

## Local authorities part of the community housing solution

A number of local authorities are partner members of Community Housing Aotearoa and CHA believe these local bodies play a key role in providing community housing solutions throughout New Zealand. This article is part one in a series looking at what is happening in the provision of housing by local councils around the country. Here we look at the Wellington City Council (WCC).

Community is at the heart of housing – this was a key message given by Mayor of Wellington, Celia Wade-Brown in when she addressed the 2015 CHA Impact Conference, 21-23 October. WCC's aims for social housing are to:

- provide appropriate and affordable housing to low-income households who face barriers to accessing housing
- provide safe and secure housing to a good standard
- build communities where people feel safe, have a sense of belonging and are proud to call home
- support tenants to improve their quality of life and wellbeing and to contribute to and benefit from living in Wellington

In 2008, WCC started on a joint 20 year project in partnership with the Crown to upgrade its housing stock to improve the quality of its housing: installing insulation and double glazing, improving ventilation and heating and improving security through controlled access and better design, to provide tenants with safer, warmer, drier homes. Another important focus of the housing upgrade is community building, with better social and recreation facilities.

WCC housing units are spread across 40 housing complexes ranging from single-story timber houses to multi-story concrete blocks. When fully occupied they are home to more than 4,000 tenants. To date 769 of WCC's 2100 housing units now provide a modern standard of warm, dry and attractive housing, and since 2009 resulting in over 28 awards and commendations for excellence in architectural design, tenant engagement and services, colour schemes, quake strengthening, project management and excellence in social housing.



Key features of this housing upgrade have been: sensitive tenant relocation programmes; housing reconfigured into community hubs and neighbour groupings (replacing 1.5km of hallways where many tenants felt unsafe); insulated, quality affordable housing— kept at 70% of market rentals; community development programmes and facilities including computer hubs; as well as improvements in monitoring and addressing welfare for tenants with high support needs.

Tenant engagement processes to get tenants and architects talking about what works and what doesn't work is central to the housing upgrade process. Engagement work is led by the Community Action programme team whose community development work has been shown to have tangible results for tenants.



An ongoing evaluation using the '**Most Significant Change**' approach (Dart & Davies) has revealed journeys from "not feeling good", to "feeling good", and going on to "do good" and play a positive role in the neighbourhood. Tenants share powerful accounts of moving from isolation, low confidence, illness, to being active, involved in the community and, in many cases, growing into leadership roles.

Other tenant outcomes have been:

- tenant wellbeing and participation have increased
- inclusion is up, isolation is down – slow positive trend in reducing loneliness
- tenants feel more safe and connected
- improved relationships with City Housing staff
- tenants linked to volunteering and work opportunities

The words of Mayor Celia Wade-Brown epitomise the key place of community housing in our communities and the role housing plays as the centre of the jigsaw:

*"We want to be more than a landlord providing a roof over people's heads, we want to ensure that tenant's social needs are met and we take a holistic approach. This means working with external agencies who are able to provide the support services that we can't. This is absolutely key to the success in managing tenant's needs and managing them well. "*

Watch the great video on the Wellington City Council housing upgrades at:  
[tinyurl.com/wcchousingvideo](http://tinyurl.com/wcchousingvideo)

Other videos on the tenant engagement and Wellington City Council social housing can be found on: [wellington.govt.nz/housing-upgrade](http://wellington.govt.nz/housing-upgrade).