run a joyful DIY "ice-your-own-cookie" station, perfect for libraries, community centres, and team gatherings.

### Made with Care, Shared with Community

Each kit includes either 50 or 100 beautifully baked shortbread cookies, pre-filled piping bags of colourful icing, disposable gloves, serviettes, wipes, and an easy-to-clean tablecloth. They're practical, fun, and made with care. The cookies themselves are baked and packed by TKP's Core Programme Coordinator, Hayden Stewart, adding another layer of purpose and community connection to the experience.



With just a snip of the icing bag and a sprinkle of imagination, participants of all ages have created edible masterpieces, some shared, some savoured, and all enjoyed.

### 1,000 Cookies and Counting

In just the first four months of rollout, more than 1000 cookies were distributed between February and May 2025. From East Auckland libraries to South Auckland community spaces in the west, the cookie kits have offered an easy, low-pressure way to gather people, spark conversation, and bring joy to the moment.

TKP's partners in Community Wellbeing have praised the activity as a refreshing, creative and sensory-rich experience that supports mental wellbeing while encouraging connection. Whether it's a parent decorating cookies with their child, or an adult rediscovering the fun of food, the Cookie Box has proven to be popular.

### A New Model for Micro-Impact

The Cookie Box is also a prime example of TKP's commitment to creating accessible, scalable solutions that use food to build community wealth, cultural connection, and wellbeing. While small in scale, the initiative embodies what we believe: that food is not just about what's on the plate, it's about the experience around it. This initiative also gave our alumni a chance to give back and contribute their skills in a meaningful way. The shortbread cookies were cut, baked and bagged in-house by Hayden and the project became a beautiful expression of food enterprise and community spirit coming together.

### What's Next for the Cookie Box?

As demand grows and more Community Wellbeing request the kits, The Kitchen Project is exploring new ways to scale the initiative. By building a simple, replicable model that offers immediate impact, the Cookie Box is becoming a beloved feature of TKP's broader community engagement strategy. It's a humble idea with a big heart, and a powerful reminder that food, at its best, is about more than nourishment. It's about joy, generosity, and the connections we create when we come together. One cookie at a time.





# 10. KAI FRANKLIN

## A CELEBRATION OF LOCAL FLAVOUR, PLACE-MAKING, AND CONNECTION.

### Introducing Kai Franklin

Kai Franklin is a place-based initiative that celebrates Franklin's unique identity as the food bowl of Aotearoa. Through a series of curated events, it connects food entrepreneurs to the region's proud agricultural heritage while showcasing the talent of the local food scene. With the support of Eke Panuku Development Auckland, the Pukekohe Business Association, The Franklin Local Board, and Pukekohe High School, The Kitchen Project delivered three signature ticketed events that brought this vision to life.

At its heart, Kai Franklin is about connection, to place, to people, and to the possibilities that food can unlock. Each event brought together local producers, eateries, students and residents to share kai, stories, and regional pride. From long-table dinners to roaming feasts and lively food halls, the series created space for collaboration, creativity, and meaningful engagement across the Franklin community.



This initiative marked a significant step in extending our presence into South Auckland, beginning with Kai Franklin Chef's Table.

### Kai Franklin Chef's Table:

#### A Community Showcase of Regional Talent

Held at 1 Roulston Street in the heart of Pukekohe, the Kai Franklin Chef's Table brought together local chefs, growers, producers and 100 guests for a ticketed long-table dinner. The event aimed to reimagine an under-utilised venue as a destination for community celebration, hospitality training, and local storytelling.

The four-course farm-to-table menu featured dishes from some of Pukekohe's most loved eateries, each highlighting produce from regional suppliers including The Fresh Grower, Curious Croppers, Clevedon Buffalo, and Wild Fermentary.

Chef Ben Bayly, known for his TVNZ series *NZ Food Story*, joined the event for a live Q&A, helping spotlight the chefs and deepen guests' appreciation of the ingredients and inspiration behind each dish.

The event sold out in four days and was described by a guest as "exactly what this town needed." Mark Woodward, owner of Blue Ox Babe and one of the participating chefs, called it "a fantastic platform to showcase the best of what Franklin and Pukekohe have to offer" and praised the strong collaboration between local restaurants.

It also created hands-on training opportunities for 18 students from Pukekohe High School, who participated in a hospitality workshop and supported service on the night. The school's jazz band, accompanied by professional musicians, elevated the evening's atmosphere with live music.

Media coverage was positive and wide-reaching, with appearances on TVNZ's *Breakfast* and multiple articles in *Rural Living*, *OurAuckland*, *1News* and *Franklin County News*.

Most importantly, it helped establish The Kitchen Project's identity in the region and paved the way for what came next.

## Kai Franklin Eat Street: A Market Hall Comes to Life

Building on the success of Chef's Table, Eat Street was the next exciting instalment in our culinary series.

In September, The Kitchen Project returned to 1 Roulston Street with a new event that transformed the space into a vibrant indoor food street, celebrating local hospitality talent with a walk-through, flavour-packed dining experience.



Four local eateries served small plates from pop-up stalls, creating a roaming food festival feel. Guests enjoyed a global menu featuring Vietnamese bites from Terri Yummies, Indian flavours from Ginger, Turkish favourites from Paasha, and handmade dumplings from Pukekohe High School's student-run kitchen. Dessert came courtesy of award-winning Italian gelato by Sparrow & Sweet. Eat Street combined food, music and community spirit across two sold-out sessions. Each vendor offered something unique. Guests also sampled beverages from local brewers John Hill Estate and Manaia Craft Brewers. The layout encouraged movement, mingling and discovery, allowing attendees to meet chefs and try a variety of dishes at their own pace.

### Students Build Real World Skills

Volunteers and students from Pukekohe High School helped deliver the event, gaining hands-on experience in both kitchen and front-of-house

roles. As part of their hospitality training, students helped prepare and serve dumplings at the Kohe Dumpling Kitchen stall and performed live music throughout the evening. It was a vibrant showcase of collaboration, creativity and applied learning.

### From Scraps to Soil

In partnership with Blue Borage, 22 kilograms of food scraps were diverted from landfill and were turned into nutrient-rich worm castings and used to grow over 8,000 worms. These castings and worms will be used to nourish public planter boxes, trees and gardens across Pukekohe. This initiative supports a regenerative, circular approach to food systems and reinforces the kaupapa that good food shouldn't just feed people, it should feed communities and the land, too.



### Local Talent on Show

Lighting, music, shared tables and local artwork created a welcoming atmosphere, while signage and menus profiled the entrepreneurs and producers behind each dish.

Eat Street drew more than 135 guests and reinforced the potential of 1 Roulston Street as a permanent venue for community-driven food events.

Feedback from both guests and local businesses was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the value of creating inclusive, local spaces that spotlight emerging food talent.





## Kai Franklin Moveable Feast: Roaming Dinner, Shared Tables

The final event in the series was the Kai Franklin Moveable Feast, held this year in April. This progressive dinner experience invited 90 guests to explore the town centre in a new way, through their tastebuds.

### A Community Served Course by Course

Held on a Thursday, a normally quiet night for hospitality, the event helped boost revenue. It opened at 1 Roulston Street, where diners enjoyed welcome drinks and canapés.

Six local eateries — Franklins Bar and Eatery, Hana Michi, Good Home, Little Ed, Appetite, and Johnny's Steakhouse — each hosted a different course of the meal, with guests moving from one location to the next throughout the evening.

By spreading the event across multiple venues, the Moveable Feast encouraged foot traffic and created new connections between local businesses.



Once again, students supported front-of-house service, building confidence and experience across a variety of food styles and settings. The Moveable Feast was logistically ambitious but delivered with heart and flair. It offered guests a unique way to engage with the town centre and reinforced the idea that good food experiences can bring vibrancy and visibility to places that matter.

## Shared Outcomes and Lasting Impact

For The Kitchen Project, the Kai Franklin initiative was more than a series of events. It was a powerful way to introduce ourselves to Franklin, activate our new satellite site, and embed our kaupapa in the heart of Franklin's food community.

Our purpose is to build community wealth through food. By creating opportunities for connection, enterprise and learning, we support the food industry and enhance economic development opportunities in the neighbourhood.



The Kai Franklin series brought this mission to life in a visible, real-world way by demonstrating our ability to lead inclusive and collaborative, high-impact activations that uplift both people and place.

### What People Said

Across the three events, more than 300 guests were welcomed into spaces that celebrated Franklin's food identity and showcased the region's hospitality talent.

Fourteen local eateries and producers took part, and students were given real opportunities to learn, grow and shine.

We reinvigorated a tired community space into a vibrant local destination and introduced The Kitchen Project to Franklin with heart, purpose and visibility.

One attendee, who enjoyed Chef's Table with her husband, shared her enthusiasm for the event and its culinary offerings. "It's a great idea. I'm loving it."

Rupert Ross, Chairman of the Pukekohe Business Association, praised the Chef's Table event:

**"I'm so pleased to see Pukekohe promoted in this way, highlighting all it has to offer. The dinner's unique tastes were delicious, and the courses worked well together. The entertainment and atmosphere were outstanding, all within this wonderful character building. We must host these events more often so more people in Pukekohe can experience this. The night was a 12 out of 10!"**

Another guest commented, "Thank you to all involved. It was an awesome night full of great people, outstanding food and great musicians. A true showcase of Pukekohe's fabulous food producers and all round talent."



Guests at Eat Street said, "What an experience! We have some amazingly talented local chefs. The food was outstanding, and the vibe was exceptional! We had such a great time." Another guest added, "Such a fun night, amazing food," while a third shared, "We had so much fun at Eat Street." From Moveable Feast, one guest reflected, "A change of scenery for me, some good Kai, date night for us to show my appreciation for all my partner has done for me."

## Transforming 1 Roulston Street

Staff also led the transformation of 1 Roulston Street into a functioning event space. We coordinated with local contractors to clean, paint and prepare the building, sourced sound and lighting, and worked with florists and signage providers to dress the venue. This level of activation required creativity, resourcefulness and a shared vision.



## Touchpoints Championing Franklin's Producers

At the centre of every dish was Franklin produce. Across the series, more than ten growers were profiled and championed.

At the Chef's Table event, for example, we partnered with The Fresh Grower to create centrepieces using their vegetables. At the end of the night, guests were invited to take these home, a practical gift, a beautiful display, and a celebration of Franklin's produce. It was a simple gesture that reflected the spirit of the evening. Our team brought it to life with care and commitment.

Information display posters at our 1 Roulston Street venue offered attendees an educational glimpse into the Franklin region's rich agricultural legacy and its substantial contribution to New Zealand's food supply, as well as details on the economic growth, Eke Panuku's Master Plan and the participating restaurants.

### Delivery of Hospitality Training to Students

Engaging students from Pukekohe High School's Work Ready Programme was another area where staff leadership was essential. Our team designed and delivered hands-on hospitality training ahead of each event, supported by participating chefs. On the night, staff mentored the students as they served guests and represented their school. For many, it was a first step into the hospitality sector. The encouragement and guidance they received helped make the experience a success.

### Programme Growth and Award Milestones

The venue of 1 Roulston Street has been the South Auckland base for The Kitchen Project programme for Cohort 16 and Cohort 18. We have supported six new entrepreneurs, four of whom are already trading. These include The Cinnamon God, Madd Pie's, Angel Treatz and award-winning Smoke Shed. We hosted two tasting events at 1 Roulston Street, giving new food businesses a chance to share what they'd been cooking. Guests from across Tāmaki Makaurau offered feedback and support.



These events are about more than taste testing, they help entrepreneurs learn, build confidence and receive live, constructive input. They also offer a glimpse into Auckland's food future, while strengthening our presence in Franklin and local connections.

### A Platform for Visibility and Connection

From long-table elegance to street-food fun and a roaming dinner with soul, each event built on the last, deepening connections, raising visibility, and reinforcing The Kitchen Project's role in growing food entrepreneurship. Partners Eke Panuku, the Pukekohe Business Association, Pukekohe High School and The Franklin Local Board played a vital role in bringing these activations to life. Together, we created moments that not only highlighted what is possible at 1 Roulston Street, but also pointed to a future where food-led regeneration becomes part of local place-making.



### Looking Ahead

The success of the Kai Franklin initiative is reflected in numbers, stories, and the strong sense of pride it created across the community.

Across three signature events, we welcomed more than 300 guests, featured 14 local eateries, and celebrated the contributions of Franklin's growers, producers and food entrepreneurs.

The Kai Franklin series has laid the foundation for future initiatives and shown that with creativity, collaboration and community, food can transform how people experience their town, their culture and each other. The Kitchen Project looks forward to continuing this journey in 2025 and beyond, building on the momentum, relationships and pride Kai Franklin has sparked in South Auckland.

Eat Street



Moveable Feast



# 11. TKP HIGHLIGHTS

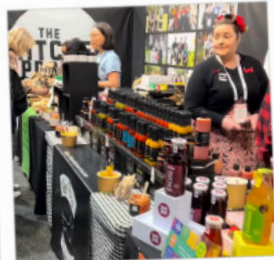
A SNAPSHOT OF THE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND MOMENTS THAT MADE THE YEAR MEMORABLE.

## 2024

### JULY



Photoshoot and food styling for Cohort 16



Five alumni showcased at 2024 Auckland Food Show

### AUGUST



Cohort 17 host Tasting Event at Auckland's Central Library with invited guests



Maisan collabs with Ginger to add kim chi to one of her exciting new Comfort Bowls

### SEPTEMBER



Pukekohe High School Students prepare dumplings for Eat Street's Kohe Dumpling Kitchen stall



TKP host Kai Franklin Eat Street ticketed event held in Pukekohe

### OCTOBER



Maisan and Spencer TKP graduates debut Comfort Bowl at Catalina Bay Farmers Market



TKP graduates Huong Nguyen and partner Harry Birnbreuer Hanoi Kitchen's market stall

### NOVEMBER



Cohort 19 Tasting Event, six entrepreneurs, 23 products & invited guests at Central Library



A busy time for our last cohort for 2024 with kitchen visits, mentoring and tasting each others food



The Kitchen Project on tour... noodle cooking class @ University of Auckland

### DECEMBER



Our limited edition Christmas Ketes with our entrepreneur's artisan products in time for the holidays

# 2025

## JANUARY



Our first Alumni gathering for 2025 with graduates, our volunteers and advisors



Our TKP whanau out and about at the Balmoral Street Food Market



Jom Makan debut their Malay snacks at the Ramadhan Market at the Manukau Tennis Centre

## MARCH



Sips & Spuds catering great kai at The Soul Food Festival held in Mangere Village Green



## APRIL



Another of our TKP whanau Angel Treatz at The Soul Food Festival held in Mangere Village Green



Five TKP alumni feature at Culture Fest Henderson



TKP alumni Julie Vu turns her dream into reality opening restaurant



TKP host Kai Franklin Moveable Feast ticketed event held in Pukekohe

## JUNE



Cohort 21 complete accounting module with mentor Jessica Stebbings



Cohort 20 Tasting Event with invited tasters from Central Library



Alumni cater The 2025 Lewisham Awards



K-Bone Kai's Trina and Ralph Pereira serve brisket and pulled pork sliders at The Lewisham Awards



EST. 2024  
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## 12. OUR EXPERTS AND MENTORS

The Kitchen Project fosters industry connections, giving alumni direct access to respected food leaders and hospitality professionals. These relationships build real bridges between start-up

entrepreneurs and established industry leaders, opening doors, validating ideas, and nurturing career-defining opportunities through shared experience and guidance.



**Lisa Franklin**  
Media Manager, AUDIO  
Founding Partner TKP



**Jacqui Yip**  
Principal Advisor, Public Health  
Engagement and Innovation  
Public Health Agency



**Martin Smith**  
The Great Catering Company  
Hospitality / Catering



**Max Washer**  
The White Lady, Iconic  
Food Truck / Hospitality



**Carmel Davidovitch**  
Carmel's Israeli Street Food  
TKP graduate, Iconic Restaurant /  
Lived experience



**Bertrand Jang**  
Sweet & Me  
TKP Graduate, Iconic Bakery /  
Lived experience



**John Evans**  
Beverage and Food Gurus Ltd  
Food & Beverage Consultancy



**Scott Kington**  
Beyond Usual  
Food Innovation / Marketing



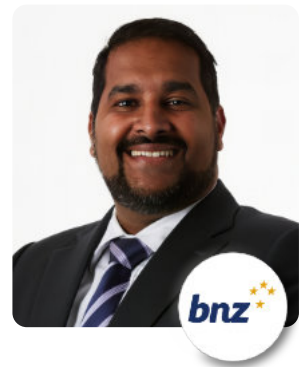
**Josh Page**  
Beyond Usual  
Food Innovation / Marketing



**Jessica Stebbings**  
Jessica Stebbings Ltd  
Pukekohe Accounting Services



**Dave Saunders**  
Aro Accounting Ltd  
Accounting / Food Industry



**Winidu Kannangara**  
BNZ, Commercial Banking  
Relationship Manager  
Banking / Finance

# 13. OUR TEAM

**MEET THE DEDICATED TEAM BEHIND TKP: PASSIONATE PROFESSIONALS COMMITTED TO FOSTERING FOOD ENTREPRENEURS, COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND WELLNESS.**

## Operations Team



**Connie Clarkson**  
**Manager**

As the Manager of The Kitchen Project, Connie is responsible for programme design and partner engagement, and oversees the operational delivery of the programme, supporting entrepreneurs as they turn their food business ideas into realities. She leads the team responsible for the day-to-day coordination across TKP's sites.

Connie's extensive operational experience spans hospitality, engagement, placemaking, property management, marketing, public relations, food and beverage, venue and event management, project management, and professional training.

Connie's hands-on leadership ensures the smooth running of the Core Programme and its wider activities, strengthening relationships with community partners, suppliers, and industry stakeholders.



**Esperanza Reyes**  
**Technical Specialist**

In her role as the Technical Specialist for The Kitchen Project, Esperanza adeptly manages the programme's regulatory requirements and coordination. As a programme participant herself, she brings firsthand entrepreneurial experience as the master grower behind Mushroomate, her business specialising in oyster mushrooms, flavour-rich pastes, and salts.

Esperanza's extensive background as a food technologist in food regulation and compliance equips her to offer invaluable guidance to our entrepreneurs. With over a decade of experience in roles like Regional Regulatory Services Specialist at Foodstuffs North Island and Quality Assurance Manager at Pitango, Esperanza's expertise in food safety and quality management is a cornerstone of her contribution to the programme.



**Hayden Stewart**  
**Core Programme Coordinator**

Hayden Stewart, as the Core Programme Coordinator for The Kitchen Project, oversees the coordination of our cohorts, kitchen operations, and logistics. Bringing over 20 years of culinary expertise as a chef, Hayden is also a proud graduate of The Kitchen Project.

Hayden's entrepreneurial journey led him to establish The Flying Rib, a business born out of his passion for nose-to-tail cooking and offering unique food experiences. Beyond his culinary endeavours, Hayden is deeply committed to uplifting the community, having also worked with Tuakana Teina (East, West & Central Auckland) at the Generator.

## Steering Group



### Connie Clarkson

#### Manager, The Kitchen Project

Connie is the originator and strategic lead of The Kitchen Project, with over 30 years' experience in placemaking, hospitality, and local economic development. A passionate advocate for food, community wealth building, and inclusive entrepreneurship, she guided the programme from concept to an influential incubator supporting Māori, Pacific, Indigenous, migrant, and women-led ventures. In 2025, Connie was recognised by *Cuisine* as one of the 50 most influential women in food and drink in New Zealand. Connie also judges the Outstanding NZ Food Producer Awards and NZ Ice Cream Awards. Her leadership has shaped major urban regeneration projects across Tāmaki Makaurau, including North Wharf, Queens Wharf, and The Cloud. She also serves on The Lewisham Foundation executive committee, championing excellence in Auckland's hospitality sector.



### Echo Janman

#### Manager, Community Hub Central City, Auckland Council

As the Manager of Community Hub Central City and part of TKP's leadership team, Echo oversees teams across the Auckland Central City Library, Ellen Melville Centre, and Albert Park Caretaker's Cottage. With over two decades of experience in arts and community work, she is a strong advocate for innovation, creativity, and social change. Echo led the integration of digital tools for community engagement, developed social innovation strategies, and fostered value-driven partnerships that enrich Auckland's community life. Echo's background in project development, creative placemaking, and cross-sector collaboration directly informs her contribution to TKP's kaupapa. TKP benefits from her deep understanding of culturally grounded programming and long-standing commitment to social equity.



### Jacqui Yip

#### Principal Advisor - Engagement & Innovation, Public Health Agency

Jacqui has been involved with TKP since 2019, delivering Health and Food System sessions, mentoring entrepreneurs, and supporting programme strategy. Born in Hong Kong and raised in Aotearoa, she brings experience as a public health dietitian and food systems innovator, along with a commitment to strengthening local food systems to support community wellbeing. Jacqui currently works at the Ministry of Health in a role focused on elevating community voice through engagement and innovation.



### Ben Maw

#### Programme Manager Development Response, Auckland Council

Ben brings extensive food industry and urban regeneration experience to TKP's leadership team, with his career spanning public and private sector roles. He has managed waterfront operations at Eke Panuku, led healthy food system initiatives in South Auckland, and managed major food and catering teams at Auckland Zoo and Auckland Council. He later served as Healthy Families Council Lead for Food Systems at The Southern Initiative. At TKP, Ben shapes programme direction, aligning it with food sovereignty, urban regeneration, and equitable development. His understanding of food systems and supply chains supports sustainable business models and strengthens links to Council's priorities. Ben's approach positions food entrepreneurship as a driver of wellbeing, cultural expression, and local resilience.

# 14. 2025 AND BEYOND

## EXPANDING REACH, ACTIVATING SPACES, AND DEEPENING IMPACT.

As we look ahead, TKP remains committed to supporting food entrepreneurs to grow sustainable, culturally rich, community-based businesses. Our mission to build community wealth through food continues to guide everything we do, from programme delivery and mentorship to place-based activations and partnerships.

### Growing Our Presence in South Auckland

In 2025, we continue to grow our presence in South Auckland, with more cohorts running from our base at 1 Roulston Street in Pukekohe. Following the success of the Kai Franklin series, we will explore new ways to connect food, culture and place through dynamic public events, enterprise training and community engagement. We will keep working closely with Auckland Council, Auckland Urban Development Office (AUDO), Tātaki Auckland Unlimited, Auckland Economic Development, The Franklin Local Board and other Local boards, and community partners to support vibrant town centres and inclusive economic development.

### Reimagining Food Leadership

We are actively exploring the concept of Whare Kai 2.0, a Ministry of Food for Tāmaki Makaurau. This bold, collaborative vision would bring together training, enterprise support, food rescue, innovation and storytelling under one umbrella, championing local food systems and accelerating impact at scale. While still in early development, the concept reflects our belief that food should sit at the centre of how we think about wellbeing, resilience and regeneration.

### Creative Collaboration with AUT

We look forward to continuing our partnership with AUT, forging deeper connections between their design students and our entrepreneurs. These collaborations offer valuable experience for the AUT student's portfolios and a powerful creative boost for our food and beverage entrepreneurs as they bring their brands to life.

### Alumni Support

We are also investing in programme refinement, expanding access to alumni support and testing new models of mentorship, peer learning, and product development. Our goal is to support entrepreneurs not just to launch, but to grow with confidence and resilience. We are also showcasing graduate businesses and our programme at the Auckland Food Show in July 2025. Five TKP alumni will exhibit their products and represent our kaupapa to a wider public and industry audience.

### Whare Kai Pop-up Store

Alongside this, we will continue strengthening our food rescue and sustainability work through the Whare Kai Store initiative, while exploring new ways to connect surplus to skill-building, enterprise, and local distribution networks. We believe food systems should nourish communities, not just economies, and we're proud to play a role in shaping a more inclusive and circular food future.

### Cooking Classes with University of Auckland

We are continuing our cooking school series in collaboration with the University of Auckland. These workshops, held at the student accommodation village, use rescued produce to teach healthy eating habits and build cooking confidence among tertiary students.

### Staying True to Our Purpose

Above all, we continue to stand beside our entrepreneurs, mentors and partners who make our mission thrive. Their creativity, courage and commitment remind us that with the right support, good ideas can take root and grow into something extraordinary. In the year ahead, we will continue to support this journey through access to opportunities, storytelling support and hands-on tools to help them grow in the city's dynamic food scene. We're building connection, confidence and community, one dish, one stall, one business at a time.



Aotearoa New Zealand's Most Influential & Inspiring Women In Food & Drink 2025

Cuisine's pick of the women set to influence our food-and-drink scene in 2025.

Cuisine

TOP 50 WOMEN IN FOOD & DRINK AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND 2025

Cuisine

fine food CORBIN RD NEW ZEALAND

PARK HYATT AUCKLAND\* CRAGGY RANGE

Cuisine

OUR Auckland TO TĀTAKI TĀMĀKI MAKĀURĀU

Tasting panel puts food businesses to the test

ourAuckland

Standing up for those with good taste

Publsh Date: 15 Oct 2024 COMMUNITY / CHART / HOSTS EDUCATIONAL / FOOD / DRINK FREE SUSTAINABILITY / FRANKLIN WARD / WAIKĀREWA / PĀPĀKURA / GĀRDĀ / MĀKĀKĀU WARD

ourAuckland

The 2025 New Zealand Outstanding Food Producer Awards winners

14th April 2025

Cheers to the winners of the 2025 Outstanding NZ Food Producer Awards!

The judges had a tough task deciding the winners this year, with 405 products from 125 Kiwi producers and an outstandingly high quality of

ON AIR NOW Coast Feel Good

The Bite: Phở Yên's phở tái (rare beef phở)

Georgie Wright

June 15, 2025

"I put a lot of love into it. So ... that's what I want to give to people as well."

The Post

NEW ZEALAND NEWS

Iconic Auckland Eats 2025: Top 100 dishes revealed

Nov. 2024

Foodies in Tāmaki Makaurau have had their say on the best dishes the city has to offer, with Auckland's top 100 dishes being revealed as part of the annual Iconic Eats awards.

This year's list of the most delicious dishes have been compiled from a record-breaking 3109 nominations from the public – a 67% increase from 2024's list.

Now in its fifth year, Iconic Auckland Eats – launched by Tātaki Auckland Unlimited – features everything from Cornish pasties and pepperoni pizzas to yaw ramen and pāua tortellini.

1 news

Iconic Auckland Eats 2025: Top 100 Dishes Revealed

17 June 2025

Food lovers in search of a quick bite or a special meal out in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland have a new source of inspiration, thanks to the release of the Iconic Auckland Eats 2025 list of Top 100 dishes

AGFG

'I could drink that sauce': The best foods to eat in Auckland, as voted by Aucklanders

Emma Stanford

June 16, 2025 - 7:16pm

Stuff

100 ICONIC 5th AUCKLAND EATS

2022 WINNER 2023 WINNER 2024 WINNER 2025 WINNER

CRISPY FALAFEL PITA CARMEL – ISRAELI STREET FOOD

ICONIC AUCKLAND EATS

100 ICONIC 100th AUCKLAND EATS

2022 WINNER 2023 WINNER 2024 WINNER

PINEAPPLE PIE CAKE BY SWEET AND ME

ICONIC AUCKLAND EATS

Shining Bright at the 2025 Food Producer Awards

We are bursting with pride for our alumni The Smoke Shed, Long Dog Sauce Co, Little Pils and Banu's Bites who collectively scored a total of seven medals at the 2025 Outstanding Food Producer Awards. That includes four golds, two silvers and the coveted New Boutique Product Champion medal.

It is no small thing to put your products forward alongside more than 400 entries from all around Aotearoa. To come out with medals shining and judges raving is proof of the passion, skill and heart that our food entrepreneurs bring to the table. These results are a reminder of the power of good ideas.

THE KITCHEN PROJECT

# 15. MEDIA AND PUBLIC PRESENCE

**THE KITCHEN PROJECT AND OUR PARTICIPANTS HAVE FEATURED IN A VARIETY OF MEDIA CHANNELS AND BLOGS.**

Highlights include:

- Cuisine: Aotearoa New Zealand's Most Influential & Inspiring Women in Food and Drink 2025**  
<https://www.cuisine.co.nz/aotearoa-new-zealands-top-50-most-influential-inspiring-women-in-food-drink-2025/>
- Our Auckland: Anyone want to come to dinner?**  
<https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2024/09/food-event/>
- Our Auckland: Standing up for those with good taste**  
<https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2024/10/kitchen-project/>
- Coast: The 2025 New Zealand Outstanding Food Producer Awards winners**  
<https://www.thecoast.net.nz/trending-now/the-2025-new-zealand-outstanding-food-producer-awards-winners/>
- The Post: The Bite: Phở Yến's phở tái (rare beef phở)**  
<https://www.thepost.co.nz/food-drink/360719569/bite-pho-yens-pho-tai-rare-beef-pho>
- 1 News: Iconic Auckland Eats 2025: Top 100 dishes revealed**  
<https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/06/16/iconic-auckland-eats-2025-top-100-dishes-revealed/>
- Australian Good Food Guide: Iconic Auckland Eats 2025: Top 100 Dishes Revealed**  
<https://www.agfg.com.au/article/iconic-auckland-eats-2025-top-100-dishes-revealed>
- Stuff: 'I could drink that sauce': The best foods to eat in Auckland, as voted by Aucklanders**  
<https://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/360725062/i-could-drink-sauce-best-foods-eat-auckland-voted-aucklanders>
- Iconic 100 Auckland Eats:**  
**2022, 2023, 2024, 2025**  
 - **ByCarmel for Crispy Falafel Pita**  
<https://www.aucklandnz.com/explore/carmel-israeli-streetfood>  
**2022, 2023, 2024**  
 - **Sweet & Me for Pineapple Pie Cake**  
<https://www.aucklandnz.com/explore/sweet-and-me>
- Outstanding Food Producer Awards 2025:**  
<https://www.thekitchenproject.co.nz/shining-bright-at-the-2025-food-producer-awards/>

**New Boutique Product Champion and Gold Medal**  
 - The Smoke Shed for Bunney's Worcester Sauce

**Silver Medal**  
 - The Smoke Shed for BBQ Sauce

**Gold Medal**  
 - Long Dog Sauce Co for Corndog Sauce

**Gold Medal**  
 - Little Pips for Black Doris Plum Syrup

**Gold Medal**  
 - Banu's Spices for Mango Chicken Sauce

**Silver Medal**  
 - Banu's Spices for Goan Fish Curry Sauce

# 16. THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

## COLLABORATION FUELS OUR MISSION.

### Strength Through Partnership

The Kitchen Project thrives because of the commitment of our partners. From our founding relationship with Auckland Council to a growing network across the city and region, each collaboration helps embed our work more deeply into Auckland's food ecosystem. Whether it's funding, guidance, or activating spaces, our partners play a vital role in everything we do, helping us respond to local needs and open new doors for emerging food entrepreneurs.

### With Sincere Thanks

Together, we're supporting small businesses, strengthening regional food systems, and building a more inclusive food economy. These partnerships enable us to deliver now, and to grow our reach.

To our funders, community partners, agencies, education providers, industry experts and mentors — thank you. Your support powers this work and helps build a stronger, fairer future through food.

### Community Wealth Building Stakeholders



### Sustainability & Healthy Food Access



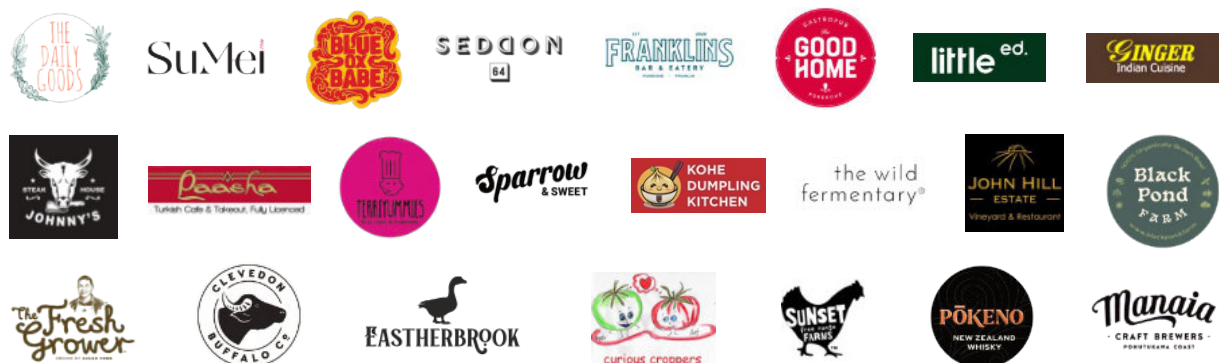
### Food Industry Platforms



### Our Mentors and Industry Connections



### Franklin's Food Trade & Producers







IGNITE THE FLAVOR,  
SAVOUR THE MOMENT

**THE SMOKE SHED**

Estd 2024



'BUNNEYS'  
WORCESTER SAUCE

180ML



# 17. CONNECT WITH US

## TURNING FOOD IDEAS INTO ACTION.

### Apply to Join The Kitchen Project

Do you have a food idea that reflects your culture or community? Want to turn it into a thriving business?

We're looking for passionate Aucklanders who want to grow their food venture with expert support. If that sounds like you, visit our website to check cohort intake dates and apply online:

[www.thekitchenproject.co.nz/apply](http://www.thekitchenproject.co.nz/apply)

### Agency Services for Food-Led Solutions

The Kitchen Project offers hands-on support and expert guidance to organisations wanting to deliver food-based initiatives with community impact. From councils and tertiary institutions to local boards and event organisers, we help partners design, test, and activate food projects.

We've led initiatives like Whare Kai and Kai Franklin, combining operational expertise with deep cultural understanding, strong networks, and proven community engagement strategies.

### What We Offer

- Tailored food activation planning
- Community engagement and co-design
- Culturally grounded food education
- Event delivery and coordination
- Entrepreneur matching for catering, demonstrations and workshops.

### Why It Matters

Through our Agency work, we're helping build a more resilient, circular and inclusive food system for Auckland.

We're also strengthening regional food networks and showing what's possible when local stories, skilled entrepreneurs, and strategic planning come together.

If your organisation is looking to bring a food-based project to life, please get in touch.



### Contact

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