

Meridian Energy Wellbeing Programme

Reducing Energy Hardship Conference

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"Anyone who has struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor."

- James Baldwin

Where it all started...

In 2021, Meridian started a journey to make a real and meaningful difference to the lives of those living in energy hardship.

The reason: It aligns with our purpose of clean energy for a fairer and healthier world.

The plan: To pilot a programme of work for one calendar year, targeted at lifting **100 Meridian families** from Energy Hardship into Energy Wellbeing.

The question:

How might we improve the **energy wellbeing** of our **vulnerable customers** with **long term sustainable solutions** that reduce the impact of **the four key drivers of energy hardship**?

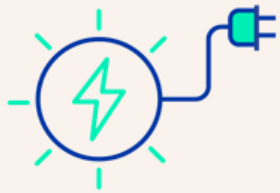
The outcome: We assisted 134 customers and learned a lot in the process...

- Of the 134 customers who received support, 44 engaged with partners for in-home assessments.
- 75% of customers we helped were either on schedule with their bill payments or had credit for their next bill.
- 48% of customers involved in the pilot were considered vulnerable or medically dependent on electricity.
- We saw a 70% reduction in debt levels for customers in the programme.
- 96% of the customers in the programme chose to remain with Meridian.

What were our focus areas

Energy wellbeing is defined as when individuals, households and whānau are able to obtain and afford adequate energy services to support their wellbeing in their home or kāinga.

There are 4 key areas that influence energy hardship



Energy Supply

- Plans & Pricing
- Payment options e.g level pay
- Fresh start
- Meter options
- Dynamic tariffs



Financial Situation

- Referrals (Moneytalks/FinCap)
- Immediate interventions
- Management with social services



Housing Quality

- Referrals to Partners
- Energy Mate
- CEA
- Sustainability Trust
- Efficient appliances
- ME Wellbeing box



Energy Efficiency

- Insulation
- Improve heating source
- Curtain banks
- Ground vapour barriers
- Extractor fans

After the Pilot....The Energy Wellbeing Programme was born

Continuing our journey to make a real and meaningful difference in the lives of those living in energy hardship we made a commitment: To scale the pilot into a full Energy Wellbeing Programme... a commitment to help at least **5000 customers** experiencing energy hardship.

We continued with our **four key focus areas**, and expanded our partner network.

We welcomed the **Community Energy Network**: a New Zealand-wide network of partners who can offer in-home assessments, small and large-scale interventions, and community support across the country.

Our partners are in the homes, looking at the best ways we can help our customers with sustainable, tailored support and energy solutions that'll reduce long term energy hardship.*

We empower our partners; our partners empower our customers. It's a high trust relationship that's creating measurable differences to households across NZ.

Customers in the Programme

Our customers may be renters, homeowners, or social housing residents, and they often fall into one of these categories:

1. Seniors who ration their energy usage, sacrificing warmth and health due to fear of costs. They often lack information about energy consumption or have outdated appliances.
2. Low-income families or beneficiaries, with high energy consumption and often in debt. Poor housing quality, lack of energy education, unavoidable needs, or large families can lead to higher energy use. Their high energy consumption and lower incomes often result in a cycle of debt.
3. Households in 'hidden hardship', who may not miss energy payments but are sacrificing other essentials, impacting their wellbeing.
4. Households on the brink of hardship, without a safety net for unexpected expenses or changes in circumstances.

Kia ora, my family and I would like to thank you and the team for the washing machine and dryer 😊 My kids all love them too and were as excited as I was when we received them lol. This is such a blessing so thank you again from the bottom of our hearts.. So much appreciation from my family..

BEST POWER COMPANY WITH THE BEST EMPLOYEES EVER!!! ❤️



This household is a family of nine (*soon to be 10*) living in a new Kāinga Ora property.

Our partner, Sustainability Options, identified the cause of their high bills was the dryer and dampness from drying lots of kids' clothes, uniforms etc.

Their recommendations: energy efficient appliances and continued support from the EW team.

This household is a family of seven, who recently adopted four of their friends' children.

They had been turned away by six other retailers due to credit issues before coming to us. Our EW team worked closely with our credit team to bring them onboard.

With energy education and ongoing support, the family is now maintaining their payments and are receiving in-home support through our partners.

"To say we are grateful to Meridian Energy is an understatement, in the last two years our lives have changed dramatically after having to adopt my wife's best friends four children after she succumbed to a very brief but painful fight with cancer, having to find housing for them, schools, and generally just changing their lives completely, we didn't expect getting power on to be so tough.

Ourselves as parents of now five kids needed to make significant changes, one of these was needing to find a power company. After calling at least six other companies we were running out of hope to get power connected due to some issues with our credit. We had a vulnerable child that needed power on and your team, after calling them, went well above and beyond and managed to convince your credit team to give us a chance. That in itself was enough to write this, but since then, to say your level of care goes well above and beyond this is an understatement. In the world of ever-increasing - well, let's just say everything - your team has been incredibly supportive.

Your credit team, wellbeing team and sales team have never once judged us, spoken to us harshly or made us feel like we have done something wrong. They have fixed, resolved and done all they can to support us, which has honestly meant so much.

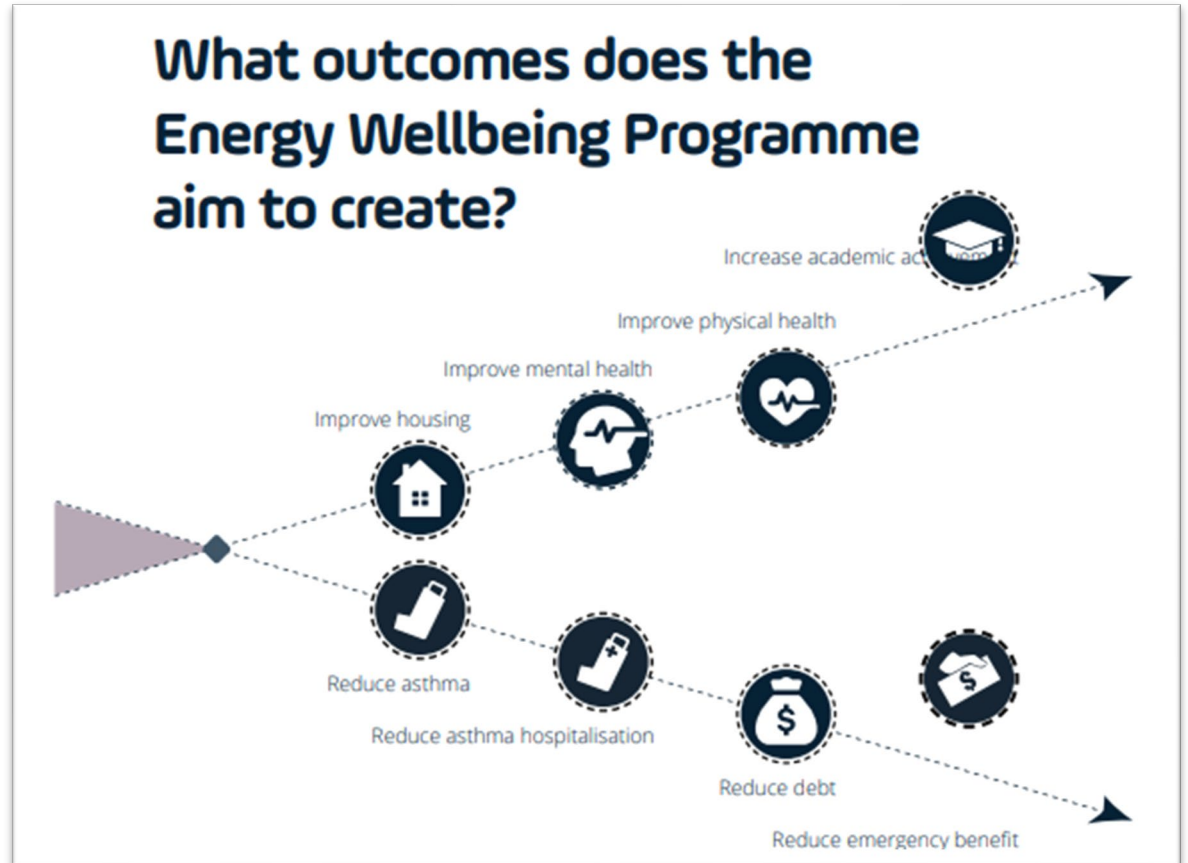
Companies now just don't serve people like this and genuinely seem to care for their clients, so to find Meridian has meant the world to us as you do deliver that."

Summary of Return on Investment

The Energy Wellbeing programme is already making a difference, and providing measurable improvements to different aspects of peoples' lives:

- Jobs and earnings
- Income and consumption
- Mental and physical health

Because some measures, like reduced stress, can't be quantified right now, the real-world value for people and their families is even greater.



Keeping our Compass on Customer Outcomes

Energy Wellbeing Programme



We commissioned a 'Good Measure' report through Impact Lab to validate the return on investment.

Driving the right impact - not just "filling the quota". High-quality, long-term interventions are key to this total return on investment and this commitment remains.

It just might take us longer to get there, and in a different way.

What have we learned?

- Energy Hardship is complex and hard to find; it comes in many forms.
- The customers coming through our programme are continually changing, no story or situation is the same, each customer we see requires a tailored solution.
- Sustainable solutions take time, education, ongoing support and a fair amount of trial and error.
- Funding community partners to do the work is fundamental to achieve real change. We need to empower the people doing the work in the communities.
- We don't have all the answers, we are still learning and growing, but we are committed to our journey and to making a real and meaningful difference in the lives of those in energy hardship.