

Issue and System

The cost-of-living crisis is a major issue at the moment, not just in New Zealand but around the world. It refers to the rising prices of essential goods and services increasing faster than salaries. Wages are simply not keeping up with the rapid inflation of everyday necessities. Because of this, many people cannot afford basic needs such as food, shelter and medical care, leaving them struggling to survive or even living on the streets. The cost-of-living crisis has always been a social issue, but in New Zealand it escalated in mid 2021 when prices began rising faster than usual. This left many moderate and low-income households unable to keep up. According to Stats NZ, around one quarter of New Zealanders find it difficult to manage financially. When people cannot make ends meet, this can lead to poverty and homelessness. Most of the poverty experienced is not absolute poverty, but many living standards are still very poor. Even low-spending households have faced a 6 percent increase in housing costs, and property rates have risen by around 12.2 percent. Although housing and product prices continue to rise, disposable income and wages are not increasing at the same pace. As a result, many people are being pushed into homelessness. Stats NZ estimated that around 112,496 people were homeless in 2023, and this number continues to grow each day. As a community, we should be working together to provide support for those who are struggling. Building strong community resilience is an important part of helping people through the crisis.

A system connected to this issue is the humanitarian system. This system is made up of non-government organisations and charities that work together to ensure that everyone's basic survival needs are met. They provide food, shelter and support during emergencies, offering assistance wherever it is needed. Many of these organisations rely heavily on volunteers to carry out their work. They offer temporary relief to people who are struggling, making sure their essential needs are met and protecting human rights. Humanitarian organisations also play a key role in educating the public. They create programmes and campaigns that raise awareness about issues affecting communities. The more informed people are, the more resilient communities become, and the more likely people are to help others. Education can inspire people to make a difference, and the more people who choose to act, the greater the impact will be.

The humanitarian system addresses the cost-of-living crisis by delivering emergency services and support to those who need it most. They focus on families and individuals who are struggling, providing temporary shelter, food and other basic necessities.. Their dedication and the amount of support they provide is inspiring. These organisations regularly advocate for social justice and human rights. They work to ensure that everyone receives fair treatment and equal access to support.

Social Action

For my social action I wanted to support the humanitarian system as a direct way to help

people experiencing the cost of living crisis and poverty, so I chose to volunteer at Fair Food, a charity that rescues food from supermarkets like Woolworths and Farro to reduce waste and provide healthy meals to those in need. Fair Food has already saved over 608,693kg of food from landfills and shared 1,739,123 meals, and their 2024 report shows they reduced 1613 tons of carbon dioxide and operate at 99.7 percent waste free, which I found inspiring and motivating. I researched their work and documented my journey on Instagram to raise awareness of food insecurity in Auckland and educate my friends about how many people are affected. When I volunteered on 30 May 2025, I spent three hours doing tasks such as cutting vegetables, washing and drying dishes, taking labels off jars and feeding the pigs, doing whatever I could to support this volunteer dependent organisation. By contributing to the preparation of healthy meals, I aimed to directly respond to the cost of living crisis, lessen its impact on the community and help reduce the approximately 11,000 deaths per year linked to poor nutrition. I believe I achieved my aims of both aiding Fair Food and helping provide food for people who are struggling.

How the action supported the system

The main impact of my social action was supporting food security by providing both immediate relief and contributing to long-term wellbeing. When I volunteered in the conscious kitchen at Fair Food, I helped make sure people in need could receive meals. Fair Food prepares around 2,365 kilos of food every day, which shows just how much food needs to be cooked and sorted daily for the community. This temporarily relieved the stress people might feel from not knowing where their next meal would come from. It also supported Fair Food itself, because without volunteers the small team would struggle to prepare and deliver all the meals needed. Fair Food shares food with 70 different community partners, so volunteers help keep this whole process running efficiently. By helping to cook food, I contributed to a smoother and more efficient process, ensuring people received meals that met their basic human needs. With about 14.9 percent of children living in food-insecure households, according to Stats NZ, providing even temporary relief helps reduce stress, hunger and the unhealthy coping habits that can come from not having enough food. Although I only volunteered for one session, I still helped support families and the organisation during that time. My contribution links to strengthening food security in the long term because supplying nutritious meals does more than just fill an immediate gap. It reduces hunger and the risks of food-related illnesses, which affect thousands every year. It also helps build trust and support within the community. When people know there is help available, they may feel safer reaching out instead of trying to cope alone.

To support my social action even further, I also promoted it on my social media account (Instagram), where I have around 521 followers. By sharing my experience volunteering at Fair Food, people could directly see how easy it was to sign up, what the work involved, and why it matters. I also posted facts about how serious the cost-of-living crisis and food insecurity are, along with the positive impact that volunteering has on families. I had over 200 people view each of these stories, which was a quick way to spread the messaging, and this will have raised awareness and encouraged more people to consider volunteering

themselves. This is important because Fair Food relies heavily on volunteers to keep up with demand, especially since they rescue food from around 30 supermarkets every day and need volunteers to help process it all. The more volunteers they have, the more people they can reach, which strengthens food security and supports the humanitarian system overall.

Evaluating Suitability:

Yes, I think my social action met its intended purpose of raising awareness and addressing the cost-of-living crisis. The volunteer part of the humanitarian system can only work if individuals donate their time to charities, like Fair Food and this is what I did. I also made sure I had a good understanding of the contribution that they made as a charity, and as it rescues food and food scraps from going to landfill, making the charity 99.7% waste free. I helped the humanitarian system feed people and made sure that everything was done with absolute care and equality so that everyone would be getting the same amount of food and the same quality I also made sure that my time helped a charity that also helps to solve food wastage. Promoting my actions on social media was also suitable and appropriate as it helped to widen the impact. This is because I wouldn't just be able to speak to over 200 people to tell them about what I was doing and the importance of volunteering to help address the issue. This was a quick and easy way that I was able to spread the message.

However, what would have improved my social action and made a more suitable in terms of supporting the system would have been if I decided to volunteer for more hours. This would have made more of an impact on the system and issue, helping out more people and relieving more stress on the charity. Being only one person, the hours I committed are very small in the scheme of how many hours they need to operate (last year they had over 19,400 hours volunteered) and therefore it may have been more suitable if I made a regular commitment to volunteering, as this would support the charity in their planning, rather than having to rely on people like me to just come in for a short while. In Fair Food these people are called "Super Sorters" and they are important, because they help train up people like me, who haven't done it before. Similarly, finding alternative ways to raise awareness to the cause and increasing the amount of posting and trying to increase my social media reach would also have increased the number of people who have awareness of Fair Food and therefore also improved the numbers who volunteer.

[Throughout the response, the student provided evidence of undertaking the social action through photographs and example posts from social media].

Grade: Excellence

For Excellence, the student needs to evaluate a social action undertaken to support or challenge a system.

In addition to the Merit criteria, this involves evaluating the suitability of the social action in supporting or challenging the system. Evidence must be used to develop the explanation.

The student selected the cost of living crisis as their social issue and used evidence from Stats NZ to show its scale. They explained how increasing housing costs and financial hardship reflect gaps in support systems. The student identified the humanitarian system as a key part of the response, outlining how charities rely on volunteers to provide food for those affected, and described their social action of volunteering at Fair Food. They detailed tasks such as preparing vegetables, washing dishes, and supporting the kitchen team, and included evidence from Fair Food and Instagram posts aimed at raising awareness. These actions were clearly connected to their aim of supporting the charity to provide assistance to those most in need.

The student explained the impacts of their social action by showing how their contribution supported Fair Food's immediate operations and the wider humanitarian system. They described how assisting with food preparation helped the organisation meet daily demand, noting its reliance on volunteers to process rescued food. They linked this to strengthening food security and highlighted how social media promotion encouraged public awareness and community participation. By quantifying engagement, they showed how raising awareness can increase volunteer numbers and improve the charity's capacity to support those experiencing hardship. This consistent use of evidence to develop their explanation aligns with the requirements for Excellence.

The student has evaluated the suitability of the social action in relation to the system by explaining how their volunteering aligned with the humanitarian system's needs and the cost of living crisis. They justified the action as suitable because Fair Food depends on volunteers, and their contribution directly supported the organisation's ability to work effectively within the system. They also evaluated the effectiveness of social media, arguing that sharing their experience was a quick way to spread awareness and demonstrate how volunteering addresses the issue. The student reflected on limitations, acknowledging that committing more hours would have enhanced suitability, given Fair Food's reliance on regular volunteers such as 'Super Sorters.' They further identified that increasing the reach and frequency of promotion would strengthen suitability by amplifying awareness and potentially boosting community participation.