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| **Kai Rotorua. Volunteers improving the food system through indigenous kai and community participation** |
| **Setting/Problem**For the last 30 years, Rotorua has produced meat and dairy but little else in terms of food, with the exception of one local orchard. Food insecurity affects a large proportion of our population, with nearly a third reporting that they go without fruit and vegetables in order to pay their bills. Māori are disproportionately affected by food insecurity; many have lost connection with Papatūānuku and have grown up without the traditional knowledge around how to grow their own kai. **Intervention**Kai Rotorua is a volunteer-run local organisation made up of over 130 individuals and organisations. It is using a multi-pronged approach to address the food security problem including:* Building free veggie gardens in people’s backyards
* Teaching children and adults how to grow traditional and staple food crops, in particular Kumara and Maori riwai (potato) karoro, moemoe and taewa.
* Providing people with plants, not food so that they can grow the kai themselves
* Teaching people how to cook meals using traditional ingredients and other vegetables
* Working with local scientists at Scion, to connect youth with kai using 3D printing as the mechanism to engage them with both kai and traditional knowledge
* Working towards a Living Building Challenge community food hub for Rotorua, which will house local good-food social enterprises. It will also function as a hub for education classes around gardening, cooking as well as good food businesses.

**Outcomes**In its first year of operation, Kai Rotorua produced over 500kg of 14 kumara varieties. Many of these have cultural significance for Te Arawa as well as other iwi. Over 2000 tipu have been gifted to kura, volunteers and community groups, and over 250 students from 6 local schools have engaged in education sessions around growing kumara. Recipients of backyard gardens, who initially reported trepidation about trying to grow their own kai, to significant increased levels of confidence as a result of their involvement. About one third reported at a 6 month follow up that they had even extended on their original gifted garden. **Implications**Kai is a significant part of Māori culture, but many have lost the connection with Papatūānuku and where their kai actually comes from. By reconnecting whanau with Papatūānuku, Kai Rotorua has ignited an interest in healthy kai as a means of connecting people to their heritage as well as the obvious health benefits. |