

we believe...



Telling the story of the community housing sector in Aotearoa

> *David Zussman and Marc Slade reveal how the Auckland Community Housing Providers Network is raising the profile of the sector through a new campaign called We Believe.*

The Auckland Community Housing Providers Network (ACHPN) is a network of 21 different community housing providers, each of them with a specialty and a story. Those stories are now being told by a recently launched creative campaign to help New Zealanders understand who makes up the Community Housing Sector, and how community housing providers offer real solutions to our housing crisis.

The housing market is no longer working for a significant number of Kiwis. The effects of the crisis are particularly profound in Auckland, which now has one of the least affordable housing markets in the OECD.

“ The housing market is no longer working for a significant number of Kiwis ”

Auckland's median house price is now \$847,000,¹ which has increased three times faster than incomes.² Forty percent of Auckland households now rent, and a third of those spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Three-quarters of Auckland residents can't afford to buy their own home, meaning the divide in income and wealth between renters and homeowners is widening.

Those feeling most of the pain are the increasing numbers of homeless individuals and families with children who are living in sub-standard housing, motels and transitional housing. Many do not have secure private sector tenancies and are paying high rents yet are still unable to access homeownership due to low incomes.

Māori and Pasifika peoples are disproportionately represented within these groups. There are also growing numbers of older people in retirement who are renting and are susceptible to rent increases and termination of their tenancies.

“ The Social Housing Register is creaking under the weight of 11,067 applicants ”

There are 800 people who are currently homeless in Auckland city, with 3,000 people in transitional or emergency housing – including 1,300 children.³ The Social Housing Register is creaking under the weight of 11,067 applicants, with 4,401 of those in Auckland.⁴

There is much to do, and many problems to solve, but the members of the ACHPN work to ease the burden for as many

people as possible. ACHPN is part of a wider sector of 90 community housing providers across the country, all working towards the vision of 'All New Zealanders well-housed' and represented by the national peak body, Community Housing Aotearoa.

In Auckland over the last 30 years, ACHPN members have provided warm, dry and safe homes for more than 13,000 Aucklanders. While each of the members of this network of community housing groups operate slightly differently and offer a breadth of services, the thing they all have in common are a shared set of values, a passion to see people well-housed and a determination to provide more new affordable housing in thriving neighbourhoods.

This breadth of service, length of experience and never-ending passion makes the community housing sector well-placed to contribute to ending the housing crisis. As Community Housing Aotearoa's Auckland Senior Programme Manager, David Zussman, says, "One of the strengths of the sector is that each provider makes a unique contribution to its own particular client group and location."

Community housing providers cover the entire housing continuum – from emergency housing to social rental, affordable rental and shared ownership. Haumaru Housing focuses on older people, Accessible Properties and Homes for Choice provide homes for people with physical and intellectual disabilities, CORT and Emerge Aotearoa house people with mental health issues, Monte Cecilia Housing Trust houses those in need of emergency and long term housing, CNSST houses Asian seniors, and the Housing Foundation and Habitat for Humanity provide affordable homeownership solutions.

“ They all have the same goal: getting people into safe and affordable homes during the worst housing crisis modern New Zealand has ever seen ”

Nevertheless, they all have the same goal: getting people into safe and affordable homes during the worst housing crisis modern New Zealand has ever seen. However, doing so requires both financial and philosophical support from local and central government and the public.

To help with that, ACHPN and Community Housing Aotearoa recently turned to Auckland creative agency Curative who assembled a storytelling package to communicate just how



1 All data in this para from Snapshot report to Auckland Council Planning Committee, 27 Nov 2018

2 Time period is between 2012 and 2017

3 Taken from Auckland's Homeless count (*Ira Mata Ira Tangata*), September 2018

4 MHUD Housing quarterly report, 31 March 2019



Waimahia Inlet

urgent this issue is, and the role of ACHPN members in helping. Part of the package is a powerful two-and-a-half-minute film, *We Believe*, in which viewers are introduced to residents housed by ACHPN members – people who previously believed they would never be able to be happy in their own healthy, stable and affordable home.

“We realised there was a lack of understanding and awareness of who we are and what we do. It was a good reminder that, if we don’t tell the stories ourselves, no one else will,” says ACHPN Chair Hope Simonsen. “Community housing providers are in it for the long-haul – some have already been operating successfully for nearly half a century.”

“ Community housing providers are in it for the long-haul ”

The ACHPN value proposition and messaging is distilled into four key pillars: Healthy, Innovative, Quality and Affordable. ‘Healthy’ means warm, safe and accessible housing with access to multiple support services. ‘Innovative’ means homes are high-tech and well-designed with a range of options available for different needs. ‘Quality’ homes are well designed, that integrate well into communities and have layouts that make the best use of sunshine; and ‘Affordable’ means housing costs that are no more than 30 percent of a household’s gross income.

At the heart of ACHPN’s values is the belief that absolutely everyone has the right to their own home, that money made from housing should be reinvested back into providing more affordable housing, and that the benefits of healthy homes extend far beyond the house itself. Also of great importance is security: “If you’re a tenant of ours, you can be confident that we are not going to ask you to leave because we want to sell the property,” assures Hope Simonsen.

Hope believes the size of community providers is one of their strengths: “Because we are smaller, we are more agile, and we are able to address issues a lot quicker and be closer to the communities we’re in.” Additionally, the benefits of investing in community housing are the retention and recycling of public investment back into housing by housing organisations that work across political cycles and, indeed, across lifetimes.

David Zussman says, “The *We Believe* video is designed to be used as the basis of communications by the community housing providers themselves – both internally and externally. We want staff and board members to become the ambassadors for the work they do. This video will give them a starting point from which to do this.”

The video contains a powerful and simple core message upon which individual providers can layer their own material. This will result in lots of slightly different stories about community housing providers but all staying aligned to that powerful, simple core message about what ‘we believe’ as a sector.

The first step in the dissemination of the video is a sector-wide national campaign to make sure people know who we are as a sector, what we do and why we do it. The video is accompanied by additional presentation resources and a refresh of the ACHPN website. Momentum will continue with the development of individual case study videos, and a 30-second version suitable for social media and TV.

“This is just the start,” says David. “Community housing providers throughout New Zealand are at the forefront of delivering some of the best examples of local mixed housing developments and community-based services.”

The 295-home Waimahia Inlet development (see ‘Sustainable Communities in Growing Cities p.42) is one of these examples, a mixed tenure affordable housing project led by a consortium of community housing providers and *mana whenua* (Māori tribal groups), and supported financially by the Government. Waimahia Inlet is the only Special Housing Action area in Auckland that has delivered significant numbers of affordable housing.

“It’s time to beat the drums for the community housing sector – louder and more frequently,” concludes David. The value proposition for the community housing sector seems obvious but the message has just not got through to those who are in a position of power and influence.

- You can watch the *We Believe* video at ACHPN website: www.achpn.net.nz