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**BANKING ON FOODBANKS FOR
POVERTY ALLEVIATION? A
CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF
PALMERSTON NORTH
FOODBANKS' DEVELOPMENT
PRACTICES**

A thesis presented in [partial] fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in
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ABSTRACT

Foodbanks entered New Zealand's voluntary welfare sector in the early 1980s when structural adjustment programmes, introduced by the fourth Labour Government, resulted in an increase in poverty amongst certain groups in New Zealand society and concurrently placed greater responsibility on the voluntary sector for the provision of welfare services.

While previous foodbank research has focused on examining the issues related to the utilisation, development and growth of this voluntary welfare provider throughout New Zealand, this thesis aims to take such enquiry a step further by analysing the effectiveness of Palmerston North foodbanks' development practice in the alleviation of poverty in New Zealand society.

It achieves this task through the application of a theoretical model utilising contemporary development theories and approaches to the data obtained through fieldwork with four Palmerston North Foodbanks. These are: the Salvation Army Foodbank, the Palmerston North Foodbank, the Saint Vincent de Paul Foodbank and the Saint Mary's Foodbank.

The conclusions deduced from this process will show firstly, that development theory (traditionally reserved for the analysis of development practice in developing countries) is appropriate to the analysis of Palmerston North foodbanks' development practice and secondly, that although the majority of these foodbanks display some features of the community development mode of development practice referenced in the theoretical model, the mode of development practice most dominantly used is a relief mode. This relief mode of development practice is ineffectual in the long term relief of poverty. The challenge issued is for foodbanks to move towards the articulation of an alternative development mode of development practice which seeks not only to effectively alleviate the very real poverty experienced by foodbank clients, but also to sustain this alleviation.

PREFACE

During a period of overseas travel from 1989-1993, I experienced a type of political awakening which saw me, on my return to New Zealand, enrol at Massey University to study the issues of development and underdevelopment which I had observed throughout my travels. In time, however, these studies too became a journey. At the beginning I was fascinated by issues such as colonialism and multi-national penetration which I could see had clearly contributed to processes of underdevelopment in many countries in the developing world, but that was where my perception ended. It was not until half way through my post-graduate diploma in 1994 that I really began to identify political processes in New Zealand as part of the 'big picture' that is global development and underdevelopment. This was the stage in my academic journey when I came across the foodbank phenomena.

Although anecdotal evidence suggests foodbanks have existed on New Zealand's voluntary welfare landscape since the early 1980s, I was not aware of their existence until I returned from my travels in 1993. I was appalled that there were people in New Zealand who could not afford to feed themselves and their families and thus began to question the success story of the economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s that had become part of every-day discussion in New Zealand society. Studying foodbanks appeared to be an ideal way to not only investigate the social effects of free-market policies, but also to link the study of development and underdevelopment to a New Zealand context.

As providers of food to those who cannot afford to feed themselves, foodbanks are a strong symbol of underdevelopment in New Zealand. The research I have completed on foodbanks has heightened my awareness of underdevelopment in my own country and indeed in the city of my birth and has put me in touch with situations I would never have believed possible. As a result of this I have immense respect for the courage of foodbank clients and for the tireless work done by foodbank volunteers and workers alike.

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