

WHEN THE DOMINOES START TO FALL

stories of

HOMELESSNESS



— 2021 —



Tauranga City



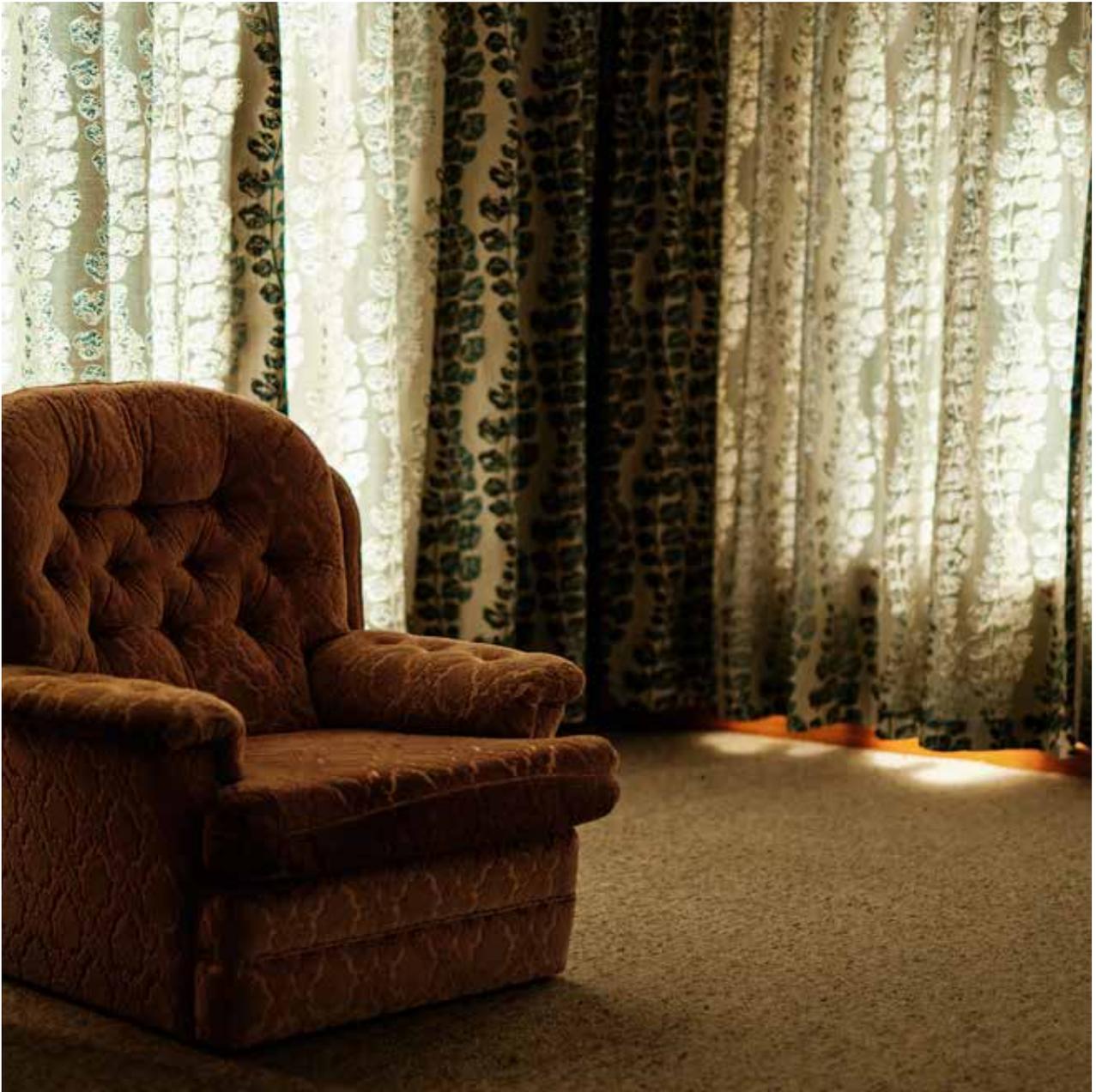
Kāinga Tupu
Growing Homes



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Introduction

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is a collection of stories from people who have experienced being homeless in Tauranga. The stories were developed as part of a research project carried out in 2020 by Ruth Hungerford of Momentum Research and Evaluation Limited, for the Kāinga Tupu: Growing Homes Taskforce and the Western Bay of Plenty Homelessness Providers' Network.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The aim of the project was to collect real stories of lived experiences of homelessness in Tauranga and to identify systemic barriers that we need to overcome in Tauranga to improve our local context and reduce the prevalence of homelessness. People who were experiencing, or had experienced, homelessness were interviewed. From these interviews, eighteen case study stories were written up and a research report produced¹.

This book reflects the stories within the full research report.

ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

When thinking of homelessness, we often think of people sleeping on the street or in parks. However, homelessness is more than just rough sleeping. Homelessness is defined as a living situation where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing are:

- Living without shelter, or in makeshift shelters – for example, sleeping rough or living in a car.
- Living in temporary or emergency accommodation – such as night shelters, refuges, hotels/motels, motor camp sites and boarding houses.
- Living in shared accommodation temporarily with others – note that the usual residents of the dwelling are not considered homeless.
- Living in uninhabitable housing – such as dilapidated dwellings or those not for human habitation, like garages.

¹ A copy of this report is available on the Tauranga City Council website at www.tauranga.govt.nz

ABOUT HOMELESSNESS IN TAURANGA

Whakahou Taketake - Vital Update: Tauranga (2020) research project found that at least three percent of residents, or over 4000 people across the city, belong to one of the four categories of homelessness. They also concluded that with “the nature of homelessness being quite private and hidden, three percent is only based on the number of people we were able to reach. In reality this number will be even higher.”²

ABOUT WHAT LEADS TO HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is not a choice and it is not the fault of an individual. It is a complex issue with many pathways leading into it. In most cases, homelessness does not happen overnight. It is usually the result of the cumulative impact of structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances.

Sometimes it's a bit like when dominoes start to fall, each one knocking the next one down. Factors like poverty, discrimination, a lack of housing and rising rents collide with individual circumstances like losing a job, accumulating debt, illness, trauma or relationship breakdown and the result is another family or an individual finding themselves without a home.

The stories in this book show how homelessness affects people from all walks of life and how there is no one pathway into or out of experiencing homelessness.

² Acorn Foundation, TECT, BayTrust and Tauranga City Council (2020), p.9. This report is available on www.tauranga.govt.nz

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the following people and organisations.

THE PEOPLE

Firstly, thanks must go to all the participants in this research. This project would not have been possible without their generosity, honesty and willingness to share their stories, so that others might understand what it is to be homeless.

THE AGENCIES

Thanks must go to the staff from the following agencies. This project could not have happened without them assisting the design process and supporting people to share their stories.

- Accessible Properties NZ Ltd
- Acorn Foundation
- Āwhina House
- Bay of Plenty District Health Board
- Baywide Housing Advocacy Service
- Curate Church
- Department of Labour
- Kai Aroha
- Ngā Mataapuna Oranga
- Pacific Island Community (Tauranga) Trust
- Plunket
- Salvation Army
- SocialLink Tauranga Moana
- Street Kai
- Takitimu House
- Tauranga City Council
- Tauranga Community Housing Trust
- Under the Stars

THE RESEARCHER

Thanks must go to the researcher, Ruth Hungerford of Momentum Research and Evaluation Limited, who took our original concept and turned it into a process that focused on protecting the stories of people who are experiencing homelessness. This project at the heart was about honouring and respecting the journey lived by those who contributed to this book. Ruth is the person that made that dream a reality, with love and integrity.

THE SUPPORTERS

Finally, thanks must go to the Tauranga City Council Community Partnerships Team, Kāinga Tupu: Growing Homes Taskforce and the Western Bay of Plenty Homelessness Providers' Network, for initiating and supporting the project in order to ensure that the voices of lived experience of homelessness are heard.

Stories of homelessness

ABOUT THE STORIES

The people in the following stories have all experienced homelessness. Their experiences range across all the categories of homelessness including without shelter, temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation and uninhabitable housing. Some have experienced homelessness for many years, often cycling in and out of homelessness, and others have found themselves homeless only very recently. Twelve of them are still experiencing homelessness and six have been able to move out of homelessness and are currently housed.

The participants' current living situations include:

Sleeping rough

Brett³; Tūī

In transitional housing

Aqua; Manu; K.T.; Ānaru; Nina; Lily

In emergency housing (motels)

Tāne; Te Uira

In unsuitable housing

Paul

In a boarding house

Kiri

Living with their parents

Jesse

In private rentals

Sharon and Liam;
Kabwenea and Jason; Rāwiri

In their own home

Māia and Shane

In a Council-owned retirement unit

Stan and Dawn

All of the people in the stories wanted to have their own home; a place of their own that was safe and secure.

³ Note that for privacy reasons, participant names were changed unless they asked for their own names to be used.



Sleeping rough

NO ENTRY
AUTHORISED
PERSONNEL
ONLY



Brett's story

Discharged to 'no fixed abode'

Brett is of Pākehā descent and is 52 years old. He has been living on the streets for about three years and has a regular spot where he has set himself up. He has a place to sleep and facilities to do some basic cooking and also makes use of the various community meal options in Tauranga.

Brett receives income via the supported living payment due to a health condition. Although he has tried some other housing options including transitional housing and a campground, he likes his privacy and the quiet of his own space. Although Brett is okay with where he is staying he would like to get his own house and one where he doesn't have to share.

But things were not always like this.

Three years ago a series of events occurred which led to Brett's current living situation. Brett's experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping, sleeping in a car, a campground, and transitional housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Brett's story is one which is about 'systems failure' and the need to ensure adequate discharge planning to support people leaving hospitals. His story is also connected to a local natural disaster, the Edgumbe Flood of 2017, and the recovery process which was staffed by volunteers. These events combined, led to Brett living on the streets of Tauranga.

EARLY LIFE AND WORK

Brett is a 52 year old Pākehā man who has led a varied life, working in lots of different industries. Born in Northland, near the Kaipara Harbour, Brett's family moved to the King Country for a few years. When he was ten years old, his family moved to Tauranga Moana where Brett completed his intermediate and secondary schooling.

After leaving school at 16, Brett first went into dairy farming on the East Coast. After four years milking 300 plus cows a day, Brett moved back to the Mount and began working as a fish filleter. A car accident when he was 26 changed his life and career, and he enrolled in a chef's course. He was soon a qualified chef and worked in Auckland for awhile. He eventually left Auckland and worked as a chef in the Coromandel. In 2017, Brett was still living in the Coromandel when a disaster in the Bay of Plenty changed the course of his life.

A DISASTER HAPPENS

Following heavy rain from the remnants of Cyclone Debbie, the stop bank protecting Edgumbe from the Rangitāiki River breached on the morning of 6 April 2017. The town was rapidly flooded, giving residents barely minutes to escape from their homes.⁴

The clean-up from the Edgumbe flood in 2017 went on for many months after the flood event of April 6 with lots of volunteers, contractors and Taskforce Green pitching in to aid the recovery.

Hundreds of volunteers put in thousands of hours pumping water away from Edgumbe, shovelling 2500 tonnes of sediment from the town and recycling 18 tonnes of ruined white ware and steel, and helping homeowners strip floorboards and walls from houses.⁵

One of the volunteers who helped with the clean-up was Brett. Although he had been living in the Coromandel, he went to Edgumbe as part of 'Taskforce Green' to help with the clean-up.

ILLNESS AND HOSPITALISATION

Not long after the Edgumbe flood clean-up work was completed Brett found himself becoming unwell. He thought that maybe he had appendicitis, as he was in considerable pain. After a few trips to the doctors he ended up in hospital; he had necrotizing fasciitis, otherwise known as 'flesh-eating disease.' It seemed that he had most likely picked up the infection while helping clean up after the floods. Surgery and aggressive antibiotics

⁴ Edgumbe flood, (2017), Te Ara: the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.

⁵ Edgumbe flood anniversary: A year of highs and lows (31, March, 2018).

are the treatment for this severe, and sometimes fatal, infection. Brett had four separate surgeries, including two plastic surgery operations, and spent a number of weeks in hospital. When it was time for him to be discharged, Brett had nowhere to go and this was when his homelessness journey began.

HOMELESSNESS: ON THE STREET

Brett was discharged from hospital after a series of significant surgeries, which had treated the disease but left him with scar tissue and ongoing pain and discomfort. He didn't know anyone locally, as he had not lived in the area for some time, and he had nowhere to go. He did have a car however, and this became his home for the next year to 18 months. A few weeks after discharge Brett tried staying at a transitional housing place but he did not like having to share a room and was disturbed by other people's snoring. He went back to his car.

Brett would park his car overnight in one of a number of places in Tauranga, moving around fairly frequently. Then, just over a year ago, Brett lost his car; "the council took it." Without the car, Brett had to find somewhere to stay. Now he has a spot where he stays. With the exception of one night staying in a campground, organised for him by a local community agency, he has stayed in his spot for fourteen months.

The same agency also tried to find him more permanent accommodation, but "it didn't work for me" as it would have involved sharing the space. So Brett stays where he is. In his spot there is shelter from the elements and, while the mosquitoes bother him at times, he does not have other people disturbing him.

"They tried to put me in a camping ground. I lasted a night."

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

During the Covid-19 lockdown in April Brett stayed in his spot. He made use of the 'takeaway community meals' and spent much of his time reading. There were attempts to shift him off the street but he preferred to stay where he was.

"I was still [in my spot]. They wanted me to move but I didn't want to. It didn't worry me because I just read most of the time. It was quiet. Under the Stars did takeaway meals as long as you kept your distance. Street Kai did the same."

DAY TO DAY ON THE STREET

There are a number of organisations in Tauranga who provide community meals and other facilities which people can access, and Brett makes use of them. Brett's routine usually consists of attending the various community meals and making use of the showers at one of the venues.

"Shower and meals at Under the Stars, Thursday lunch time and Saturday night. St Peter's Tuesday, Arataki Tuesday evening, Wednesday Elim, Thursday Under the Stars, Friday Greerton, Saturday Under the Stars. Sunday is curry. The Sikhs do that. Monday Street Kai, at the waterfront. Once a month the ladies from Huria Marae do a feed."

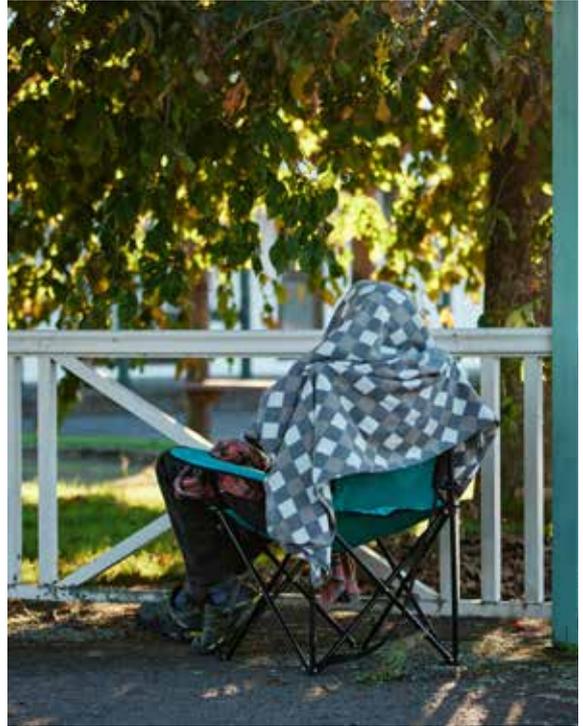
In between times, Brett does a lot of reading. He also has medication for a mental health condition and he makes sure he takes that. He has a doctor who he sees when he needs to for his health and for getting his prescriptions filled.



Insights

SYSTEM FAILURE

Brett was failed by a system that did not ensure that he had somewhere safe and secure to go when he was discharged from the hospital, after suffering a severe illness brought on from helping out with disaster recovery. As a result, Brett has spent the last three years living on the street, either sleeping in his car or rough sleeping. He is an educated person, who enjoys reading but does not want to be forced to live with others. Although Brett feels comfortable where he is, when asked, he did say that he would like "his own house" but not one where he had to share.



Sleeping rough



Tūī's story

A life of experiences

Tūī is of Māori descent with whakapapa links to the Bay of Plenty. She is 62 years old and has been living in and around the Bay of Plenty for most of the past ten years. She is single, has no children and has been sleeping rough on the streets of Tauranga for nearly a year.

Tūī loves Tauranga with its harbour and sea views and has stayed in different parts of the city, particularly enjoying the places where she can see the water. While she is okay with her current living situation, with winter coming on she is keen to find an alternative. Ideally, she would like to get her own little unit somewhere in the city.

But things were not always like this.

Last year Tūī was staying with family and friends having some R and R after having worked for over forty years in a range of different jobs. During the Covid-19 lockdown she ended up 'stuck' staying with a friend, which was not ideal. As soon as she could she moved on ending up, a few weeks later, staying on the streets where she has been ever since. Tūī's experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HER STORY

Tūi's story is one of experiences. Since leaving school more than forty years ago, she has worked at a variety of different jobs and had a lot of experiences and opportunities. A year ago she found herself unexpectedly arriving in Tauranga at 11 o'clock at night with nowhere to stay. While at the bus shelter, wondering what to do, she was approached by local 'streeties' who "looked after" her for the night. Thus began Tūi's experience of staying on the streets.

EARLY LIFE AND WORK

Tūi is the second youngest of eight children, four boys and four girls. She was "born and bred" in the Bay of Plenty but "ran away to the city" when she finished school, ending up in Auckland where she stayed and worked for the next twenty years. Tūi started her working life as a barmaid, but she was soon moving on to different things as various opportunities presented themselves. A contact led to a boat cleaning contract, then work with a company supplying goods to the boating industry.

EXPERIENCES IN THE CAPITAL

In the 1990s Tūi moved to Wellington and further expanded her CV and her experience. She worked as a bouncer in Wellington bars and moved from there into a security firm, working all over the city guarding anyone from lawyers to children in care to staff in 24/7 supermarkets. Tūi began working as a cook in a resthome and from there went to polytech, gained certificates in food

and moved into working in restaurants. The stress of working in the food industry and the appeal of better weather up north prompted her to move "back home" to the Bay of Plenty in 2011.

EXPERIENCES IN THE BAY

Teaming up with one of her sisters Tūi's next venture was running courses for job seekers helping them to get work experience and employment. She was also putting her cooking skills into practice doing a few catering jobs. She soon had a local community group offering to set her up with a van and help her get started as a mobile "dial a chef." However, she was by this time "struggling with alcoholism, with my drinking" and turned down the offer.

"My oldest sister used to say our family are 'pissheads.' I just started drinking, just having fun."

After turning down the van offer, Tūi moved closer to Tauranga, working in a café, a fish factory and then the kiwifruit industry. She worked in the kiwifruit industry for several years, and at this time was renting a caravan in a campground for \$120 a week. Then a bad cough took her to the doctor to find that she had developed asthmatic symptoms from the dust in the packhouse.

Medication helped with the symptoms but continuing in the packhouse was no longer an option. Tūi went on the jobseeker benefit, working at casual jobs when she could. However, with kiwifruit out, other work opportunities were limited and this was when Tūi decided on a trip to stay with a relative in another town.

“I went on to the unemployment benefit, worked at casual jobs. Then I decided to go to [town] because there was nothing in [this area], only kiwifruit. To stay with my [relative] for some R and R.”

EXPERIENCES: ROAMING

Tūi was staying with her relative when the Covid-19 situation began to develop. While the situation was in its early stages she decided to go “roaming,” getting on a bus and heading off to visit family and friends. A stop to visit a friend she had met during her time in the kiwifruit industry turned into a four-week stay when the ‘lockdown’ occurred and she could not get a bus out.

“I was in [town] and something happened in Auckland and I got stuck in [town], and there was no buses. My friend I had worked with, they were nice, but I didn’t like the lifestyle, partying and drinking.”

HOMELESS: TWO WEEKS ON THE STREET

Once the lockdown was over, Tūi went back to her relative’s house for a couple of weeks then went “roaming” again, around the Bay of Plenty.

“I went from [here] back to my [relative’s] for two weeks. I went roaming. Then I got on a bus to Rotorua, then there were no buses [to where I wanted to go] so I came here [Tauranga] on a bus. Arrived at 11 o’clock at night at the bus shelter. Stayed at the shelter. It was 11pm. Then the streeties showed up and came over [to me] and looked after me. I stayed for two weeks. Slept at the harbour and the streeties would take me to get food.”

HOMELESS: LIFE ON THE STREETS

After two weeks on the streets, Tūi went back to her relative’s house but decided she wanted to return to Tauranga and go back on to the streets. She had met some interesting people and wanted to spend more time there.

“I went back to [town] and I wanted to come back and ‘enjoy’ the experience and ‘face the elements.’”

Tūi has spent nearly a year rough sleeping in Tauranga. Her days are typically spent reading, going to the public library, helping out at community meals and checking up on the streeties, “especially the girls” who she worries about. She says she hasn’t been hassled but she has “had about three fights.”

“I’ve never got hassled but I have had about three fights.”



When asked about where she stays, she has moved around. She started off staying by the harbour where she can see the sea in the mornings. Now she stays in different places depending on the weather.

“Sometimes I’ll walk around at night time. Depending on the weather. Sometimes I squat where I’m not supposed to, like in doorways.”

EXPERIENCES: ON THE STREETS

When talking about her work experiences Tūi describes herself as “very good at my job because I did the extra bit.” It is clear that she has always done the “extra bit” to take care of others. She shares stories of helping the children in care she was ‘guarding’ to understand actions and

consequences. When working with job seekers she found them work experience to match their interests rather than just putting them into “any old job.”

On the streets Tūi has continued with this helping role. She helps with setting up and cleaning up at the community meals. She works with other homeless outreach initiatives who provide safe spaces to congregate, store gear or make a hot drink. She keeps a lookout for the wellbeing of her streetie friends, giving them clothes she has got from Under the Stars or making them food. People confide in Tūi. She is saddened by some of the stories she hears from others on the street; stories of past trauma and abuse and she worries about her streetie friends, especially the other women. She doesn’t put up with any “nonsense” and

while she helps her friends she won't do things to create dependence on her, insisting they pay for things themselves and take responsibility for their actions.

NEXT STEPS: WINTER IS COMING

Tūī has been on the streets for nearly a year and although she has found the experience to be okay she wants to move on. Winter is coming and she would like to be off the streets. In her time on the streets she has been offered motel accommodation but turned it down. She does not want to live in a motel room.

“I’ve been asked twice if I wanted to go to a motel. I said no.”

Tūī has some options for where to go to, but none of them are ideal. She has family and friends she could stay with, but these would be temporary situations. Rents are high and she has a limited income. Preferably, she would like her own place where she does not have to share.

“I’ve been nearly a year on the streets. It’s coming to an end especially with winter coming. The family want me to go and stay [with them] but I do not want to live with others.”

A few years ago Tūī and her sister had put their names on a waiting list for kaumātua housing in a town in the Bay of Plenty. However Tūī quickly realised that the work and other opportunities in the town were limited so turned down the offer of a place when one came up.

“Sister and I had put our names down for kaumātua flats in [town]. They rang up to say it was available but I didn’t want to go there because there is nothing there.”

Tūī loves Tauranga and wants to stay there but finding somewhere affordable is difficult. She has recently heard about some units being built that will rent for “\$75 a week” and she has been told to “put my name down.” However, even if the units are an option for Tūī they are still undeveloped so she will likely have to move in with family in the interim.

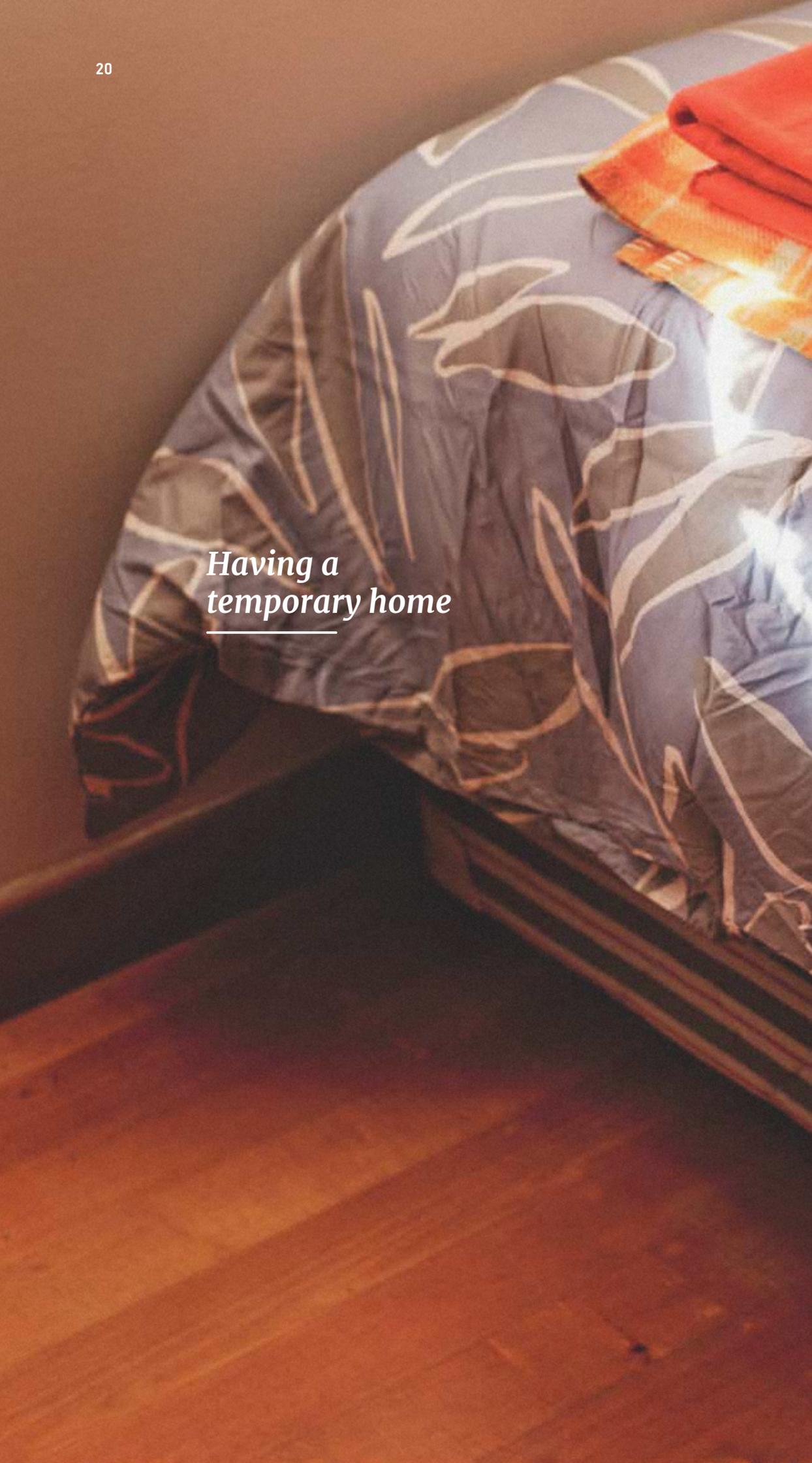
I would like my own little unit. Keep myself busy. Walking around. If I get my own place I’d like to volunteer to help others. I love Tauranga. The harbour. The views.”

Insights

PROVIDING HOUSING OPTIONS

Tūī’s story is about someone with decades of work and life experiences, always doing the extra bit to help others, who has been sleeping rough on the streets of Tauranga for nearly a year. She has extended family she could stay with but she does not want to live with others. Rents are high, she has a limited income and she is not getting any younger. Finding an affordable dwelling for a single person in Tauranga is a challenge. She is likely to have to move in with family while trying to find some alternative accommodation. Tūī’s story highlights the need to have a range of housing options. While motel rooms, bedsits or shared accommodation may suit some people, they do not work for others and everyone should have the option to live in a home that works for them.

*Having a
temporary home*



Aqua's story

A wake up call

Aqua is 26 years old and of Māori and Pākehā descent. He was raised by his mother who is both Māori with whakapapa links to Waikato iwi, and Pākehā through her English father, and by his stepfather who is of Pasifika descent. Aqua has never met his birth father, who is Māori from the East Coast, although his father has recently contacted him. Aqua is the oldest of six children with four younger sisters and one brother.

Aqua is currently living in Takitimu House, a transitional home. He has been there for the last week as a result of some “poor decisions” he made while under the influence of alcohol. He has a court date for sentencing in a few months and is worried that he might get a custodial sentence, as he does not have an address where he can complete a home or community detention sentence.

But things were not always like this.

Aqua never expected to be homeless. A few months ago he had a fulltime job and somewhere to live. He thought he was someone who had things together. He was not someone who would end up with nowhere to live, facing court charges. But, “hanging out with the wrong person at the wrong time” has resulted in him losing his job, living in emergency housing and facing charges for criminal offences. Aqua's experience of homelessness includes transitional housing.



SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Aqua's story is about problem drinking, about getting involved with the wrong people, making some poor decisions and the resulting 'ripple effect' of those decisions leading to finding himself homeless and staying in Takitimu House. It is also about a young person being at a crossroads, a point where things could go either way. His recent experiences have been "a wake-up call" and he wants to get his life sorted and back on track.

"I thought I had my stuff together. Alcohol caused me to lose everything because every time I have a drink I get carried away and then stuff happens."

THE EARLY YEARS: NORTH TO SOUTH AND BACK AGAIN

Aqua's early life was one of moving around as his parents shifted for work, living in both the North and South Islands. Aqua spent his early years in the Wairarapa, where his grandparents have a farm, and it is this part of the country that Aqua says is 'home' to him.

My grandparents own a farm in [the Wairarapa]. That's where I call home."

He has a stepfather who has been in his life since he was ten years old and who he thinks of as 'Dad.' Aqua started school in the Hutt Valley. When he was about ten his whānau moved to the South Island for work and it was there that he completed his intermediate and high school education.

By the time he was 17 Aqua had one child, born when he was 16, and had left school. He started a work experience

programme at a local marae as a gardener which led to a paid job. He did this for a while and then he moved away. Over the next few years Aqua worked on the farm in Wairarapa and on an apple orchard on the East Coast. He also spent some time in Palmerston North working and staying with family, in Blenheim working on the vineyards and in Wellington working as a labourer and hammer hand.

He met his now ex-partner in Palmerston North and they have two children, an eight-year-old and a six-month-old. The relationship was, in Aqua's words, a "toxic" one and they recently "parted ways." The children live with the ex-partner and Aqua keeps in contact with them, making an effort to "ring them every evening."

Aqua came to Tauranga over the summer of 2019/2020 with a couple of his siblings to go to the One Love Concert. After spending a bit of time here, on holiday he decided to stay. He felt "happy and settled here," managed to find some work and was soon working fulltime meeting new people and socialising. Unfortunately, some of the people he was hanging out with were not good influences and Aqua soon found himself in situations he had not planned.

THE RIPPLE STARTS

A few months ago Aqua was hanging out with a friend, having a few drinks and the friend decided to burgle a nearby house and put the stuff in Aqua's car. At the time, impaired by the alcohol, Aqua went along with it.

"I was hanging out with the wrong person at the wrong time. I had been drinking. Impaired my judgment. He robbed a house and put all the stuff in my car."

The next morning Aqua, now sobered up, realised what they had done and took the goods back to the people they had stolen from. Although the victims did not want to press charges, the police were now involved and Aqua was charged with burglary. He pleaded guilty, is paying reparation and has a sentencing date in early 2021.

In the morning (after the burglary) I took everything back to the owners. They didn't want to press charges but the police did."

THE RIPPLE SPREADS

As a result of the criminal activity he had been involved with, Aqua lost his full time job. His boss put him on a casual on-call contract. This did not give him a reliable regular income so he is enrolled with Work and Income for a Job Seeker benefit and is looking for more work. Aqua moved away from the people who were a 'bad influence' and moved in with a friend. However the friend had a jealous ex-partner who arsoned Aqua's vehicle while Aqua was out of town.

Then, last weekend, things escalated further for Aqua. He was out drinking with friends when one of his 'friends' accused him of stealing a cell phone. Aqua hadn't done this; the phone was later found in the car. Aqua was drunk, overwhelmed with what had been happening, worried about the court

sentencing and feeling like things were out of control. And now his mates were accusing him of stealing their stuff. He felt depressed and “worthless” and tried to take his life by driving his car into a pole.

“I felt really down. I wanted to give up. I thought I was worthless. I attempted to take my own life.”

He ended up spending the night in the police cells and was in front of the judge in the morning, charged with drink driving.

HOMELESSNESS: TRANSITIONAL HOME

After his night out, attempted suicide and his court appearance, Aqua had nowhere to go. He was not able to go back to the house he had been staying at and he didn't know what to do. At this point Aqua took the first step to get back on track: he asked for help.

He went to the Work and Income office and asked for help to find somewhere to stay. They referred him to Takitimu House. At the house he explained what had happened to him and they offered him a place to stay.

SUPPORT: “LIKE BEING AT YOUR OWN MARAE”

Aqua has found the support and help from Takitimu House to be “amazing” and he is hopeful that he can find his

way out of the situation he has ended up in; that this is a turning point for him. The whānau atmosphere at the house is, for Aqua, “like being at your own marae” and the care, respect and help has been what he needed to start thinking about how he can get his life back together.

“The help they have given me here has been amazing. Someone cares about me here. They are giving me my own motivation. It's awesome. It's a tight family here. Look after others, help each other out. Respectful of others. It's a second family, a family home, like being at your own marae. There is a lot of love and respect here.”

STOPPING THE RIPPLE: NEXT STEPS

Aqua never thought he would be in this situation; homeless and facing possible jail time. He was someone who had his stuff together, but a drinking problem and poor decisions have led him to this place. He has started working on getting back on track.

One of Aqua's first steps is to deal with his drinking problem. While Aqua probably wouldn't describe himself as an addict, he has realised that he has a problem with alcohol. He has decided to quit drinking and do an alcohol education programme.

“It was a wake-up call. Because of recent events I realised I had to not drink, not make poor decisions. I have kids to think about. I need to get into my own accommodation. Not to go to jail. I have decided: No more drinking. I am planning on doing an alcohol course through Hanmer Clinic. I have done it [alcohol

programme] before in the past. But [this time] having the extra support [will help].”

Aqua does not want to go to jail, so housing is important as he is hopeful for a community-based sentence and for that, he needs his own place.

“Hopefully from here I can get to my own accommodation. I have a sentencing date in January. I need my own accommodation where I can do electronic monitoring. Rather than going to jail.”

Getting a house is reliant on income to save for a bond and to afford to pay rent. It also needs a landlord willing to take on someone who has a criminal record and may be on a community sentence.

“I need to get more casual or fulltime work to pay for a house. I have been looking around but it is difficult to find somewhere. And I need a property manager who would take on someone who might have a bracelet. I might have to go through emergency housing. I would need to save for a bond. Hopefully I can save while I’m here, enough to get a bond. Ideally, a one bedroom place would be good. Realistically I would have to go through emergency housing.”

Aqua is realistic that he may have to go into emergency housing. He is not sure if he would be able to stay at Takitimu House to complete a community –based sentence, but he plans to talk to the staff and his lawyer about that.

Insights

A FEW POOR DECISIONS

Aqua started his year on a positive note. He’d travelled to Tauranga to go to a summer concert, decided he liked it and made plans to stay. He was soon working and things seemed to be going well. While he broke up with his partner, this was a positive move as the relationship was not healthy. Within a few months though, Aqua’s life had unraveled as his drinking problem led to some poor decisions and from there to offending, a suicide attempt and homelessness.

This has been a “wake up call” for Aqua who never thought he would find himself homeless and in trouble. He took the step of asking for help, first at Work and Income and then at Takitimu House. The importance of helpful, knowledgeable staff at government agencies, and having available supportive services such as Takitimu House, for Aqua and others in similar circumstances, cannot be underestimated.

Aqua has the support of staff and social workers at Takitimu House and they are helping him to work through his situation and have connected him with a good lawyer. He is hopeful that he can find a job, a place to live, and a community-based sentence, and from there, work on getting his life back together and move forward.

*Having a
temporary home*



Manu's story

Sanctuary: A healing place

Manu is 58 years old of Pasifika descent, and has been on the streets, on and off, for the past 25-30 years. He is currently staying in Takitimu House, a transitional home. He has been there for about a month and is hoping to stay for some time so that he can work on getting himself to a better place. This is not the first transitional home that Manu has stayed in, but it is one that he has found to be “a sanctuary, a healing place” and “a really good place to stay.”

But things were not always like this.

Manu came to New Zealand from the Islands as a child, but an event in his youth changed the path of his life. He ended up in prison and by the time he was in his thirties he was drinking and gambling away any money he had, and living on the streets. Manu moved to Tauranga this year to start a new life after years of homelessness in other cities. Manu's experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping, boarding houses, emergency housing and transitional housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Manu's story is about the failure of the justice system. It is about the impact of incarceration on a young person. It is also the story of a young man who got caught up in being "young, dumb and stupid" and because of this, his life took a turn that resulted in addictions, mental illness and homelessness.

A TERRIBLE MISTAKE

In order to understand Manu's story of homelessness, there is a need to go back a few decades. Manu's story really started with one mistake. A group of three friends, young boys, only 13 and 14 years old, getting into drinking and causing trouble on the streets of a big city. One night they are drunk and things go badly wrong, something happens and they find themselves charged with a serious crime. Manu is the oldest, at 14, and the judge decides to make an example of him.

"The judge said, 'You did a man's crime. You can do a man's time in a man's jail.'

"The crime occurred because I was drunk. That's not an excuse or a good reason."

It is New Zealand, in the late 1970s, the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act (1989) is more than ten years away from revolutionising youth justice practices. Manu pleads guilty because, "I was the oldest and someone had to take the rap." As a 14-year-old, charged with a serious crime, Manu is treated as an adult and sent to an adult maximum security prison to serve a lengthy sentence. His co-offenders are

charged as accomplices, receive much shorter sentences, and serve their time in a youth unit.

THE TOLL

After serving his time Manu was released on parole, but the time inside had taken its toll. He had been inside for more than 12 years; going in as a teenager and coming out as an adult in his late twenties. During his time inside he became mentally unwell and some of his time served was spent in psychiatric care. Manu was released on parole in the early 1990s with conditions to continue to take his medication and to remain part of the mental health system. At this time, Manu was, in his words, "a real sick puppy because of the mental illness."

POST RELEASE: THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Manu's parents had come to New Zealand from the Islands in the 1960s when Manu was two years old. The oldest of eleven children, Manu had six brothers and four sisters born in New Zealand. The family settled in Auckland and that was where Manu was raised. His parents were "very religious," attending church and "praying and fasting every Friday for their family."

After he was released from jail, Manu moved back in with his parents and he stayed there for at least the next three years. His parents were generally supportive and he was particularly close to his mother. But he had become ill in jail and things were not easy for him on the outside.

GOING BACKWARDS

He moved out of his parents' home after a few years and went flatting. Manu moved around all over the city, staying with "all different kinds of people." The places he stayed were "not good places to stay."

"Flatting taught me a lot about people. Not good things. I stayed all over Auckland, South Auckland, everywhere."

Manu's mother became ill and eventually passed away. It was after this that things really started going backwards for Manu. He missed his mother, felt alone and unhappy. He started staying in different boarding houses all over the city. The other people there were "bad influences" and drugs, drinking and violence were prevalent.

"My mother was the closest thing to me, my best friend. When she passed away I felt like I had nobody."

"Then I went backwards. Especially, after Mum died."

"I started staying in boarding houses in Auckland. People were a bad influence. I was fearful and scared. They were all bad boarding houses. The people in there were on drugs. I never got involved in the drug scene but I got involved in drinking."

Manu had soon developed a serious drinking and gambling habit. He drank to "escape the reality" of his life. At one point in his life, he recalls, he was working at a cash job and drinking two boxes a day, every day after work and he did this for ten years.

"I would go to the pub after work. Every day for ten years. I would drink two boxes a day, every day. To escape my reality. I didn't like myself."

HOMELESSNESS: BOARDING HOUSES AND ROUGH SLEEPING

At this time in his life, Manu was receiving an invalid benefit and as well, would do casual labouring work when he could. The same night he got paid it all went on drinking and gambling. He would go to the casino and "lose all my money the same night." He was staying in boarding houses but because drinking wasn't allowed in the boarding houses, Manu and others from the house would go to the local park to drink. This arrangement worked until a Liquor Ban came into effect and they could no longer drink in the parks.

It was at this point, Manu says, that the homelessness really started. His drinking habit forced him to start living on the streets. He couldn't stay at the boarding house or with his family because of his drinking, so he started living on the streets.

"That's where it started – the homelessness."

"I couldn't stay at the boarding houses because of my drinking. I couldn't go home because my family didn't like my drinking. They are all Christians. I've seen too many bad things in my life to believe in that. I couldn't go to church and think, 'I'll be drinking and gambling the next day.'"

"My family didn't want to know me because I was always asking for money for gambling and liquor."

HOMELESSNESS: LIFE ON THE STREETS

Manu spent many years sleeping rough “on the streets.” He has stayed under bridges, in parks and on the main streets of cities like Auckland, Wellington, Palmerston North and Tauranga. He spent five years living on the streets of Auckland. Manu described life on the streets as scary, a place with no love or support, where it was cold and dangerous so you stayed awake all night and slept during the day, where you begged for money and spent it on alcohol and gambling.

“In winter we would stay awake all night and stay asleep all day. Did begging for money. I was very good at the TAB and the Casino. I am a good gambler but I would put it all back to the machine. I would win \$800 then it would all go back in and I would lose it all.

“I was scared all the time on the streets. I avoided certain places all the time. I became streetwise. I was on the streets in Auckland for five years. On the streets there is no love. There is never any love or support on the streets. Everywhere I went there was danger. Because I lived that long on the streets.”

Manu is quietly spoken and as he says, he “is shy, sensitive and vulnerable.” He stays away from violence and although he drinks he does not take other drugs as he reacts badly to them. On the streets he would keep an eye on the youth, try to keep them away from drugs and alcohol, and would not steal to feed his addictions.

“I went on to the streets. Lived on the streets. The people on the streets became my family. The only one I knew.”

“I would try to look after the younger ones on the streets. I would not introduce them to drugs or alcohol. They would ask [me for alcohol] and I would say, ‘no.’ I did not want them to get addicted. They would soon move on because I wouldn’t give them alcohol.”

“I would always do the right thing. If I was with a group of fellas drinking and we needed more to drink. I would say no to robbing somewhere [for money or liquor]. I would say we need to go borrow some money, go and buy more liquor, then pay back the money to the friend.”

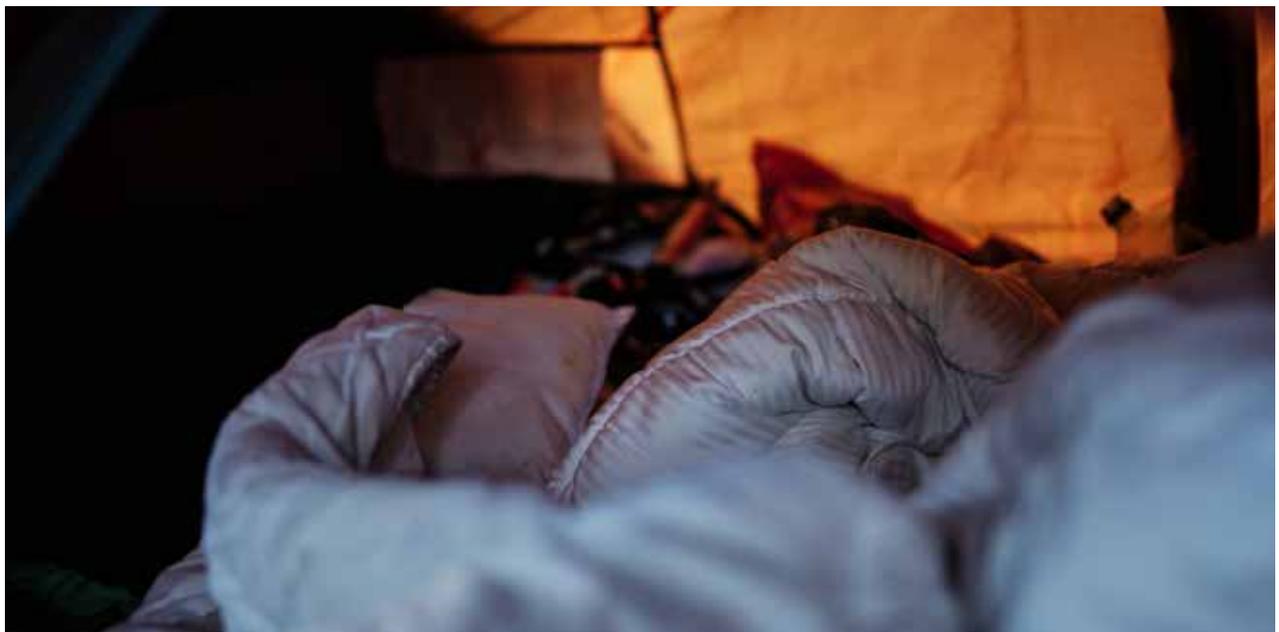
Manu has moved on and off living on the streets over the years. He has at times stayed in emergency or transitional housing but often felt safer on the street than in some of the housing options. Sometimes he would spend some of his week in a backpackers or other accommodation, but could only afford to stay for part of the week. So he’d stay there for three or four nights, then move

out to the streets and ‘sleep rough’ until the next payday.

TAURANGA: A NEW LIFE

Manu’s journey to Tauranga began more than a year ago. He had been living in Wellington staying in a transitional house. He had been there for eight months and he had plans to move out. He had a flat set up and a job, and was planning on moving there when his father became ill. Manu chose to go home to Auckland to see his father.

He stayed in Auckland for three months, managing to get a flat via a community housing provider. But after his father passed away Manu decided that he needed to leave Auckland to “start a new life.” After his father passed away he told his family that, “there was nothing here for me.” He had heard about Tauranga from someone in Wellington; they had told him, “If you want work and a good place, then go to Tauranga.”



So Manu got on a bus and went to Tauranga. Arriving there he went straight to Work and Income to enquire about housing and benefits. He thought they would have him covered, but “how stupid could I be?!” He had voluntarily left a house in Auckland which meant he was ineligible for housing assistance. So he was back on the streets, staying in the local backpackers when he could afford it and spending the rest of the week rough sleeping.

“They told me, ‘You left Auckland. You had a place there. So you are not eligible.’ So I was on the streets for the week. Then I would stay at the backpackers for three or four nights, then back on the streets, when the money ran out.”

TAKITIMU HOUSE: A PLACE OF HOPE

Although Work and Income could not assist with getting a house for Manu, they told him about Takitimu House and he asked to be referred there. At his first meeting with the manager, he decided that it was not the place for him. He had spent years in and out of shelters, emergency housing and institutions with different programmes and he “didn’t believe in that stuff.” He had seen too many bad things to believe in ‘programmes.’ So he thanked the manager for her time and left.

WINZ told me about this place. I asked, ‘How do I get in?’ I got referred. I talked to [the manager]. She came on hard. Told me all about what would happen here, the programmes. I didn’t believe in all that. I was too institutionalised. I thought, ‘I’ve come to the wrong place.’ I apologised to [the manager]. I said, ‘This

is not the place for me, because it’s too institutionalised.’ She said, ‘You’re on the streets, right?’ and, ‘If you want a shower or food, you can come here, any time.’”

A few days later, Manu was sitting drinking in a park and he realised that he was repeating the same pattern that he always had. He had come to Tauranga for a change, to start a new life, and here he was, doing the same thing. So he decided at that point to take the chance on Takitimu House and he went back and asked to stay.

“I was on the streets, drinking. Sitting there, and I thought, I was doing the same as I was in Auckland. I decided that I had come here [Tauranga] for a change, and I was doing the same thing. So two days later I came back, and she [the manager] said, ‘Are you ready now?’”

Manu has now been at Takitimu House for a month and for him it is place of hope. He has even come to like the programmes!

“Then I came here. I have done a lot of bad things. Burned a lot of bridges. This place here, it’s like a haven for a person who has been sick. It’s turned my whole life around. For me, it’s given me hope. It’s not an institution. Because of [the manager] and the way she operates.”

FUTURE PLANS

Manu is at a point now where he wants to heal, to get help and to find some peace of mind. He had been offered a job but on the encouragement of the staff, he decided to try some of the programmes on offer. He is now making plans and setting goals and is open to healing and

moving forward. He would like a job and a place of his own and he hopes that he can get there, with the support and help of the staff at Takitimu House.

“I have been here about a month. It’s good. Very good. They are helping me out. The last three weeks have been very helpful. People have been very helpful. Kind. Generous. They care. They are helping us homeless people and people with mental health who are sick. To set goals. Do programmes. I never used to believe in that stuff [programmes], but that has changed since being here.”

“The staff don’t force us into it. They encourage us and support us. They know exactly what their job is. I will stay here as long as I can. Use this to get a better lifestyle. A place of my own and a proper job. I had a job offer at the orchards, but the women [staff] said ‘try the new things here, the programmes, first.’ So I tried for a week and I liked it. So I’m doing that first.”

“I’ve even come to like the programmes! Addiction, budgeting, setting goals. To me, I call this a sanctuary. Like a healing place for us.”

Insights

SYSTEM FAILURE AND FINDING PEACE

Manu's story is one of the system failing a young person who made some bad choices and a terrible mistake. This led Manu down a path he may never have gone on otherwise. Manu has paid the price for the actions of his youth and it has been a hefty price where he has ended up mentally ill, homeless and drinking to escape his reality. It is not about excusing the crime or the responsibility for it, but about considering how we treat young offenders and how we ensure that the 'punishment' is tempered with rehabilitation and reintegration that does not result in mental illness, addictions and decades of homelessness. It is also a story of hope; that after so many years, Manu may have come to a place where he can finally heal and can move on to a more peaceful life.

“This place has given me hope and I want to grab it with both hands. To give me a better life and find my peace of mind.”



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K.T.'s story

Disconnection and addiction

K.T. is 26 years old and of Māori and Pākehā descent, with whakapapa links to Taranaki iwi through his father. He is one of four children with an older sister and two younger brothers. He was born in Palmerston North but moved with his parents to the Western Bay of Plenty as a four year old. K.T.'s parents both work in traffic management and he has also worked in that sector, off and on since he left school.

K.T. is currently staying in Takitimu House, a transitional home. He has been there for four months after leaving a mental health facility and having nowhere else to stay. He is working on making some lifestyle changes, dealing with his drug addictions and making plans for further training. For K.T., Takitimu House has been a turning point; a place where he can get clean and make plans, and one which he hopes will lead to a change in his life path.

But things were not always like this.

Last year K.T. had got 'clean' and got himself a job in Taranaki. He was doing okay until the addiction took over and then he was out of a job, and back in Tauranga. He managed to get another job and a flat and then got kicked out for stealing his flatmate's weed. A family friend let him stay with them, but he didn't feel safe there so moved into his car for a few nights before referring himself to a mental health service. A week later he was discharged and with nowhere else to go, he was referred to Takitimu House. K.T.'s experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping, staying in his car, couch surfing and transitional housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

K.T.'s story is about the effects of synthetic drugs. It is also about racism, and disconnection, and about a kid with potential. Disengaged from school, with only two teachers who had ever made him feel worthwhile, by the time he was 16 K.T. was being asked to leave school. 'Out of school' programmes didn't work for him so by 17 he was working as a labourer and developing a significant addiction to synthetic cannabis. The addiction led to mental illness, self harm, petty theft and drink driving charges interspersed with periods of sobriety, work when he could pass a drug test, and homelessness.

SCHOOL YEARS

"I'm not a dumb little Māori kid."

K.T. says that school was "challenging." He remembers having a teacher in Year 7 who saw his potential, opened his mind and made him feel like he was not a "dumb little Māori kid," and another teacher in high school who was "a good teacher." But the rest of his schooling is not a positive one. He recalls the "racism of the teachers," of having his taonga taken off him by a teacher in primary school and his parents going to the school and complaining. In high school he struggled. When he was 16, a close friend died and, after this event, K.T.'s schooling suffered and he was soon asked to leave.

"I had one good teacher at high school. ... A friend died, in an accident, about a month or two before I got kicked out [of school]. I found that really hard. [My] school [work] suffered. They asked me to leave. I had to go to all my teachers and

they signed a leaving form. They gave me an option – better than being expelled – having that [expulsion] on my record."

Alternative Education didn't work for him, and soon he had left there and was working. He had worked for his father off and on since he was 15, so he was able to get some work there, and then got his first fulltime job at 17 through a contact of his father's.

"I got referred to out of school programmes – Employment Plus but I didn't get on with the teachers. Got put in to work. Got my first job at 17. Laying fibre optic cables. One of Dad's work friends had a position."

LEGAL WEED AND MENTAL HEALTH

K.T. had started smoking marijuana around the time he was 'kicked out' of school. Marijuana shows up on drug tests, and random tests were a requirement of his workplace. However, synthetic cannabis, had recently become available and did not show up on the tests, so K.T. started using synthetic cannabis and in his words he was "eating that for breakfast, lunch and tea," an estimated "four to six grams a day."

Unfortunately synthetic cannabinoids are highly addictive and can exacerbate mental illness.

"Synthetic cannabinoids are very addictive. They can make you anxious and can make mental health problems worse. ...The comedown or withdrawal can last days or weeks... [Some of the more] serious withdrawal symptoms [include]: difficulty stopping use; weight

loss; suicidal feelings; paranoia, anxiety and panic attacks; uncontrollable anger. A significant number of people in New Zealand experience extreme reactions, serious psychological distress or loss of consciousness requiring hospitalisation with risk of death.⁷

K.T. became heavily addicted to the “legal weed” and after six months he lost his job. When K.T. realised how addicted he had become he stopped using. The withdrawal sent him into a drug-induced psychosis where he tried to kill himself and ended up being admitted to a mental health ward. There two more suicide attempts occurred. He was 18 years old.

“I got heavily addicted to that [legal weed]. I was a functioning addict.”

“Then I realised what it was doing so I stopped it. That [withdrawal] was what brought the mental illness on.

“Coming off it, I tried to kill myself. Ran in front of a car. The driver stopped, called the police and they took me to the station. I didn’t want to talk to the police about it, because I didn’t want to admit about the drugs. The police drove me to the mental health ward. I got to the mental health ward. I tried to kill myself two more times.”

K.T.’s mental illness, drug-induced psychosis, is recurring. He has prescribed medication which he admits that he takes “on and off” and he usually has another episode at least every two years.

After being discharged from the mental health ward, K.T. was on a sickness benefit for six months, completed a welding course and got himself a job as a welder. By the time he was 20, he had lost his job due to drink driving, and was also dealing with a cancer diagnosis and chemotherapy treatment. A “binge” just before his 22nd birthday caused a paranoid episode where he turned up at a hospital ward convinced they were going to kill him.

“I had finished the chemo just before my 22nd birthday, had a bit of a binge. Watched a movie, ‘The Do-Over.’ Got paranoid. Went into the cancer ward and said ‘you are going to kill me!’”

LIVING AT HOME AND PERIODIC HOMELESSNESS: COUCH SURFING, ROUGH SLEEPING

K.T. had continued living with his parents after he left school and he continued to live with them for a number of years. During this time he experimented with other drugs (methamphetamine, alcohol and marijuana) and by the time he was 20 years old he was addicted. He would periodically be ‘kicked out’ because of his addictions or sent to his family to get clean. Whenever he could pass a drug test, he got work, usually with his Dad.

⁷ New Zealand Drug Foundation – Te Tūāpapa Tarukino o Aotearoa. Synthetic Cannabinoids (n.d.), p.1. Also New Zealand Drug Foundation – Te Tūāpapa Tarukino o Aotearoa (2018), which indicates that the risks of synthetic use include, for example: death, psychosis, suicide ideation, depression, anxiety, hallucinations.

“Had an addiction. By about 20 to 21, I would have said I was addicted.”

“I lived at Mum and Dad’s. They would kick me out at times. I stayed with friends. At one stage they kicked me out so I moved to New Plymouth [to live] with an auntie. But I missed my friends so I came back here.”

“When I was about 23 I picked up a [meth] pipe. I didn’t get addicted but I got a bit stupid. I was thieving from Dad. So he kicked me out to the streets. I was living on the streets for a week. Then Mum sent me to her family. Got sent to my Nana’s to sort myself out. Got sober and clean. Then came back for a while. Then got addicted again. Spent time in and out of addiction.”

NINE MONTHS CLEAN

In 2019, K.T. moved to Taranaki and stayed with an auntie. It took him six weeks to get clean, after which he got a job working in a laundry. He moved in with a cousin and things were going well; he had a secure job and a paycheck and he was sober and clean. But within nine months he “got back into the weed” and his cousin asked him to leave. So he quit his job and moved back to Tauranga where his Dad had a job available for him.

HOMELESSNESS: FROM FLATTING TO SLEEPING IN THE CAR

Now back in Tauranga working, and keen to get his own place, K.T. found an advertisement on Facebook from someone wanting a flatmate. He moved in paying \$200 a week for rent. It was his first time living in “his own place,” not at

home or with relatives. Things started off okay until a series of events collided and he ended up being kicked out.

The first event was a broken foot which happened six weeks into the job. He was now at home with his broken foot and not much to do except drink alcohol and smoke weed. Then the Covid-19 lockdown happened and between Accident Compensation and Covid-19 relief payments K.T. was getting \$1000 a week. Then his tooth broke and he got a prescription for painkillers (Tramadol). Being stuck at home with a broken foot, a broken tooth, plenty of money for drugs and alcohol, and nothing to do, was a recipe for disaster. K.T. spent his time drinking, smoking, and taking pills. Stealing his flatmate’s weed was the last straw and she kicked him out halfway through the lockdown.

He ended up in a family friend’s house where he did not feel safe, as some in the household had gang connections. He tried to find somewhere else to live. He couldn’t go home because of his addictions and he wasn’t thinking clearly, in any case, as he says:

“I took up smoking weed to try and think about my situation and it didn’t help!”

He left the family friend’s house, spent a few nights sleeping in his car, and then referred himself to a mental health service. After a week there, not considered “sick enough” he was discharged, and referred to Takitimu House.

SUPPORT AND HEALING

K.T. has found Takitimu House to be a supportive place; a place where he has

people who care, and where he can work on his sobriety. Since being there he has been supported to get his dental work done, has enrolled in a polytech course and signed up to the Hanmer addictions day programme. The staff have also been with him to the doctor to get his medication adjusted.

“[Being here is a turning point because] coming here made me realise after sleeping in my car, that here I have a roof over my head. There are people going through similar situations so it’s easy to relate [to them]. It is easy to do the sober thing here. We are not allowed drugs and alcohol on site.”

“It is a lovely environment. There is support. Each new person gets inducted into our house.”

At Takitimu House, K.T. also has access to a Māori healer to work on his wellbeing. Although he has only been to one wānanga, so far he has found it to be a positive, affirming experience. K.T. didn’t grow up in te ao Māori and has only recently learned a bit about his marae, so being able to learn in a kaupapa Māori context is beneficial for his healing journey.

“Māori was beaten out of my Nan. She was from that generation. So she didn’t pass it on to Dad so I didn’t grow up in that world. When I moved to Taranaki to stay with my auntie I learnt a bit more about where I was from.”

“There is a healer for the Māori side of things here. To kōrero with us about why we act how we do. There was a wānanga on Sunday. It was good.”

Insights

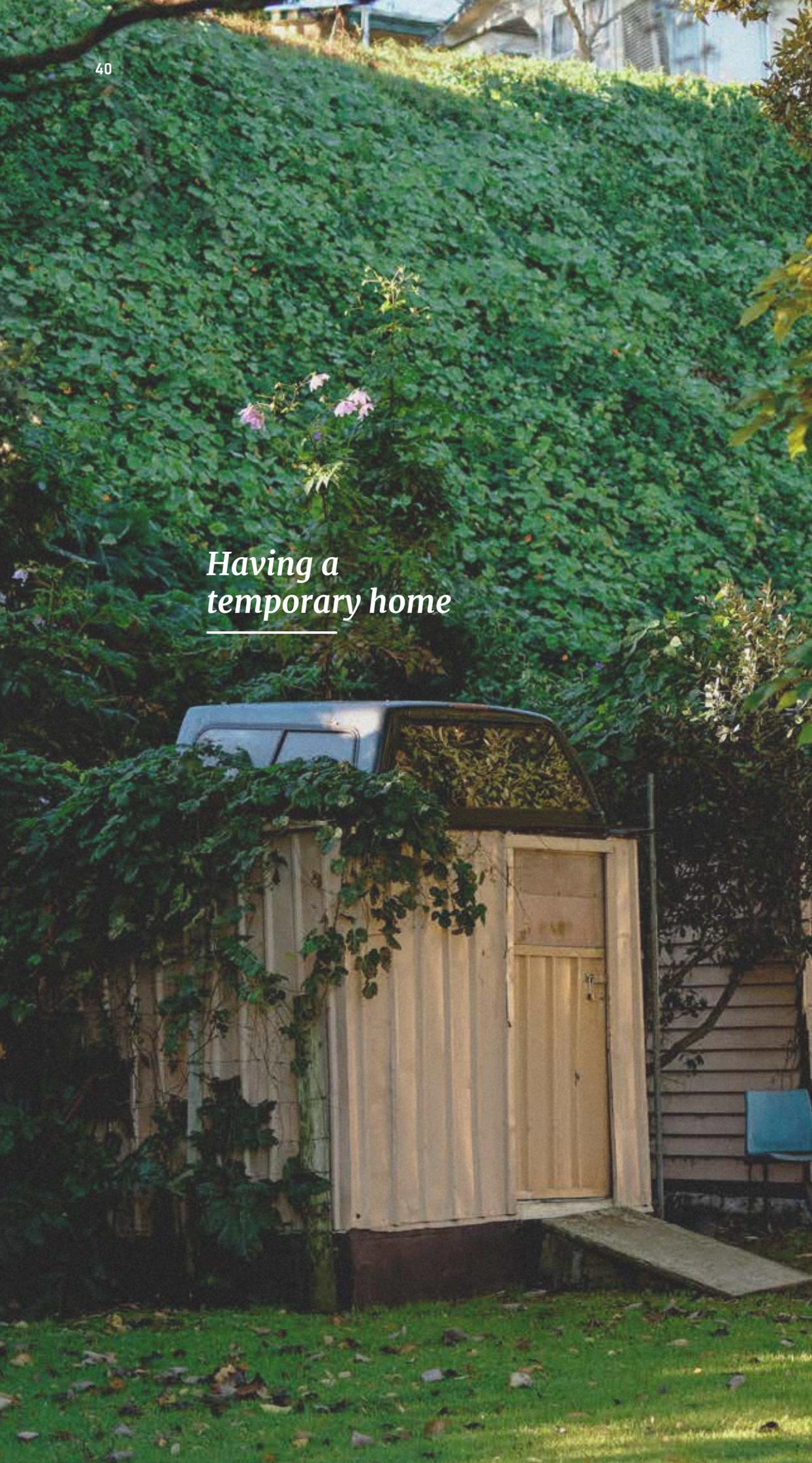
DISCONNECTION, ADDICTION, MENTAL ILLNESS AND A TURNING POINT

K.T.’s story is about racism and the failure of a system which resulted in a young person leaving school disconnected, disillusioned and using drugs to fill the gaps. His story highlights the link between drugs and mental illness and the need to educate young people about the impacts of drugs on mental health. It also shows the need for services, like Takitimu House, to provide support to make different choices moving forward.

K.T. doesn’t want to “let himself down” again. He wants to stay sober, to heal, to do further study, to get a career and perhaps get into civil engineering. He also wants to learn about te ao Māori, about his whānau, his whakapapa and his connections.

The child who had his taonga taken off him, who only remembers two teachers who saw his potential, who left school, lost, disconnected, grieving for his friend and soon fell into a cycle of addictions and drug-induced mental illness, is at a crossroads, a turning point. He has the option to take up the support on offer, to heal, to do the work to stay well, to stay clean and sober and be on a more positive life path where he can be proud of who he is and where he is from.

*Having a
temporary home*



Ānaru's story

Finding hope: Breaking the cycle

Ānaru is 39 years old and of Māori descent. His whānau has whakapapa links to Rotorua and Western Bay iwi and he was raised between the city, the farm and the beach. He has five children, aged between five and 23 years, and two mokopuna. He is currently staying in Takitimu House, a transitional home. He has been there for four months and while it was hard to stay at first, he is now glad that he has, and is making progress on getting well and changing the course of his life. He is doing various programmes and working on getting a job and eventually a place of his own. He would like a one bedroom place, where he can stay and where his son can visit. He is interested in working in the mental health field, to help others who have been through what he has.

But things were not always like this.

Five years ago Ānaru was living in a van with his partner and two children, while they struggled to find somewhere to live. Two years ago he was living by himself in his car and four months ago Ānaru “had nothing.” He had got involved with someone who stole the car that he had been sleeping in for the past six months. His ex-partner did not want him at her place and he had nowhere else to go. He arrived at Takitimu House on a weekend, after a four-day drug binge, and asked if he could stay. Ānaru’s experience of homelessness includes sleeping in a car and a van, emergency housing and transitional housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Ānaru's story is about the legacy of abuse and neglect; of being unwanted, a child born to a mother who was too young and raised by family members who were unable to properly care for him. By the time he was 14 and a half, Ānaru had left school, had fathered a daughter, and was heading for a lifestyle of drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness and periods of homelessness. His story is also about finding hope, having the support of staff and others at Takitimu House, and wanting to be a better role model to his son and to help others who have been through similar pain.

THE BLACK SHEEP

“I was seen but never heard – like the black sheep of the family.”

Ānaru's mother was a teenager at high school when she became pregnant with him. She never told the birth father about the baby, and after he was born Ānaru's grandparents were his initial caregivers. His grandparents were alcoholics and so when he was two years old, Ānaru was given as a tamaiti whāngai to another family within the whānau. Ānaru remembers the abuse and the neglect he endured. He remembers being unwanted and being kept home from school because he “was too bruised to be at school.” One of his aunties would put him in a cold bath to reduce the bruising. His mother's younger siblings, his aunties and uncles, remember how he was treated but they were teenagers and unable to stop what was happening.

THE ADDICTION BEGINS

When he was 13, after years of abuse, neglect and haphazard schooling, Ānaru left the area and went to live with his birth mother in a rural town in the King Country. He was abused and neglected there as well and “didn't make it to the fourth form,” instead enrolling in some courses which he never completed. He had started to go “off the rails.”

He had some work in a local shop but was getting into trouble, going to parties, “causing chaos” and coming to the attention of the police. He spent a few nights in the police cells, collected some fines but managed to avoid jail time. Around this time, Ānaru started taking marijuana and he liked it; marijuana enabled him to switch off thinking about what had happened to him, the abuse and neglect.

“I liked the feeling because I didn't have worry about the how and the why [of what had happened to me].”

IN AND OUT OF REHAB

Over the next few years Ānaru moved around, had three more children, developed addictions to drugs and alcohol and was in and out of rehabilitation. He completed a drug and alcohol programme at Higher Ground in Auckland. Another time he stayed in transitional housing in Hamilton which had requirements to attend AA and NA meetings; he was desperate for somewhere to stay, had seen their advertisement in a phone book, so he “contacted them and stayed there.”

THE RELATIONSHIP

Six years ago Ānaru “fell into a relationship” with someone who was a “full blown alcoholic.” Ānaru had been to rehab and had been clean for six years, but he “didn’t do the suggested things”; i.e. to not get into a relationship too soon, and certainly not with another addict. His partner already had three children and in the time they were a couple, they had another child together.

THE EVICTION

When Ānaru started seeing his partner, Hayley, she was renting a house through a property management company and had been there for ten years. It was a “standard three 3 bedroom house, with no garage” for which she paid \$280 per week. She had two teenagers and a four year old when Ānaru moved in with her and soon after, their own baby was born. The house was in some disrepair; “it was trashed.” Some of the damage had been caused by his partner’s ex, but other issues were the responsibility of the landlord such as a non-working stove and rotting floorboards in the bathroom. Despite their requests, repairs were not carried out, although

the rent was increased by another \$60 per week. Hayley had got behind on the rent payments and four months after Ānaru moved in, they were evicted for unpaid rent. And so the homelessness started and continued for the next two and half years.

HOMELESSNESS: THE VAN

After the eviction, Ānaru and Hayley could not find anywhere to live. They had been to Work and Income and were on the Social Housing Register but there were no available houses in Tauranga. So they lived in their van. As they couldn’t all fit in the van, the two teenagers were sent to stay with relatives; one with their grandmother and one with their birth father. The teenagers were not happy with being separated from each other or their mother.

The first four months when Ānaru and Hayley were in the van, with the four year old and the baby, they would drive around and find somewhere to park up for the night. Sometimes they would ask friends if they could park the van at their house for the night, but sometimes, Ānaru says “you were too ashamed to ask” if you could do that. Some mornings they woke up to find that they had parking tickets. On one occasion Ānaru wrote to the council explaining their situation and the council waived the parking fine.

Money they would have otherwise spent on rent went towards a gas cooker, bottles of water and food. At this time Ānaru was working in the kiwifruit industry but they only had one vehicle, which they were living in. The logistics of trying to get to work, in the vehicle that was also their ‘home’ became too much, so Ānaru left the job.

HOMELESSNESS: THE HOLIDAY PARK

Eventually the cost for petrol was too high and they wanted out of the van. They went back to Work and Income to ask about housing options. Work and Income offered them a Relocation Grant and the option to relocate, but they did not want to move to another town; to move the children away from their school and friends.

“WINZ were trying to get us to move out of Tauranga. But my partner didn’t want to move the children from their school and their friends.”

The next option was emergency housing so they went to motels and hotels asking if they had vacancies. They were either turned away or offered short term options for a few days. Then a holiday park offered them a spot, so they moved there and stayed for the next year. Work and Income helped pay for the holiday park, but only one week at a time, so each week they had to go into Work and Income to organise the payments. They did this every week for the whole time they stayed there.

“We were going around getting quotes from hotels or motels. Asking if they have rooms for families. Some would just say ‘we have no rooms.’ We got turned away. Some would put you up for a few days but not weeks or months. The holiday park let us stay for a year.”

HOMELESSNESS: THE WHĀNAU BACH

After a year at the holiday park, and with still no options for their own place, they left and went to Ānaru’s whānau bach at one of the local beaches. They put all the children in a caravan at the beach

and they stayed in one of the houses, paying a very low rent. But the stresses of the homelessness were taking their toll; the relationship was unhealthy and they were drinking heavily.

“At times the hardship and the homelessness, the kids were unsettled and there were a lot of dramas between me and her.”

After three months, the whānau, tired of the drinking and them staying at the bach, asked them to leave.

“An uncle let us stay in his bach but the family got hōhā about us being there so we had to leave after about three months. We couldn’t take it [the stress] – we were drinking heavily – we got kicked out because of the drinking.”

HOMELESSNESS: BACK TO THE VAN AND THE HOLIDAY PARK

After being evicted from the whānau bach they considered going to stay with whānau in Rotorua but did not want to move away. So they were back to Tauranga, staying in the van. At this point they enrolled with two social service agencies, both of whom were helpful and encouraging. One agency offered them a transitional housing option. However, it was a communal house and the teenagers were reluctant to have to share with strangers so they did not go there.

Another agency initially got them back into the Holiday Park, and then three months later helped them get into a four bedroom Kāinga Ora house. As well, this agency arranged budget advice, helped Ānaru get back into work, and provided support and advocacy.

“They were excellent. They helped us all the way. We got a house through them. They gave us budgeting services, got me back into work part time. The staff looked after my partner and kids, to get her out of the rut. At Christmas time they gave us ‘chits’ for kai and presents donated by the community. They put us back into the holiday park again. She was home with the babies. I would go to work. Three months later we ended up in a house – through their services and contacts we got bumped up the list with the government. They would go to interviews with my partner, like at Work and Income, and support her.”

WALKING AWAY

They moved into the Kāinga Ora house and whilst they were no longer homeless, the relationship was not working. Ānaru was now working fulltime and Hayley was at home with the children, however they were struggling. Ānaru was feeling overwhelmed with work, the drinking, his own mental health and feeling as though he was coming home and still ‘working’, doing chores, cleaning and cooking. So, he left.

“I wanted to stop drinking but she was drinking. So I was working and coming home and still working – cleaning house, cooking, making lunches for the kids... She was drunk.

“What she needed was to have her own house and the kids settled. She just wanted to relax after all we had been through. We were still head butting because of my mental illness that I was

in denial about. I was still going to work, doing the lunches, coming home, cleaning the house making dinner but I wasn’t happy because I was doing too much. I know when it is too much, I run. So I left.”

HOMELESSNESS: THE CAR AND COVID-19

With nowhere to go, Ānaru started living in his car and getting deeper into addiction, into drugs. He carried on working for awhile to support his habit, then ended up on a sickness benefit. Despite having blackouts and ‘seeing death’, he didn’t seek help.

“I was hard on myself because I had walked away [from my son]. I went back to the kiwifruit work. Went into more [bad things]. Working to support my habit. Saw death again. Blacked out. I was introduced to the white stuff. I was living in my car and going to work.”

During the Covid-19 Level 4 lockdown he moved back in with Hayley, sleeping in the lounge and bingeing on drugs and alcohol.

“In Level 4, my partner took me in because she felt sorry for me because I was in my car. I had the lounge. It [lockdown] was hard. There was nothing to do but buy drugs and alcohol.”

In Level 3 he stayed with a relative on the East Coast who soon kicked him out because of the drinking and drugs, so it was back to living in the car.

“In Level 3 I went to my auntie [on the East Coast] but I got kicked out because I was getting stoned and drunk so it was back to the car. Then I came [back] here [Tauranga] because my son was here.”

Back in Tauranga after lockdown, he became involved with another addict and eventually he lost his car and all his belongings.

“Came to Tauranga. Hung out with the wrong lady. Ended up losing my whole car and everything. All my belongings. Her friend asked to borrow my car and it never came back. I was in a white cloud. One day she never came back and I thought “I’ve got nothing!”

TURNING POINT: TAKITIMU HOUSE

“This place has helped me, this time around, because I am sick of abusing drugs and alcohol.”

Ānaru had hit rock bottom. He had nothing. No car. No belongings. Nowhere to stay. He knew about Takitimu House and knew someone there; someone he had met in his time “on the streets.” So Ānaru went to see him. It was a Saturday and the house doesn’t take new people in on the weekends, but they made an exception for Ānaru and let him move in that night.



“I brought myself in here. I knew this place was here because I knew someone who lived here. It was the weekend and they don’t take new people in, in the weekend. But I knocked on his door. He rang the manager. It was hard to do the interview with [the manager] because I was coming down, withdrawal, tired. I had been up for a binge, for three or four days. I was hungry and tired.”

Ānaru has now been at Takitimu House for four months and he has come a long way since the weekend he showed up and asked for help. Things didn’t change overnight. The first few weeks were difficult; withdrawing from drugs, not sleeping well, getting used to others and learning to trust. He has started attending appointments, doing programmes, such as addiction and budgeting, and has plans for the future.

“I was not sleeping well here at first. Dealing with different personalities. Trust. A lot of anxiety. It took me two weeks to start knuckling into the requirements for living here. Attending appointments. Getting in touch with Hanmer Clinic – they run a group here. Creating a CV. The staff all work alongside to get us back to be a part of society.”

Insights

THE LEGACY OF ABUSE AND FINDING HOPE

“I am just grateful to be where I am instead of six feet under.”

Ānaru’s journey of substance abuse started because he had been abused and neglected, the black sheep that no one wanted, and drugs helped him to cope, to block out what had happened to him. But the cost was high, leading to mental illness, blackouts, unhealthy relationships and years of homelessness. He has a young son, five years old, and he wants a better life for his son. He wants to break the cycle that he endured. He knows he needs to take care of himself and he is working, with the help of the staff at Takitimu House, to make that a reality. Although he is still ‘homeless’ he is working towards employment, dealing with his addictions and getting a place to live where he can have his son to stay. Ānaru has hope for the future and he is grateful for the support and the encouragement of the staff, and for being alive and not “six feet under.”

*Having a
temporary home*



Nina's story

It could take years

Nina is of Māori descent with whakapapa links to Tauranga Moana. She is 29 years old, single, has no children and has been living in transitional housing for nearly a year. Although she feels that she is “blessed” to have a roof over her head she would rather be living in her own home. She is on the Social Housing Register but was told “it could take years” for her to get somewhere to live. She has applied for houses to rent but always gets an email saying “you were unsuccessful.”

But things were not always like this.

A year ago Nina was living with her brother and his partner in their family home, a Kāinga Ora house. Halfway through last year the family was moved to a different house and Nina was told she could not continue to live with her brother. With nowhere to go Nina was referred to a transitional home, sleeping in her car for a week, while the referral was processed. Nina's experience of homelessness includes sleeping in her car and transitional housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HER STORY

Nina's story is about family harm, the impact of housing policies and the housing shortage. Nina's childhood included abuse, family violence and time in care. When Nina was a teenager her mother died and after this she stayed living in the family home with one of her brothers and his partner. Fast forward a number of years and the family is re-located with only the brother and his partner being moved to a new house, leaving Nina without a place to live. Despite trying for a year Nina has been unable to find a place of her own to rent.

EARLY LIFE AND WORK

Nina is the youngest of three children. She has two brothers who are ten and eleven years older than her. She was born in Tauranga, although the family shifted to the South Island when she was young. In the family, alcohol, drugs and violence were prevalent and because of this, Nina ended up "in the system." Oranga Tamariki became involved with the family and at the age of "seven or eight years old," Nina was taken from her parents and put into the care of a cousin. Living with the cousin was okay. She was fed and taken care of, but she "felt out of place" as the cousin was not her parent. When Nina was nine years old her mother left the violent relationship and shifted back to Tauranga. Although Oranga Tamariki was still involved with the family, Nina was able to live with her mother and her brothers.

By the time she was 14 Nina was no longer attending school and when she was 15, her mother passed away. Following her mother's passing Nina enrolled in a youth education course and gained NCEA credits. After graduating from her course Nina started working in the kiwifruit industry. After four seasons of working in kiwifruit she got a job as a cleaner in a resthome where she stayed working until "a couple of years ago." Following this she went back to working in the kiwifruit industry. During this time she stayed living in the family house with her older brother and his partner.

HOMELESSNESS: A WEEK IN THE CAR

Nina's "family house" was a Kāinga Ora house. It was scheduled to be demolished and last year the family was relocated to another Kāinga Ora house. However, Nina who was 29 years old and had been living with her brother since her mother died was told, by the brother's partner, that she could not continue to live with them in the new house.

"I was living with my brother and his partner in the family house. It was in the family for years. Then we had to move out because the houses were being demolished. So we got relocated. Then we moved to a new house and I was told I couldn't live with them anymore. By my brother's partner. She told me that I couldn't live with them. She said Kāinga Ora said that no one else could live with them. I had pretty much lived with them all my life, since Mum had died."

With nowhere to live Nina approached Work and Income for some help. They referred her to a transitional house in Tauranga. The referral process took "a week or two" and so Nina slept in her car while she waited for the referral to go through. Staying in her car was uncomfortable and she often felt unsafe. She was pleased to move into the transitional house.

"I did stay in my car for a little bit after I left my brother's [house]. I parked [the car] at parks [overnight]. Stayed in [the car] for a week or two. I was very glad to be coming here [transitional housing]. It was not good in the car. Uncomfortable and I felt unsafe at times."

HOMELESSNESS: TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Nina has been staying at the transitional house for nearly a year. The amount she pays to stay there is dependent on what she is earning, with a maximum of "25% of my wages when I'm working." Every three months, she has to re-apply to stay at the house. The housing is only for women and has some safety rules including a curfew and not being able to have visitors. Nina has her own bedroom but shares bathroom and living spaces with the other women. Local charities such as Good Neighbour provide some donated food and the women buy any other food and necessities for themselves.

“It’s good. I am so blessed to be here. A roof, shower, food. The ladies are all good. The House Rules are okay. Curfew, being here by 10pm, have to occupy your room every night or let the social worker know if we’re staying out, respecting others. 11pm to 6am is quiet time.”

SUPPORT SERVICES

Nina has made use of the different support services that come to the transitional home. She finds the weekly acupuncture really good to help with pain and stress. She has talked to the budget advisor who showed her how to look for housing online and has accessed counselling from the Hanmer Clinic day programme staff in regards to childhood abuse and violence.

IT COULD TAKE YEARS

While Nina feels grateful to have a place to stay she would prefer to have her own place. She has been trying to find a place to rent but the housing shortage has made this difficult. While she has applied for a number of places she just gets rejection emails, which is very disheartening. Nina is willing to live with others and has teamed up with another woman to apply for houses to rent but so far they have not been successful. She is also on the Social Housing Register but has been told that “it could take years” to get a house through that avenue.

“I would want to move to a one or two bedroom house. I’ve done a lot of searches and gotten nothing. I have applied [for rentals] and I get sent emails, ‘not successful.’ Makes you want give up looking because you just keep getting those emails. There’s not much out there. It is \$500 upwards for a three bedroom [house]. I’m on the Social Housing Register. I signed up when I got in here. But I was told not to hold my breath because it could take years.”

Within her extended family there is some whānau land and Nina has some hope that this may provide an opportunity. However this is not a short term option as the family is still working through details in regards to the land. Nina is frustrated by not being able to get somewhere else to live. She would like more help to access a house and feels as though more could be provided to help her to move out and into a place of her own.

“I thought that being here you’d get help to move into a place of your own, but no one’s gotten that help.”

Insights

HOUSING SHORTAGE

Nina's story highlights the impact of the housing shortage in Tauranga. Nina spent her childhood living in Kāinga Ora housing and after having to move out of the family home she had nowhere to go.

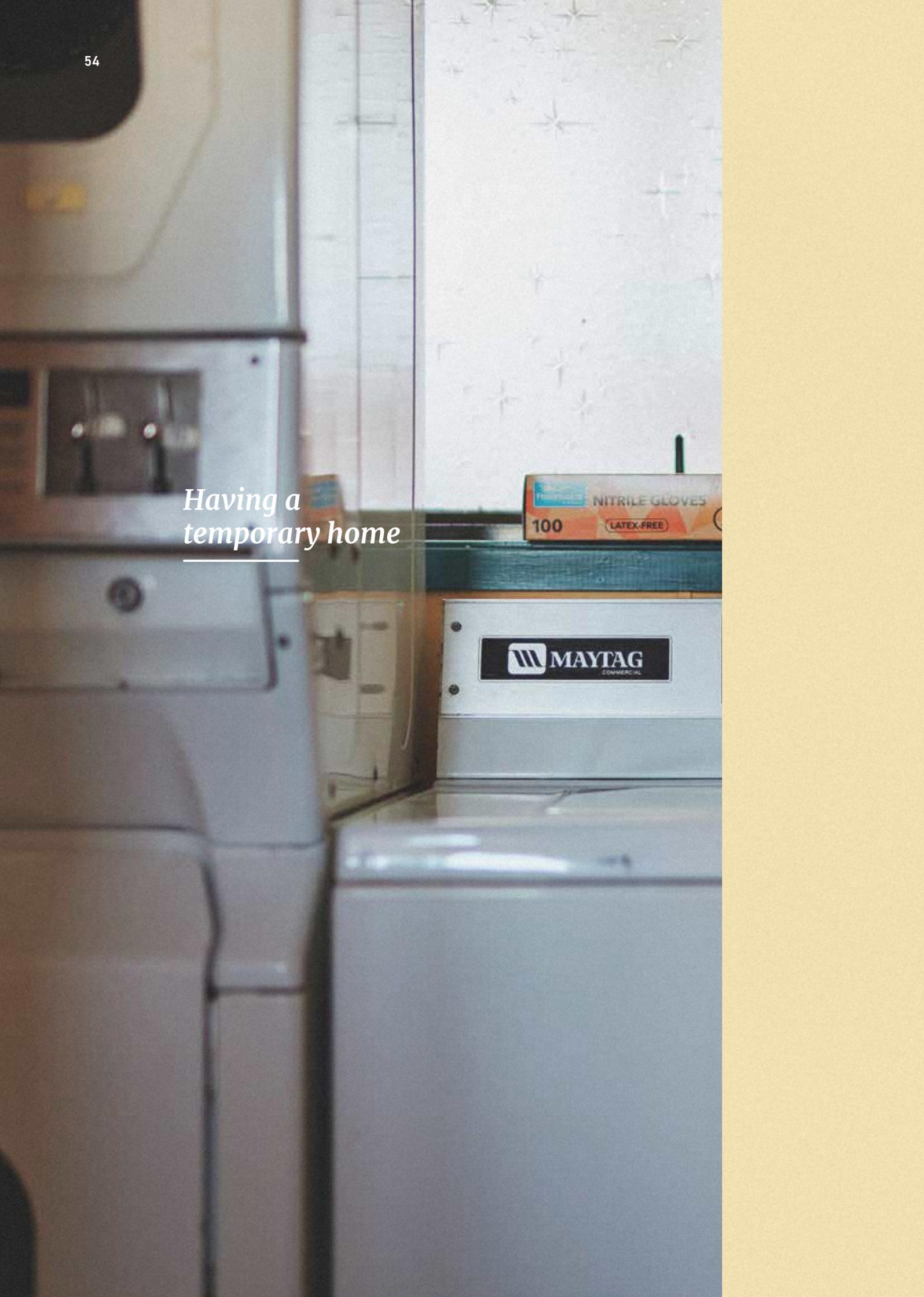
Despite numerous rental applications, being prepared to live with others and being on the Social Housing Register, Nina has now been in a transitional house for nearly a year with little evidence that this could change any time soon. There is no simple answer to Nina's situation as there are not enough houses to go around. An advocate might make a difference for Nina by helping her to get her in front of potential landlords and make a case for taking her on as a tenant.



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Lily's story

Everything is steps

Lily is a 21 year old New Zealander. Her parents moved a lot with their work and as a result Lily and her sister were raised in a number of different communities both in New Zealand and overseas. She is currently living in a transitional home in Tauranga and has been there for about a month.

Lily likes the transitional home as it provides security of tenure for longer than a week or a few days. She has her own space, company if she needs it and access to support. She would like to focus on figuring out her next steps and eventually finding a place of her own.

But things were not always like this.

A few months ago she was estranged from her family, had left an abusive relationship and was staying with one of her old teachers after various short term stays in emergency and respite accommodation. Lily's experience of homelessness includes staying with friends and family, emergency housing, transitional housing and respite.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HER STORY

Lily's story is about relationships, of being estranged from family, not having friends you can rely on, domestic violence, losing who you are and the "steps" to go through to get help. Lily is only 21 but has experienced abusive relationships, self harm and homelessness and in the process has become lost.

EARLY YEARS: MOVING AROUND

Lily grew up in a family who moved around a lot. She and her sister were born overseas, adopted as babies and brought to New Zealand. Her parents are Pākehā of English descent. Lily's parents moved a lot because of their work; both to other countries and to different New Zealand cities. Lily and her older sister grew up going to a range of schools, living in different communities and cultures and making friends then moving away. Tauranga Moana was a place that the family returned to a number of times and where her parents owned a house.

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

When Lily was 13 her parents' marriage ended. The children were asked not to talk to anyone about what was happening while their parents worked their way through the break-up. Having to keep to themselves, pretending that all was well in the family and having no one to confide in took a toll on Lily's mental wellbeing. Her father moved out of the family home and then moved overseas. Her Mum started studying and became immersed in that.

"I was 13. Dad left the house. Mum was not around and started studying. I was 15 when Dad moved overseas."

Throughout this time of family upheaval, Lily stayed at school and completed her NCEA Level 3. Her mother was in and out of the house, often away staying with her family for weeks at a time, leaving Lily and her sister on their own in the family home.

"Mum disappeared for a bit. She went to her family and stayed with them. So it was just me and my sister. So I got part time jobs to pay for food."

FAMILY HARM

When she was 17 Lily had met and become involved with Andrew. He was a few years older than her and had custody of his three year old daughter from a previous relationship. Soon after leaving school Lily moved in with Andrew and his daughter. At this time Lily was working part time and had enrolled in a course. However, she did not complete the course, dropping out after a few months to look after her stepdaughter. She continued working part time in the kiwifruit and apple packhouses and then as a supermarket checkout operator.

"Went to [a course]. It was supposed to be a year but I dropped out because of the relationship [I was in]."

Andrew became violent towards Lily, both physically and mentally, and she was soon caught in a cycle of violence, intimidation and control. After Lily had been with Andrew for nearly three

years Lily's mother found out what was happening and intervened.

“Mum found out and came one day and said “you’re coming home.” I didn’t know how to get out [of the relationship]. I was with him for 2 ½ to 3 years.”

Lily moved into the family home. Her Mum was not living there as she had moved in with her mother who needed some care. Her sister was staying there but a month after Lily moved in, her sister moved away. Lily was now living on her own in the family home. An argument with her maternal grandmother resulted in Lily's mum asking Lily to move out. By this time Lily had a new boyfriend, Kyle, and so she moved in with him.

“Then I had an argument with my Grandma. She told me I was unlovable. Mum kicked me out. I moved in with my boyfriend. It didn’t go well. We were flatting with a bunch of other people. We were together for seven months. We had to move into his Mum’s house. We split up so I left.”

Kyle was mentally abusive and the living situations were less than ideal; flatting with numerous others then moving into his mother's house. One night Lily fled. Kyle called the police as he was unable to find her. The police located her, realised that she needed help and took her to the Salvation Army who referred her to Bay of Plenty Mental Health services.

“My ex was mentally abusive. I walked out. He called the police ‘cos he couldn’t find me. I was hiding by the car. He walked right past me and couldn’t find me. The police found me. Police got me

into the Salvation Army and they referred me to Bay of Plenty Mental Health.”

HOMELESSNESS: STAYING WITH FAMILY, EMERGENCY HOUSING AND RESPITE

The mental health social worker arranged for Lily to stay with her father who had recently relocated back to New Zealand. After staying with her father for a couple of months, Kyle “reeled” Lily back in with promises to change and she moved back in with him. A few months later Lily realised that the relationship was not working so she left, packing her things into rubbish bags and calling her social worker for help.

“I packed my stuff into rubbish bags, called my support worker and said, ‘I can’t do this’ I was outside in the rain with my rubbish bags. The social worker had organised for the police to come and get me. A lady was driving past and she saw me waiting and she stopped and offered to wait with me.”

The social worker took Lily to Work and Income where she arranged for a referral to a transitional housing provider and in the interim, for emergency housing in a local backpackers. Referrals to the transitional home typically take a week, however in Lily's case it took nearly a month due to some hiccups in the process.

“The ‘middleman’ lost my email [referral]. It took over a month to get here [transitional home]. Normally it should only take a couple of weeks.”



“My ex was mentally abusive. I walked out. He called the police ‘cos he couldn’t find me. I was hiding by the car. He walked right past me and couldn’t find me. The police found me. Police got me into the Salvation Army and they referred me to Bay of Plenty Mental Health.”

Lily struggled at the backpackers and after threatening and then attempting self-harm, the mental health crisis team became involved and she was re-located to a respite care facility. She stayed at the respite facility for a week then was moved to an emergency housing motel. However, Lily was lonely at the motel and was “kicked out” after inviting a friend over. With nowhere to go Lily contacted an old friend, a teacher from the course she had dropped out of, who took her in.

“I was put in an emergency backpackers in [suburb]. I was going crazy there. Ended up threatening, and trying, suicide. The social worker] put me in respite. [The respite facility] is a nice place. I liked it. It was supportive. Nice. Caring. I was there for one week. From there I went to a motel. I got lonely. Invited a friend there, then got kicked out. Went to a friend’s house.”

HOMELESSNESS: TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Lily stayed with her friend for a few days, until her referral was approved and she could move in to the transitional home. She has now been at the home for a month and she likes it. It is a safe place and she can stay for longer than a week or a few days.

“Once you are here, it’s nice to know you have somewhere to stay for longer than a week or a few days. It’s a 90-day stay but I can extend it. It’s been okay [to be here]. It’s up and down but that’s my own personal [issues].”

NEXT STEPS: HEALING FIRST

Looking back Lily says it takes “a lot of steps” to get anywhere. She has arrived at a transitional housing place where she is safe, has others around but still has her own space and has access to further support. In the short term Lily says she needs to get help to figure out “what I want to do, who I am” and she has a referral in process to access counselling. While Lily would like to have her own place, preferably a one bedroom flat, she is aware that there are limited places available and that she needs to be in a better place in terms of her health and wellbeing before she can move into her own place.

“There was a lot of steps to get here. Social worker got me to WINZ, then to the backpackers, then the crisis team, then respite, then WINZ, then the motel and then my friend’s house and then here.

“[First] I need to figure out what I want to do, who I am. You lose yourself when you experience these sorts of things.

“Housing in Tauranga is terrible. I can’t find a one bedroom flat. That’s what I want.”

Insights A LOT OF STEPS

Lily’s teenage years were traumatic. Her parents divorced, she felt abandoned and after finishing school found herself in a violent relationship she did not know how to get out of. A young person, on her own, Lily needed help and support.

Getting help was a series of steps and she has needed the assistance of mental health, social workers, family, friends and Work and Income. Lily is now staying at a place which is allowing her to take some time to get well while she figures out what she wants and who she is. The next steps for Lily are to access counselling or therapy and from there to start mapping out some options for her future.

“Now I have time. Before, I didn’t have time. I didn’t know where I was going to sleep.”

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Tāne's story

A new start

Tāne is of Māori and Pākehā descent with whakapapa links to Rotorua. He is 59 years old and has been in Tauranga for the past four years. Tāne is a recovering addict with co-existing mental health issues, as a result of a childhood history of trauma and abuse. Tāne attends Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) every week, and would like to attend Narcotics Anonymous (NA) as well, but has no transport to get to meetings.

He is supported by some of the local agencies, and appreciates the “hot meals” provided by community meal providers. He is currently staying in an emergency accommodation motel and although he says that it is better than living on the streets it is still an unsafe environment at times, with “frequent fights” and little privacy. He would like to have his own place to live and he feels ready to move into his own home if a place can be found for him.

But things were not always like this.

Four years ago Tāne was new to Tauranga, having come from Waihi where he had been sleeping rough. He was living on the streets in Tauranga, staying behind a local hall. About two years ago he got a place in a transitional home and from there moved to a boarding house and then to the motel. Tāne's experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping, emergency housing and transitional housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Tāne's story is one about the impacts of child abuse and trauma, which resulted in him developing addiction and mental health issues as he grew into adulthood. These co-existing disorders eventually led to him leaving his job and his home, moving towns and living on the streets, sleeping rough.

EARLY LIFE

Tāne explains that his childhood is a “long story” of psychological and sexual abuse. His mother was of Pākehā descent and his father of Māori descent, and whilst both his parents passed away last year, he has four siblings who are still alive. Tāne is single but has two adult children and a “few mokos.” He has little to do with his family, and for the last three years he has chosen to stay away from them. The relationship with his family, he describes as “difficult” as a result of the abuse and trauma of the past.

HOMELESSNESS: ON THE STREETS

Around five or six years ago, Tāne was working and living in his own flat in another town. On the surface things were okay; he had a job and a place to live. However, his long-term addiction to alcohol and cannabis, and mental health issues as a result of the child abuse, eventually caught up with him. He left the job, the town and his flat, moved to Waihi and began sleeping rough on the streets. Four years ago, after some time in Waihi, he made the shift to Tauranga Moana, where he continued to live on the streets, sleeping rough behind a local hall.

“I was living in [town] in my own flat and working. My experience of mental health issues and long-term addiction to alcohol, due to my story of abuse, led me on to the streets, first in Waihi, then in Tauranga four years ago. I was sleeping rough in [Tauranga suburb], near the hall. I was always scared for my safety.”

HOMELESSNESS: TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND EMERGENCY MOTEL

After some time on the streets in Tauranga, Tāne began looking for an alternative place to stay. Although the “streeties are a kind of family,” he felt unsafe on the streets and wanted to get help for his addictions. He moved into a transitional home and after a few months, from there to a boarding house. At the same time he started going to AA and with their help has managed to ‘get off’ the alcohol and continues to attend weekly meetings.

“Needed to find a safe place to sleep every night. Then I got a place at [a transitional home] for few months. From there I moved to a boarding house, 18 months ago. ... Got off from alcohol addiction at the same time with the support of AA. I go to AA every Friday, very supportive, it works for me.”

Tāne now stays in emergency motel accommodation, and it was there that he spent the Covid-19 lockdown. He says that when he first moved off the streets he had to “re-learn” how to look after himself.

“At the beginning, I needed to re-learn how to take after myself (cooking, showering etc.).”

While the motel is “better than living on the streets,” it is still challenging, with little privacy and, at times, feels unsafe.

“Motel is better than living on the streets. But it is still an unsafe environment, frequent fights. No privacy. Would love to cook more often for myself but [it is] challenging at the motel, and [there is] no money for buying stuff.”

NEXT STEPS: HOPE FOR A NEW START

Tāne now wants to get his own place to live. He has re-learned the skills he had before he moved onto the streets and now feels ready and confident to look after himself and maintain a tenancy. He regularly attends AA, sees his doctor and relies on the Acute Care Team⁸ as needed. He does not want to go back on to the streets, but rather wants to start attending NA, get further counselling and re-connect with his whānau.

“I feel confident now to move on to my own housing. I can take care of myself. I don’t want to rely on my family. It can take two or three years to be housed, but it will be a new start. I need that in my life for reconnecting with my family, and to feel proud of me.”

“I can rely on ‘the crisis team’ when needed. I need to buy a bike to go to NA for my cannabis addiction. I can’t afford to go back on the streets. It will kill me.”

“I would like to receive more counselling for my family and me; to reconnect with them, a kind of family support.”

Insights

THE STEPS TO A NEW START

Tāne's story highlights the long term cost of childhood abuse and trauma and the complexity of support that is needed. He is 59 years old and still suffers from the legacy of an upbringing of abuse, which resulted in addictions, mental health issues and eventually leaving a job and a home and moving out to live on the streets.

Tāne has worked to get himself well and off the streets. He took steps to find a place to live and has taken up the help of AA and other agencies to deal with his addictions and mental health issues. He has moved from transitional housing to a motel and along the way he has re-learned the skills to take care of himself and built up his self confidence.

He is at a point where he feels ready to take the next step into his own place, but he will still need support to find a place and maintain that tenancy, at least in the short to medium term. His story shows the toll that homelessness can have; that even for someone who has previously held down a job and a home, there is a need to re-learn the skills to live in a house.

⁸ The Bay of Plenty District Health Board Acute Care Team – Mental Health and Addictions Service provides a 24/7 response service to people in mental health or addiction crisis. This team is sometimes called ‘the crisis team’ or the ‘mental health team.’

*Having a
temporary home*



Te Uira's story

Twenty years on the streets

Te Uira is of Māori descent with links to the Eastern Bay of Plenty. He is in his early 40s and has been in Tauranga for the past 26 years. He is single, has no children and is currently staying in an emergency accommodation motel, where he has been for nearly one year, ever since the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. The motel, he says is “excellent.” It “feels like home, he “can cook, has a bathroom, a shower, and peace and quiet,” “there is no hōhā like [there is] on the street,” and for him, the motel is “safer than the streets.”

He is being supported by a local agency and has been told he can stay in the motel “until March 2021” or until the agency finds him a “permanent home.” He is a little nervous about moving to more permanent accommodation as he has not lived in a house for “a long time.”

But things were not always like this.

Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown Te Uira was living in a tent and had been living on the streets, sleeping rough, in Tauranga since 2000. Te Uira's experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping and emergency housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Te Uira is from a large family, the middle child of twelve siblings. He explains that his early years were characterised by abuse, he “used to get beaten up” and there was “family violence and bullying.” He has been away from home since he was ten years old, after which she saw his Mum at times, but not his Dad. It is not clear where he was living from the age of ten, whether in care or with other whānau.

He came to Tauranga 26 years ago when he was in his early twenties to “get away from his family” and has spent most of that time living on the streets. He has slept in various places, including behind the night clubs and the local rugby club. For him, the “streeties” became his family.

“[I have] no family in Tauranga. Streeties are family. A few of them I can talk with.”

HOMELESS: LIFE ON THE STREETS

Te Uira has seen some changes ‘on the streets’ over the years, and considers that the streets are less safe than they were because of increased drug use and intimidation, and facilities such as showers being less available due to the behaviour of some.

“Thirteen years ago the streets felt more like a family. You could live together with other people in tents. Four years ago that changed. People came into the CBD from Greerton and caused problems – like smoking drugs in the showers, so they were closed. [It has] become less safe to be on the streets in the last three years. Now a couple of streeties are trying to intimidate/extortion from other people on the street.”



Te Uira has significant experience living on the streets of Tauranga and he explains that, in his view, living on the streets and having no home is unsafe and unhealthy. Despite having access to community meals, for example, food insecurity is still an issue as programmes can close down without warning, leaving people without access to a meal.

“Having no home is not safe, unhealthy. You can’t look after [your] wellbeing. Used to be able to get breakfast at [provider] on three mornings (about 15 years ago), [but] meals got closed because of ‘outsiders’ causing trouble.”

HOMELESS: COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND EMERGENCY MOTEL

The Covid-19 lockdown which occurred on 25 March 2020 was a catalyst for Te Uira moving off the streets. A local agency helped him move into a motel and he has been there ever since. His lifestyle has changed since the move. For example, he doesn’t utilise the community meals as much as he can cook at home now. He still engages with the agency who helped him access the motel, as well as a number of other support agencies and he still goes to the same doctor if needed. Te Uira does not want to go back to the streets as he feels safer and more secure in the motel. He knows that the motel is not permanent and whilst he would like to move to another place, if one could be arranged, he is nervous as he has not lived in a house for many years.

Insights

LIFE ON THE STREETS

Te Uira’s story is one of a child from an abusive and violent home who moved to get away from family and has ended up spending decades living rough on the streets.

Whilst the variables that initially led him on to the streets are unknown, his experiences of life on the street provide some valuable insights. For example, his story shows how decisions at a higher level impact peoples’ day to day lives both positively and negatively.

The decision to lockdown the country because of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in Te Uira, a streetie for more than 20 years, moving into a motel with the real possibility of moving on to his own home. Another decision made at a local level a few years back to close some public showers meant he and other streeties lost their access to washing facilities.

Te Uira’s story also brings to attention the need to support people who have not lived in a house for some time, to successfully transition to a more permanent living situation.

*Having a
temporary home*



Paul's story

Everyone needs a home

Paul is of Pākehā descent and is 56 years old. He is originally from Auckland but moved to Tauranga twenty years ago to “get away from the lifestyle” there.

He is currently living in a shed and a van on a mate's property just out of town, and has been there for “just over a year.” He was there during the Covid-19 lockdown so nothing changed for him in that time. The “set-up” is okay for the moment. It is affordable, and Paul has privacy and his own space, but it is not a home and not how he wants to be living. He has a son and would like to have a place where his son can come to visit and stay. He is working towards that as best he can, although in order to achieve this he will need more help and support.

But things were not always like this.

Over the past twenty plus years Paul has been in and out of prison, mental health wards, transitional and emergency housing, and slept rough on the streets, behind buildings, in public toilets and tents. He has battled with addictions, been ‘beaten up’ by gangs, had his belongings and medications stolen and worked with lots of different agencies. Paul's experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping, staying in a car, emergency housing, transitional housing and unsuitable housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Paul grew up and went to school in Auckland. He does not share a lot about his life in Auckland except to say that he left there twenty years ago, to move to Tauranga, in order to “get away from the lifestyle I was living up there.” His life in Tauranga included criminal activity and he ended up spending some time in prison as a result. Upon release four years ago, he had nowhere to live and was soon sleeping rough in a suburb of Tauranga.

HOMELESSNESS: SLEEPING ROUGH, EMERGENCY HOUSING

Over the past four years, Paul has been in and out of emergency housing, transitional housing, mental health residential accommodation and “living on the streets.” On the streets he always felt unsafe, was frequently getting “beaten up,” “moved on by council” and subjected to having his belongings stolen. About two years ago he had an operation and on release from hospital he went to a transitional home for rehabilitation and recovery. However, he says that he was “thrown out for breaking the rules” and was soon back on the streets. He slept in public toilets, behind buildings, in a tent and a car and in various locations around Tauranga, but things were always precarious. He has, at times, been trespassed from community meals and other venues for his behaviour.

“Before here [I] was living on the streets – for over three years. I came out of prison, [had] nowhere to go hung around [Tauranga suburb]. About two and a half years ago, I got beaten up by [a gang] and needed [an operation]. I got put into





[a transitional home] for rehab, but I got thrown out for breaking the rules.

“I slept in toilets in the Rose Gardens, behind buildings. I always felt unsafe – people always beat me up. I kept getting moved on by council. My stuff got taken all the time. I got a tent went to [a local park] and was behind the tennis courts for months. It wasn’t safe. Stuff got nicked.”

Paul has a chronic mental illness and requires regular medication. During this time he often lost his “meds” and would spend time in the mental health ward. At one stage he was discharged from the ward only to find that all his belongings had been stolen in his absence.

“I lost my meds all the time, ended up in mental health ward at Tauranga Hospital. When I came out all my gear, tent, bikes, belongings had been taken. I lived up in the Rose Gardens. Then for a few months. I tried to live in a car but that got towed by council.”

TURNING POINT: FAMILY

Paul is not close to his family. His parents have both passed on. He has siblings, a brother who was the head of a gang in Auckland and is now “elsewhere” and sisters who are “no help.” He is currently single. He has a son from a past relationship and it was his son who was a turning point for Paul to take steps towards a different lifestyle.

A year ago Paul was tired of trying to get by, of feeling unsafe and he wanted to see his son whom he had not seen for seven years. So he made contact with a friend, and as a result was able to move into the van and shed on his friend’s property.

“I just contacted my mate after about ten years of no contact. I lived here before I went to prison.”

This was the first step towards being able to see his son; he needed a place to live so he would be able to have his son to visit. Seeing his son has been “the best thing,” and is a motivator for him to keep working on getting a home.

“Everyone needs a home, I was working towards getting one so I could see my son – I’d not seen him for seven years, court stuff, divorce things, drugs, mental health all those things got in the way. But I kept pushing courts and once I got the place I am in now I could see him. It has been the best thing to see my son, to be a part of his life again. I got this place by myself.”

NEXT STEPS: SUPPORT AND WELLNESS

Paul has had rocky relationships with other agencies at times, but more recently he has developed a positive relationship with a local agency. He is also now getting regular injections of his medication and his mental health has stabilised as a result.

“In the past I’ve been everywhere – WINZ, People’s Project, Baywide Housing Trust, Tauranga Community Housing Trust, Under the Stars, Street Kai, Sallies, Church meals, Mental Health at the hospital. [Now] I’ve got pretty friendly with [a local agency]. They gave me tents, food, bikes. Help with seeing my son. Clothes, and support when I needed it.”

“I’ve been in and out of the mental health unit for decades – now I have a regular injection and I feel more stable.”

Paul still faces a lot of barriers to moving out of homelessness. He has financial debt, a chronic mental illness and no family support. Although he says, “I survive just like I always have,” he also says that “life is difficult.”

“[I’m] not working, on a benefit, have a chronic mental illness. I can’t work, and life’s difficult, which is why I’m still here; it’s cheap and I have company, some support. I’m still paying off debts to WINZ for things I’ve needed in past [like] teeth (which got stolen) and a phone. I survive, just like I always have.”

Paul would like to have his own home, somewhere his son can visit and stay, but without further support to assist him he cannot see how this would be able to happen as he is at “the bottom of the heap – just like on the streets.”

“It’s a pretty good set up – relatively safe, have my own space and privacy, but it’s not a home, not how I want to be living. I want a place where my son can come and stay and I can have a dog.”

“It would be good to be elsewhere but don’t see that happening, no money, single male – bottom of the heap, just like on streets.”



Insights

EVERYONE NEEDS A HOME

Paul's story is one of someone who has come from a life connected to gangs, violence and drugs and a history of 'burning bridges' with agencies and others. His story shows how this history can continue to put up barriers, even whilst he has been trying to change his lifestyle. He first tried to move away from the lifestyle twenty years ago when he shifted to Tauranga, with limited success. He ended up in prison for a time, and upon release four years ago, he had nowhere to live and was soon living "on the street."

Fast forward four years and he has taken further steps towards a different lifestyle. His health is more stable with regular medication and while he has somewhere to live that is affordable and safe, the dwelling would still fit within the definition of homelessness. He wants to move into his own home because he says "everyone needs a home" but with a legacy of debt, prison time and mental illness he will need support to reach this goal.

*Having a
temporary home*



Kiri's story

The impact of circumstances

Kiri is 29 years old and is of Māori descent with whakapapa links to Tauranga Moana and the Western Bay of Plenty. Her daughter, Anahera, is six years old and in this short lifetime she has lived in six different places, four of them in one twelve month period.

Kiri, her 18 year old brother and Anahera are currently living in a transitional housing place. Kiri has been there for three years and wants to leave as it is “never going to be a home or an ideal home for children.” However she does not want to end up in “another temporary place.” Kiri has applied for numerous accommodation and housing options, including private rentals, public housing and assisted home ownership, and has approached various agencies for help over the past four years but has been unable to find a permanent home.

But things were not always like this.

Seven years ago Kiri was working fulltime, living with her partner and expecting her first baby. Three years later she was a single mum on a low income needing somewhere to live and thus began her journey of homelessness. Kiri's experience of homelessness includes temporary accommodation, transitional housing, boarding, living in a portacom and a motel, sharing accommodation, walking the streets, and staying with friends.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HER STORY

I was “a child of the system” is how Kiri introduces herself. Kiri’s story is one of circumstances which have impacted her life and negatively affected her housing options. As a child Kiri remembers being “shipped out” when mum didn’t want her home and having to find somewhere to stay for the night. As a young single mum on a limited income she has struggled to find an affordable, stable, secure place for herself and her child and has spent the last four years trying to find a home.

THE EARLY YEARS: NIGHTS ON THE STREETS

At the age of ten, Kiri was put into the care of her mother and that’s when “things went downhill.” Prior to this Kiri had been living with her father in Tauranga. The shift to her mother’s place meant a move to another town, more than 50 kilometres away from Tauranga. From the age of eleven and through her teen years Kiri recalls that she spent “a lot of nights on the streets.” On the nights that she couldn’t stay at home, she would find a friend to stay with and where that didn’t work out she would spend her night walking around the streets.

“It was common for me to be shipped out [by Mum] to find a friend to stay with. It was just what it was like. ... From the age of eleven, I spent a lot of nights on the street. I spent my teenage years between [two different towns] jumping from house to house, finding somewhere to stay and if I couldn’t, I just walked around all night.”

Although Kiri had whānau in Tauranga, they were not aware of what was occurring for Kiri and since she was living some distance away from Tauranga, she was unable to get to her extended whānau.

SECURE HOUSING AND WORKING FULLTIME

A few years after leaving school Kiri was working as a fulltime tourist guide, earning reasonable money and living in rented accommodation. She met someone and they had soon moved in together and had a baby. When she was pregnant, at the age of 23, Kiri took parental leave from her job and after Anahera was born she became a stay at home mum.

“I was working as a tour guide. Got pregnant. Had to leave work but that was okay. I had parental leave.”

She describes her housing situation at the time as “stable until the relationship fell apart.” By this time Anahera was two years old and Kiri was faced with having to move herself and her child out of her partner’s house and find somewhere to live.

“When the relationship fell apart I had all this stuff. I had to find somewhere for that. So I put it into storage.”

HOMELESSNESS: TEMPORARY HOUSING AND SHARING ACCOMMODATION

After her relationship ended, Kiri decided to move to Tauranga Moana where she had extended whānau. A relative arranged a temporary solution

of a studio unit in a motel for six months while Kiri looked for a place to rent. But soon the six months was nearly up and she still hadn't found a place to live.

“There was a housing crisis [in Tauranga]. There were no homes. I went to a studio apartment in a motel. I was given six months. I couldn't find anywhere.”

She got “desperate,” answered an advertisement for a ‘room’ in someone’s house and moved in there. This situation was not a good one. The people she moved in with were “always fighting” and the house was some distance from where Anahera was enrolled in daycare. Wanting to ensure some stability for her two year old, Kiri was regularly driving the 20 minutes back and forth to daycare. The cost of board and petrol was “eating a hole in her pockets” and the fighting was unpleasant, so after a month Kiri moved out.

HOMELESSNESS: TEMPORARY HOUSING

Another relative offered Kiri the use of a portacom on whānau land. This was again a short term option while Kiri found somewhere else to live. However, it was soon agreed that Kiri could stay in the portacom, save money for a deposit and buy her own portable unit to put on the land. Kiri would have to apply for a ‘license to occupy’ for the whānau land, but this would give her some security of tenure. Kiri was happy with this agreement and looked forward to having her own place for her and Anahera, but it was not to be. Four months later family relationships soured and Kiri was once again faced with having to move.

HOMELESSNESS: STAYING WITH A FRIEND, TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

An old school friend offered Kiri a place to stay for a month so she moved in there and continued to search for a place to rent. Despite lots of applications and searching, the only one who called her back and offered her a place was a transitional house for low income families. After eleven months of moving four times from one temporary housing option to another, Kiri did not want to shift Anahera into yet another temporary place. However, she had no other options and so she moved, together with her brother, into the transitional house.

In the house the family has three bedrooms which are for them exclusively. They share a bathroom with one other family, and kitchen and living facilities with four other families. The accommodation includes numerous changes in the occupants, twelve in the past three years, “bringing their baggage.” Kiri worries that where they are living is not safe for Anahera.

“Up to the day my friend’s father was coming back [and needed his place back] I was trying to get somewhere to live. The only place who rang me back was this place. I went to the viewing. It was gross. But I have been here ever since. It’s not the greatest because it’s shared living. It’s not safe. It’s not managed. There are people with drug problems. It’s dirty. There’s criminals.”

“It is exhausting dealing with the new people coming and going.”



Kiri has now been in the transitional house for three years, and is still looking for a home for her and Anahera.

AGENCY SUPPORT: WHEN YOU DON'T MEET THE CRITERIA

Kiri had whānau who helped her out at times but what about other support options? Over the past four years Kiri has 'done the rounds' of different government and non government agencies and organisations, looking for support in getting a home for her and Anahera, but to no avail. She either does

not meet the criteria or the help on offer is no better, and sometimes worse, than where she is currently living. She has also experienced discrimination because she has a child, noting that house advertisements will often specifically say, 'no children.'

"I can't get on the Social Housing Register because when I applied I was staying in my friend's house so I was not an emergency because I had somewhere to live. [Tried again recently] and they said, they are not adding anyone to the list at the moment."

“I tried to go to [a local agency] for a bond, but I didn’t get that.

“I’d applied for the ‘Doing Good Foundation’ – had done the whole interview process etc. but nothing progressed from there. I didn’t meet the criteria. It was disheartening. That was the last assisted home ownership option.

“Went to [a local agency] – I didn’t know what they did. But they weren’t going to help me with a home. They could offer emergency housing for 12 months. It was another short-term unstable option. I didn’t want to be always moving around. It is not good for Anahera.

“Some of the transitional housing places are dives. I would get offered a shared accommodation or a little unit.”

WHERE TO NEXT?

Kiri would like to own her own home or at least, to have a secure affordable rental where Anahera can grow up and be safe. She has recently reviewed the option to live on the whānau land and is waiting to see if she can get a ‘license to occupy’ so she can move there and know that it is stable. If this option does not eventuate, Kiri is not sure what else she can do.

“I am trying to get out of where I am but I do not want another temporary place. I would like to move to the whānau land. But I need a license to occupy. I’m waiting for that.”

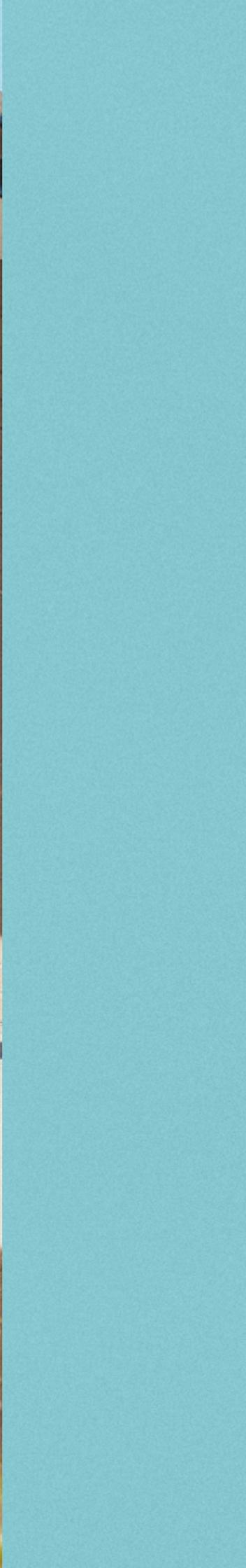
Insights

THE IMPACT OF CIRCUMSTANCES

Circumstances, many outside her control, meant that as a child and teenager Kiri spent nights looking for somewhere to stay or walking the streets all night. As a young person Kiri was employed and had secure housing. But circumstances changed. She had a child and a partner and a place to live, and then the relationship broke down and suddenly she was a single parent on a low income, with a dependent child, in the middle of a housing crisis. While extended whānau and friends were able to provide some temporary places to stay, these options were not sustainable, and so four years after the breakup she is still trying to secure a stable home for herself and her child.

“I want that security. To get that paper. To get that home. To be stable.”

*Having a
long-term home*



Jesse's story

Looking back: Addiction, anxiety and abuse

Jesse is 28 years old and of Māori descent with whakapapa links to Tauranga Moana. He has two jobs and is planning to further his education, so he can work for, and contribute to, his iwi and hapū. He would like to increase his knowledge of te ao Māori and he is planning to study at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in the new year.

Jesse lives in an outside room at his parent's house. The room is comfortable, of reasonable size and he doesn't have to share it. He uses the kitchen and bathroom facilities in the main house. He would like to be able to either move his own tiny house on to whānau land or move into a renting, flatting or boarding situation. The room he is in is not his own place, but it is affordable for now as he does not have to pay rent.

Jesse is a recovering addict. He has been clean for six months and has started going to a regular addiction programme. He has been sober before so he is under no illusions that he is 'cured' but he is hopeful as this time, he made the decision to change. Although things are not perfect, Jesse says that, at the moment, "I feel the best I ever have in my life."

But things were not always like this.

At 17 years old, Jesse found himself alone in Australia completing an apprenticeship and living in an apartment on the 32nd floor. Within a few short years, he would be out of the closet, out of a job, addicted, selling meth, homeless, sleeping on floors and eating at community meals. Jesse's experience of homelessness includes rough sleeping, night shelters, emergency and temporary accommodation, boarding houses, couch surfing, and house jumping both here and in Australia.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Jesse's story is about addiction and how that led to a vicious cycle of homelessness and fear, but it is also about how a young person ends up in that cycle. It is a story of child abuse, of disconnection from whānau and whenua, of being gay in a 'macho' culture, of feeling alone, abandoned and afraid, and of a family not knowing how to help.

"Looking back, the physical and mental abuse as a child. The big secret of being gay. I had so much anxiety because of the abuse. I can see now why my life took the path it did. It was my choices, but I made them because of my childhood. If my family were open about homosexuality, were educated about drugs, not in a 'macho' culture then things might have been different."

LOOKING BACK: AN ANXIOUS CHILDHOOD

Jesse was born in Tauranga and lived there until he was 12, at which point his family of Mum, Dad and two siblings, moved to Australia. Home was a place where Jesse was anxious and fearful "all the time" due to verbal and physical abuse. It was common to be slapped, strapped, hit or called names by one of his parents for seemingly minor incidents.

"As a kid I always wanted to run away because I was always getting hit."

Jesse knew he was gay from about the age of eight, but it was not something that he was able to talk about to anyone and keeping this 'secret' added to his anxiety

and fear. By the time he was 16, Jesse had had enough of the home environment so he left school, got himself an apprenticeship and moved to another city to live with his sister.

ABANDONED

In the new city "everything was fine." Jesse was still "in the closet" and estranged from his parents, but he had an apprenticeship, was earning money and living in a decent apartment with his sister. When he was 17, his family all moved back to Aotearoa and Jesse was on his own. He took over the lease on the apartment and carried on with his work and his life, and while he had not wanted to live with his parents, at some level, he did feel a loss when they moved.

"Looking back, when my parents left me at 17, at the time I didn't feel it but I experienced loss and abandonment."

THE PARTY YEARS

Jesse turned 18 and started going out 'clubbing.' He was having a good time, partying, making friends and experimenting with drugs, taking party pills, MDA and Ecstasy. It was around this time that the family found out that he was gay. This did not happen intentionally but was a classic case of 'someone who knew someone, who knew Jesse', who had seen him out in the gay club scene.

"I started going out, clubbing. I was in the closet. I had a relative living in the city. My relative's workmate had a brother who was gay and went to gay clubs ... The workmate was at my relative's house."

“They were looking at photos and she said, ‘I know him. I saw him at the gay club.’ So then, that’s how it all came out. Everything unraveled.”

Although Jesse had not been the one to tell his family, it was in some ways a relief that they knew, as up until then Jesse had “felt alienated” because he was “in the closet.” He does recall that “it took Mum and Dad a while to accept it” particularly as Jesse’s lifestyle became more ‘open’ and he started ‘living the lifestyle’, with the inevitable photos on social media. The images did not fit with the ‘macho’ culture of his upbringing and his parents “didn’t like it because they were embarrassed.”

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS ADDICTION

By the time he was 21, Jesse’s apprenticeship was nearing its end, he was working, had friends and a social life, and, in his words, felt he was “mentally healthy.” However he had put on a lot of weight and it was affecting his ability to do his job and as a result he was put on a work review. He was worried he would not pass the work review and would lose his job and a friend offered him ‘something’ to help him out. The ‘something’ was Methamphetamine, or ‘Ice.’

“She offered me meth (Ice). I started taking half a point of Ice before work. I would have done all my work in four hours instead of eight.”

And as Jesse says, with more than a little irony, “So, I passed my work review because of drugs!”

BECOMING A HABIT

Over the next two years, Ice became a greater part of Jesse’s lifestyle. He lost weight, started going out more, and began using Ice regularly. At this point, Jesse did not consider that he was addicted as he would only take Ice when he was going out; this was at least four nights a week. At 23 he went to Sydney’s Mardi Gras for the first time and was exposed to a heavier drug scene. It was after this that he started regularly spending his own earnings on what was becoming ‘a habit’.

“I went back to work and began spending \$200 to \$300 a week on drugs. I would get paid, go to the ATM, withdraw the cash and buy from my friend. My friend had become my dealer. That carried on for two years. Habitual use, but I managed it.”

During these years, from ages 21–23 years, when Jesse’s drug use became ‘a habit,’ he was working long hours with his job and in his off time he was living a party lifestyle, and this took a toll. He “ran his body down” and drugs were the solution.

“I liked [my job] but we had to work all the time and it was a party life. Then it ran my body down. We started work at 3am or 1am. It was so hard. I fixed it with drugs.”

JOB LOSS AND EVICTION

Jesse’s family had shifted back to Australia and were living in another city. So, Jesse, now 23, moved there, started a new job and was again living with his sister. But despite the move and the new start, Jesse continued to use drugs, keeping this fact from his sister.

Within a short while Jesse was no longer working. He hurt his wrist by passing out and sleeping on it for 36 hours following a drug binge. The resulting injury meant he couldn't work and was on 'worker compensation' payments. However, he got bullied at work as a result, so decided to quit. Then his sister found evidence of his drug use, called the police and kicked him out.

HOMELESSNESS: ROUGH SLEEPING, COUCH SURFING, SHARE HOUSES

Jesse was now homeless. He had no income and was not entitled to any benefits as he was a New Zealand citizen. His family wouldn't take him in while he was addicted. With nowhere to live except in his car, he drove to a local park to stay there. His dealer called him and offered him a job delivering drugs in exchange for some money and drugs. Jesse took the offer.

He delivered drugs for his dealer, getting 'paid' in drugs which allowed him to stay awake, so he didn't need to find somewhere to stay for the night. He got some money and found a 'share house'⁹ to stay in with one of his dealer's customers. He literally slept on the floor next to her bed. By now, Jesse was addicted and his drug use increased as he was exposed to more drugs and drug use at the share house.

Jesse wanted to move from the share house, but couldn't afford to rent or board. Getting and keeping a job was no longer an option due to his addiction, and he was not entitled to benefits. So

he started dealing to make more money. This led to him moving to another part of the city. He found a private boarding situation but he soon left there and was back in share houses, couch surfing or staying awake all night.

"Then I started dealing myself because I had to move, but I couldn't afford to board anywhere. So I went against my dealer – this was his territory. So I moved to another part of the city. I found a place to board with an older man, but he was a pervert and I had to leave. He burnt my stuff. All I had left was drugs, money and a set of scales (for weighing the drugs)"

THE CYCLE

Jesse describes the next few years he spent as being in "survival mode." His life became a cycle of homelessness, addiction and drug dealing. He tried to get off the drugs a number of times. He asked his parents if he could move home and they agreed but only if he was off the drugs. However he had nowhere to safely withdraw, so he would say he was clean, go home and when his family realised he was in withdrawal or still using, they would ask him to leave. Then he would have to move out, staying wherever he could find a place; in share houses, moving around, staying with 'friends' or customers, and the cycle would continue.

"I tried so many times to get off drugs. I had asked my parents to let me back home. I had nowhere to go. They would only have me home if I was not on drugs. But I couldn't withdraw anywhere because I need to sleep and I couldn't where I was staying or I had nowhere to stay."

⁹ Share house is a term used in Australia to describe a type of 'boarding house'. Share houses, like boarding houses, typically have separate bedrooms / sleeping areas, and shared common areas.



HOMELESSNESS: SHELTERS, ROUGH SLEEPING

By the time he was 25 Jesse had been in and out of the family house numerous times, was still using and still dealing. And then he was robbed. Money and drugs were taken and he owed thousands to a bkie gang. No one would let him stay with them because they were afraid of the gang. Jesse started staying at homeless shelters. He did this for six months while he continued to sell drugs and pay off what he owed to the gang.

“I started staying at a shelter in the city. It was the only place I could stay. It was a big café. An open room with tables and chairs. They would serve meals from 6am to 11pm. At 11 pm, they would put cardboard on the floor and give out blankets and people would sleep there. Then you would be out by 6am so they could set up the café. I was there for six months. Still selling drugs to pay the gang. I stopped selling [after paying the gang] but I was still using to get free hits. I would wake up at 6am then go to the Anglican Church to sleep, then go back to the café to start again.”

GOING HOME

Jesse was 26 years old, addicted to meth and had found another place to board. However, the boarding place was not ideal and he soon found himself unable to stay there and once again being forced to stay on the streets. He went to the Salvation Army and the Red Cross and asked for help. They offered to pay for a flight home to New Zealand. Coincidentally on that same day, his parents called to say they were moving

back to New Zealand and offered to pay for him to go home as well.

Back in New Zealand a relative initially offered Jesse a motel unit to live in on the conditions that he got a job or did a course and didn't use drugs. He agreed. Away from the drug scene, he got clean because he had no access to drugs, and started a course. He managed to stay clean for seven months until an issue with another student caused him to spiral back into the drug scene.

“I had an argument with someone in my course. A friend called me and she had access to ‘P’. I said, “Can you get me some?” So I started using, once a week then three times a week and then I was driving her around to get drugs.”

HOMELESSNESS: COUCH SURFING, NIGHT SHELTER, EMERGENCY HOUSING

Jesse was quickly addicted again and it soon took over his life. His family started to notice the signs. However, the Covid-19 lockdown happened and he was allowed to stay where he was. But then the Lockdown was over and he found himself homeless again. Jesse had a car so he would spend his time driving around and staying with other drug users.

“My family started talking about me and I could see where this was going. But the addiction took over. The P here was a lot stronger and after being off for six months I was more susceptible. I started using and met people in the P scene here.”

“One day my family had had enough. I had nowhere to go but I had a car, so I was driving around to people who use drugs [and staying with them].”

At one point he spent two nights at a transitional house, but then moved out when a friend called to say she had drugs and he could stay with her at her emergency motel housing. So he moved there and “got high for a week.”

Over this time, Jesse tried to get clean. He moved to another city where he managed to stay clean for three weeks, but then was soon back to using. He phoned a rehabilitation place in Auckland and asked to be admitted but was told there was an eight month waiting list. He applied anyway and was contacted recently to say there was a place; however he has now been clean for six months and goes to a weekly rehabilitation programme and has decided to stay with that.



TURNING POINT: DECIDING

“I decided on my own that I was unhappy that I had had enough and wanted to get off the drugs.”

Six months ago Jesse had reached a point where he wanted to change. He realised that he was not happy, and that he did not want things to carry on the way they had been. He decided that he wanted off the drugs. His parents offered him an outside room on their property. He could stay there as long as he was not using. Jesse took the offer, got off the drugs and has been living there for six months. There are conditions to his tenure; he has to stay clean and it is not his own place as his parents do not want “druggies coming around” so they could ask him to leave and he would have nowhere to go. But, Jesse is optimistic that this time he will be able to stay clean.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Jesse ended up homeless in Australia and also in New Zealand, caught up in a cycle of addiction. He tried to get help from family, from various social services and even applied for a residential rehabilitation programme but it had an eight month waiting list. Jesse is concerned about the lack of addiction services in Aotearoa, and in Tauranga, specifically. Access to addiction services, when he needed it, could have meant he could have got off the drugs, and the streets, sooner.

“The Salvation Army programme has a one year waiting list. Hanmer is the same. Odyssey House, eight months. One day is too long! There are not enough places for people with addictions. Someone who has called and said “I need help” is at a lower priority than someone from court or prison. I’m ringing saying, “I want help now,” and I can’t get it.

“In Tauranga there is no overnight rehab. Only a day clinic. You go in the morning until 3pm and do programmes and workshops to help manage triggers. But once you leave you can access drugs straight away because you are not in a residential situation.”

Insights

LOOKING BACK:

THE IMPORTANCE OF BELONGING

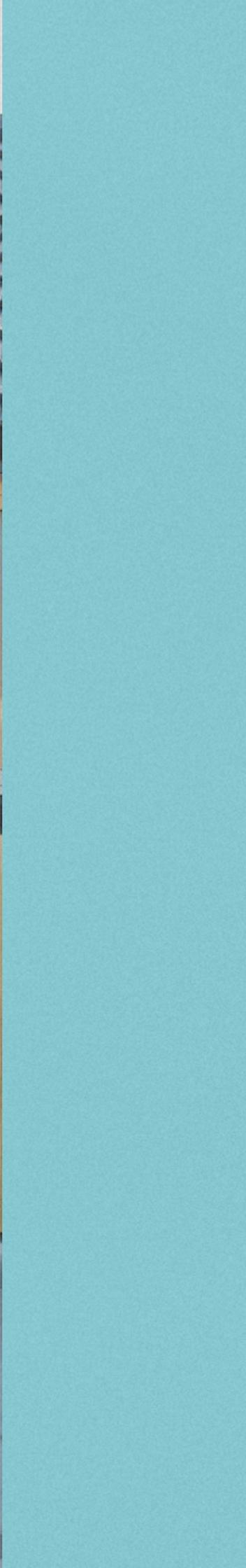
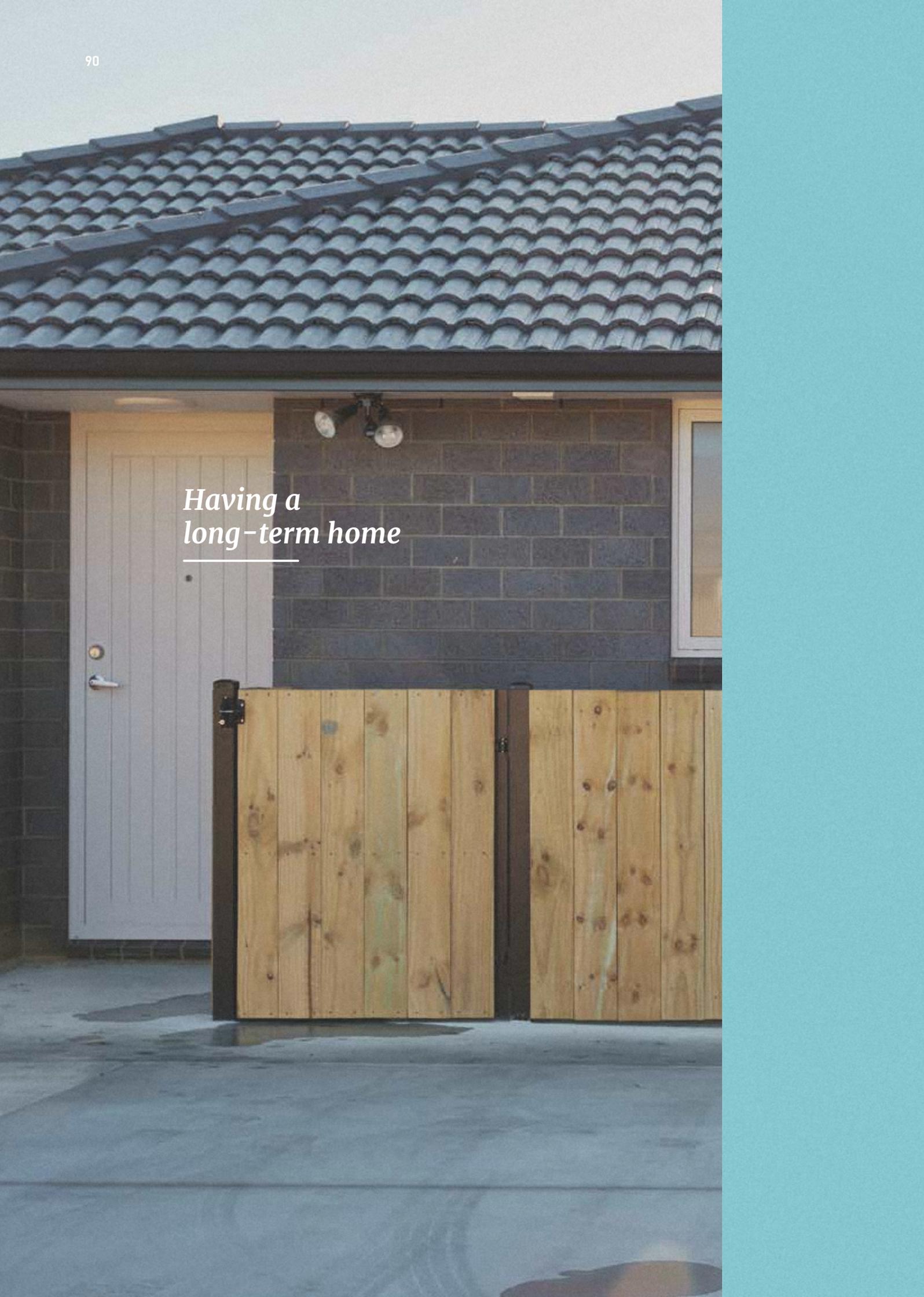
Jesse's story is one of the impact of disconnection and the need to belong and to be valued. When he reflects on his life so far Jesse can see the patterns that led to his addiction. The abuse, the disconnection from whānau, from whenua and from whakapapa, and keeping the 'secret' of being gay, all created a void. He needed to belong, to be accepted, to be cared about but he was alone, disconnected and alienated.

Drugs filled that void and as the addiction developed and worsened and he needed help, he had nowhere to turn. His family did not understand addiction and all his other 'friends' were addicts. As a result he ended up 'on the streets,' staying in his car, in shelters, couch surfing and house jumping.

Jesse is now at a turning point where he has chosen to take a different path and he is working to stay on that path. He has looked back on his life and is gaining an understanding of the underlying causes that led him down the path of addiction. He attends a rehabilitation programme. He has somewhere to stay and has plans to get his own place and he has a purpose, and things to occupy his mind to keep him away from the drugs. He is learning and connecting to te ao Māori and he has plans for the future, to study, to learn and to help others.

*“I have things to occupy my mind.
Connecting with my whakapapa. Working
with people – I can fill that void with that
instead of drugs.”*

*Having a
long-term home*



Sharon and Liam's Story

Five years to get a home

Sharon is 38 years old and of Pasifika descent. Her partner Liam is 32 years old and of Māori descent with whakapapa links to Tauranga Moana. Sharon, Liam and their three children live in a three bedroom home which they rent for \$470 a week through a property management company. They are eligible for a Work and Income accommodation allowance of \$220 a week which makes the rent affordable. They have lived there for “one year and three months” and it is “home.” The property is a stand-alone older house on a full section with fruit trees. It reminds Sharon of her grandparent’s home.

Sharon is currently a stay at home mum and has been since her baby was born a year ago. Prior to that, Sharon was working as a packhouse supervisor. Her partner Liam works as a gardener and maintenance person for a local company. Liam’s take-home income is around \$600 per week but with Work and Income accommodation support, budget advice and support from a local community agency, they are paying off debts and managing to make ends meet. They would like to get their own home and are working towards that goal with the support of two community organisations.

But things were not always like this.

Fifteen months ago they were living in a caravan and a car and had spent years trying to find a place to rent. Their experience of homelessness includes sleeping in cars, caravans, temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation, emergency housing and overcrowding.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS THEIR STORY

Sharon describes what happened as “a series of [stupid] things that should not have happened.” The first thing to happen was an eviction which eventually led to five years of temporary housing situations, while trying to find somewhere secure to live.

EARLY YEARS

Sharon was born in the Islands but came to New Zealand as a baby. She grew up in a small town in a “straightforward household, no drinking, no domestic violence.” She moved to Tauranga as a young person, with her first partner, Cole and their young children. However, Cole was abusive and whilst “it took me seven years to get away,” she left him. Cole took the youngest child, and Sharon moved home and spent two years going through the courts to regain custody. After regaining custody of her child, Sharon moved back to Tauranga, with her new partner, Liam.

THE INITIAL EVENT: EVICTION FOR 'EARNING TOO MUCH'

Just over five years ago, Sharon and Liam moved to Tauranga Moana. They initially moved in with Liam's parents while they got themselves settled back into the city and looked for a house to rent. Liam's parents had been renting their house from Kāinga Ora for more than 15 years. This was the family home, where they had brought up their children. The children, some of whom still lived there or like Liam had moved back in for a while, were all grown up and working.

All the adults living in the house were in paid work and it was the household income that was the first event that triggered the journey of homelessness for Sharon and her family. Essentially, an income assessment of the household concluded that Liam's parents were able to afford a private rental and as such were no longer eligible for their Kāinga Ora home. They were told they would have to leave.

“We were trying to get a house when we found out his parents were being evicted.”

Although it was okay living with the in-laws, Sharon had been looking for a house of their own to rent. When she found out that her in-laws were going to have to move, she increased her efforts to find somewhere, but to no avail.

BARRIERS TO TENANCY: INCOME, DEBT, TENANCY RECORD, RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, INELIGIBLE

Between them, Liam and Sharon were earning too much to qualify for a Kāinga Ora home and despite both working and earning “good money,” they could not get a house in the private housing market.

“We were making good money. We’d been to just about every agency. I was on Trade Me. Applying. Kept getting, ‘Sorry this house has been taken.’ or ‘You have kids.’”

Choices and circumstances from the past which had led to ‘bad’ credit, a ‘bad’ tenancy record caused by Sharon’s ex-partner, and discrimination and racism all played a part in why they were struggling to get a house in the private rental market.

“Our credit was pretty bad then too. We were paying off debts, from when I was young and stupid. Bought things on hire purchase and didn’t pay on time. My ex-partner did not have a good tenancy record. He trashed the house (after we split up). The house was in my name. After that I just stopped paying for everything, lost my job, and started drinking.

Discriminated against? Yes. With my name you would not think I’m a brown person. But one lady, an old white lady, she looked at me up and down and I knew we weren’t going to get a house from her.”

HOMELESSNESS: SHARING ACCOMMODATION AND EVICTION

While Sharon continued to look for a house for the family, they moved out of the parents’ place and moved in with a cousin who rented a house from Kāinga Ora. They had permission from the Kāinga Ora tenancy manager to live there and paid their share of the rent directly to Kāinga Ora.

However, the situation was far from ideal. Sharon and Liam were working separate shifts, he on days and her on evenings, and so would only see each other for half an hour a day after he came home and before she went to work. The cousin struggled with mental health and addiction issues, and Sharon was particularly concerned for the wellbeing of her children, as she would sometimes come home to find a ‘full on party’ happening.

“[Cousin] has got mental health issues and we had to deal with that. He was an alcoholic. It was shocking.”

In addition, the cousin was not paying his share of the rent, and after they had been there for 18 months the cousin was evicted for unpaid rent. Sharon had been trying to find another place for the whole time they lived there and when the cousin was evicted she tried to get the house signed over to them. However, they were not eligible for the house and had to leave and, for Sharon, “that’s when the homelessness started.”

HOMELESSNESS: TEMPORARY HOUSING

Moving back in with Liam's parents was not a realistic option as they had moved out of their house and into a caravan at a family-owned property. One of the Nannies had left the property to the family, and whilst there was a house on it, there was no room inside for Liam's parents, so they were living in a small caravan onsite.

Liam sent an "emergency email" around his workplace asking if anyone had a house they could rent. Someone responded with an offer of a one bedroom studio unit, rent-free. This was the first of a number of temporary options they went through over the next nine months. The first place was small, so Sharon and Liam sent the children to stay with the grandparents in the caravan whilst they moved into the studio unit and tried to find a bigger place. Within two weeks a friend of a workmate offered them another one bedroom unit which was a bit bigger. They moved in there and got the children back.

Although they weren't paying rent, the place was small and the logistics of getting to work, school and daycare hampered by their location and only having one car, took their toll. Sharon was now doing day shifts so "we would get up at 4am, get the kids ready for school and daycare and then drop the youngest at day care and our son at Mum's house at 6am, to walk to school from there. Then we'd go to work."

HOMELESSNESS: BOARDING, STRESS AND EVICTION

After six months in the studio unit, they moved into a boarding situation with a woman and her grandson, to be closer to school and work. However, this situation only lasted three months as the stress of trying to find a home, keep the family unit together and still be on-board at work, had begun to catch up and inevitably the relationship suffered. Sharon and Liam were arguing, Liam was coming home drunk and "that ended our tenancy there," as eventually the landlady asked him to leave, which he did. Two days later, worried that he might come back, the landlady asked Sharon to move out and "that's when we got homeless."

HOMELESSNESS: CARAVAN AND CAR

Sharon had nowhere to go, and just to add to the situation, she had recently found out she was pregnant. She had her eight year old son with her and they spent two nights sleeping in a car, whilst her two year old stayed in the grandparents' caravan. Sharon and Liam patched things up and the in-laws said they could stay with them, so Sharon moved into the caravan sleeping on a "tiny bed" with the two children, while Liam slept in his car outside. After a night or two in the caravan, Sharon moved into the car with Liam to sleep, as it was more comfortable than the caravan bed.

And this was where the family stayed for the next few months; the children in the caravan with the grandparents, Sharon, pregnant and sleeping in a car with Liam. During this time Sharon and Liam continued to work and Sharon continued looking for a house to rent, but no one would rent to them.



TURNING POINT: HAVING AN ADVOCATE

While their housing situation was getting more perilous, Sharon was working in a supervisory role at the packhouse and struggling with being available to help her staff with their concerns, without letting on what was happening in her life.

“It was [very] stressful. I was worried about losing the baby. As a supervisor I had people coming to me all the time and you have to pretend like it’s all okay.”

It was at this time that Sharon opened up to someone else at work who had noticed that Sharon was not doing too well. This person knew of a local social service agency who helped families and encouraged Sharon to contact them. Sharon made contact with Angel at the agency and “just like that, Angel was able to get us in to see houses!”

“We had an advocate and her name is Angel. She advocated for us, hard. Angel came to every WINZ meeting with us. She advocated for us hard. Without Angel we would have still been in the caravan. We would still be sleeping in a car. Angel is amazing.”

EMERGENCY MOTEL TO SECURE TENURE

Once Sharon was connected with Angel and the community agency, she had an advocate and that was the turning point. Within a few weeks the family was out of the caravan and the car and into a motel unit for a month while Angel actively worked with them to find a house to rent. They went to three house viewings, organised by Angel, and within a month they were moving into their current home, helped out by the agency that paid the bond. Just in time, as baby was born one month later.

“I went to WINZ but because we worked, we made too much, and they declined us. Angel came with us and she said to the WINZ lady ‘so you are okay with having a heavily pregnant lady sleeping in a car?’ [That’s when] we got into a motel. WINZ paid for most of it. Our season shut down and I lost my job and that’s when WINZ finally said we were under the threshold. [At the motel] we had to pay \$290 a week which was do-able as I had just finished work and had holiday pay. It was bliss compared to sleeping in a car.”

FINALLY A PLACE TO CALL HOME

After five years of sharing housing, temporary housing, sleeping in cars and caravans and emergency motel housing, the family finally has a place to call home.

“It is home for now. We plan to pay off all our debt then start saving to be able to own our own home. So that our kids have somewhere to be in the future. Angel is working with us towards that with [another organisation]. I’m just happy that we have a house and we are all happy now.”

Looking back, Sharon says that while things are good now, she can still remember what it felt like to be homeless.

“It takes a big toll on you – being homeless. Not knowing where your family is going to be. Feeling a failure for your children. That’s what homelessness felt like for me. I’m failing my kids and I can’t do anything about it. We’re good now, in a good place. But it’s still raw. It feels like yesterday.”

“It’s [very] stressful to be in that situation.”

Insights

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Sharon and Liam's story is one of how a series of different factors, created barriers for them to find a home. The initial event which triggered their homelessness journey, that is their in-laws having to move from their Kāinga Ora home, might have started their journey, but was not the 'cause' of their continued homelessness.

The barriers they faced to being housed were a mix of structural and system failures, as they were ineligible for support due to their income level which limited their housing options, and individual circumstances, as they had 'bad' credit and tenancy records which discouraged private landlords from renting to them. They needed a house of a reasonable size to accommodate them and their children, and the lack of available housing coupled with discrimination and racism further limited their options.

The key for Sharon and Liam to getting out of the situation was the involvement of a community agency and an advocate who could provide access to housing options, vouch for them to prospective landlords, advocate for them with Work and Income and support them to secure and maintain a tenancy in a private rental.



*Having a
long-term home*



Kabwenea and Jason's Story

New migrants and 'The Struggle'

Kabwenea and her husband, Jason, are of Pasifika descent. Kabwenea was born in Kiribati and her husband was born in New Zealand to parents from Kiribati and Tuvalu who were, at the time, studying here. Kabwenea and Jason both grew up in Kiribati, and lived there up until twelve years ago when they migrated to New Zealand.

Kabwenea and Jason who are in their early 40s, have four children aged nine to 20 years. All four children are living at home. The youngest two children are still at school and the oldest has recently finished a course and is seeking a job. The second oldest has just completed high school, gained a scholarship for university and will begin her tertiary studies in 2021.

Jason works fulltime as a commercial cleaner and Kabwenea works part time as a healthcare assistant. They receive appropriate income support entitlements, are connected with social service agencies, and are involved with their local community and church. Overall, they have enough income coming in to pay their bills, service debts and provide for themselves and their children.

They are currently living in a three bedroom house which they rent for \$500 per week through a property management company. Kabwenea says that "it is a good place to live" and "it feels like our home." In the future Kabwenea and Jason would like to get their own home and are working towards that goal with the help of a local agency and a budgeting service.

But things were not always like this.

When they first came to New Zealand they found themselves living in overcrowded, old, cold houses, unable to afford to put food on the table and rationing one loaf of bread to last for a week. Their experience of homelessness includes sharing accommodation, overcrowding and unsuitable housing, with related struggles of poverty, food insecurity, lack of information and financial debt.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS THEIR STORY

“But it is very, very difficult for us [here]. [At that time] we thought it would have been better to have stayed home. We struggled.”

Kabwenea talks about her experiences as ‘The Struggle.’ They had come to New Zealand from Kiribati for their children’s education. At the time, their oldest was eight years old and they were thinking ahead as to whether they would send their children overseas for further education. It is not uncommon for families from the Islands to send children to New Zealand for schooling, however Kabwenea and Jason did not want to send their children overseas alone. They had options, after all. Jason had been born here and could get New Zealand citizenship, which gave them the choice to migrate.

“We want to move for our children’s future, for their education.”

AOTEAROA: THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

In Kiribati, Kabwenea and Jason were office workers; Kabwenea worked in data entry and Jason was an accounts clerk. Whilst they were not wealthy, they had good jobs, lived in a house they had built on their land, did not have to pay rent and had savings in the bank. However, wages in New Zealand seemed so high compared to what they were earning as office workers in the Islands; it seemed like a land of opportunity. They could gain good schooling and brighter futures for their children and as a bonus they would be ‘wealthy.’

“I thought we would be wealthy here.”

So the decision was made to move. Jason got his New Zealand citizenship and they packed up and together with their three young children aged one, six and eight years old, they came to New Zealand. Whilst they brought some money with them, Kabwenea, believing they would be better off financially in Aotearoa, gave much of her savings to her parents before she left the Islands. They spent the first two months in Auckland, buying a car on hire purchase and then moving to the Bay of Plenty as they were told there was available work in the kiwifruit orchards. This was where the struggle began.

HOMELESSNESS: OVERCROWDING

When they arrived in the Bay, they moved in with an uncle and his family. The house was small, only two bedrooms, and it was crowded. In addition to Uncle and Aunty and their five children, there were two other couples and three teenagers living there. So, with Kabwenea, Jason and their three children, there were a total of nineteen people in the two bedroom one bathroom house. Kabwenea and Jason had a bedroom for their family, the two couples and the three teenagers slept in the lounge, the uncle’s five children had the other bedroom and Uncle and Aunty slept in their car outside.

“There was one bathroom so the men all used the public toilet or would use the toilets at work. Sometimes only the kids used the shower because the hot water was finished. The kids got priority.”

LOW PAID WORK

It was winter time in the Bay of Plenty and the only work on offer was contract pruning on kiwifruit orchards; work that Kabwenea and Jason had no experience of and, to make it worse, they were paid by how much they could prune. Their inexperience meant they were slow. As well, Kabwenea could not put in as much time as Jason as she also had to feed and take care of their baby who would sleep in the car while they worked in the orchards. All this meant that their earnings were very low. Kabwenea remembers they earned about \$380 per week.

The overcrowding was not ideal and as well, they had to spend money on petrol to drive to the orchard they worked on, which was money they could ill afford. Kabwenea was looking for a house, but they had no money for a bond so this limited what housing they could get.

HOMELESSNESS: THE OLD COLD HOUSE

After six months of living with the uncle, Kabwenea and Jason managed to get a house to rent through a friend. This house was near the orchard so they could walk to work, and they didn't need a bond. A small two bedroom house, it was "very old and very cold." The rent was \$280 a week, leaving them about \$100 a week for all other expenses, including food. Kabwenea remembers keeping the children home from school because they had no lunch. She would close the curtains so people would think there was no one home, as she was embarrassed that she had no food in the cupboards and could not even offer visitors a cup of tea.

"Sometimes we don't send the kids to school because of their lunch."

"I would close my curtains because I didn't want friends to come in, because we had no food. No sugar, to offer them a cup of tea."

Meals were often kiwifruit and fish, with one slice each of bread from the one loaf they bought each week. This food was either inexpensive or 'free.' Kabwenea and Jason were able to take home any kiwifruit they found in the orchard, and Kabwenea's neighbour who was a keen fisherman, would regularly take Jason out fishing with him.

STRESS AND DEBT

The stress of the poor housing, lack of food and financial worries took its toll on the family. Arguments between Kabwenea and Jason were common as they struggled to make ends meet and provide for their children.

"We were not a happy family. Stress. No money, no food, arguing. My husband and I, we didn't talk to each other."

They were unhappy here, believing they would have been better to have stayed in the Islands, but were also too embarrassed to tell their family overseas how bad things were.

"I didn't even tell my parents about our struggle."

Their financial situation was becoming worse and they had fallen behind on their car payments. A fellow worker from the orchards told them about getting a credit card. This seemed like

a good idea and so they got a card with a limit of \$3000 from their bank. They soon found themselves further in debt on the credit card and paying interest, as they could not pay the full amounts owing each month.

TURNING POINT: THE KINDNESS OF OTHERS

There was no 'one' turning point for Kabwenea and Jason, but rather series of incidences and help from a range of individuals that eventually helped them to get assistance and find their way out of 'the struggle.'

Two of these individuals were teachers at the children's school. The children had gone to school one day and their friends asked them why they had been absent the day before. The six year old spoke up saying, "because we have no food," while her older brother tried to keep her quiet. This was overhead by the teacher and that afternoon two teachers turned up at Kabwenea's house with a car full of groceries to give to the family. This moment was one of the best memories Kabwenea has of that time.

"The teachers brought some groceries. I held my daughter and said 'thank you God.' When my husband came home, he smelt food cooking. I cooked the food. He smelt rice and chicken. When he knock on the window and he say, 'What the smell?' I opened the pantry and the fridge and said, 'See. Now it is your turn to say, 'thank you, God.'"

Once the school found out about the situation, they told the family that they would arrange lunch for the children so they could go to school.

TURNING POINT: SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE

As new migrants, Kabwenea and Jason had not been provided with any information about their legal entitlements to, for example, financial assistance and/or job seeker support from Work and Income and Inland Revenue, housing options with Kāinga Ora or the social service agencies who might assist them.

They had found the local community house and were using the resources there, such as computers and internet, to communicate with family back home. They could have asked for help there, but they were not confident in their English which limited who they could talk to, and as well 'you don't know what you don't know' and they did not know there was any support they could access.

There were a number of other workers from the Islands, including Tuvalu, at the orchard and Kabwenea and Jason had begun to get to know some of them. One day Kabwenea was talking with some of the other orchard workers and they told her about Work and Income, Working for Families and other available support. This was the first she knew that they might be able to get some financial help.

The nearest Work and Income office was ten kilometres away from their house. As they had no money for petrol, Jason walked there and back to find out if they were eligible for some help. He made this four-hour return journey a number of times because as it turned out they were eligible, but he needed to take in 'paperwork' like birth certificates and other documentation in order to apply.

"We didn't get Working for Families and all that because we didn't know about WINZ. I talked with people from Tuvalu at the orchard and they told me about WINZ accommodation support and Working for Families. I talked to my husband about going to WINZ. He walked from [our house] to WINZ. It took two or three weeks because we had to get the paperwork, the certificates. He had to walk back and forth. Then we could get some assistance from WINZ."

They were also entitled to Working for Families and now they knew what to ask about, they asked, and "the lady from the community house" helped them to apply online for that.

TURNING POINT: MIDWIFE FRONTLINE WORKER

Kabwenea and Jason were now getting a bit more financial support from Work and Income and Inland Revenue. Work and Income also assisted Jason to gain a forklift license ready for the next season, so he could work in the Packhouse which was better pay and conditions. Things were improving for the family, but they were still living in the 'old, cold house.' They had a bad credit rating from when they had got behind on their car payments, and this was one of the barriers to getting another house.

They had been in the house for just over two years, when Kabwenea became pregnant. Their midwife came for home visits and seeing their housing situation, was soon helping them to apply for a Kāinga Ora house.

"My midwife gave me phone numbers, guided us where to go, to Housing New Zealand and what to ask for."

HOUSING: PUBLIC HOUSING

Within a few months they were moving from the small two bedroom old, cold house to a bigger, better place to live; a three bedroom Kāinga Ora house in Tauranga. The rent for their new 'better' house was \$320 per week, only \$40 more than what they had been paying for the previous place. Their baby was born two months later. Once again they had been assisted by someone who saw

a need and worked to help them access support; in this case helping them move from unsuitable housing to public housing, another step forward.

The Kāinga Ora house was home for the next seven years, until they moved into a private rental three years ago, with the assistance of a community social service agency.

HOUSING: PRIVATE RENTAL

Accessing their entitlements and gaining qualifications for better paid employment and living in affordable public housing, enabled Kabwenea and Jason to move away from ‘the struggle’ and to be able to provide adequate food and shelter for their family. However, with four growing children, and the baby turning six, they were keen to find another house. Kabwenea had started a part time job so they had more money coming in and could afford to pay a bit more in rent.

Despite actively searching and going to viewings they were not having any success. They were still paying off debts and this ‘bad’ credit coupled with having four children and the competition for housing were the main barriers they faced.

“We had been looking for a house. When we view [houses] there [are] lots of people. There were eight or nine [houses] and we missed out on them.”

Kabwenea first heard of a community agency through the local school where the agency ran a programme for boys. Soon she was connected with this agency and they were actively assisting the family to get into a new house. The agency staff helped by taking them to viewings, advocating with the property managers and paying the bond, and very quickly the family had shifted into a four bedroom private rental house, paying \$595 per week.

The family stayed in their private rental for two years. They chose to move to another private rental last year in order to reduce their rent payments. They now pay \$500 per week for a three bedroom house and for Kabwenea, the house they are in, “feels like our home. It feels like you are in your own place. You feel relaxed.”

HOUSING: PATHWAY TO HOME OWNERSHIP

The local community agency was instrumental in assisting the family to move from public housing to private rental housing, and is now working with them to get to a stage of being able to buy their own home.

“When we got [our worker], then [getting a house] was easy. [The worker] helped us to get the house at The Lakes and the one we are in now.

“Now they are helping with being able to buy a house.

“Now we are at [a budgeting service]. All our pay goes to them and they pay our bills and debts. Then when we have done that, we can go back to the bank [for a home loan].”

Insights

NEW MIGRANTS AND THE 'LAND OF OPPORTUNITY'

As new migrants, Kabwenea and Jason didn't know the New Zealand system and what assistance they were entitled to. They were also 'shy' at first to speak English and, although the situation they found themselves in was not of their own making, they were too embarrassed to ask for help from their family or friends. The language barrier and lack of support and information meant they spent their first year in New Zealand struggling in unnecessary hardship, poverty and stress, living in overcrowded and unsuitable housing and racking up debts which they are still paying off.

There were a number of occasions where Kabwenea and Jason received help and support from others in the community, including community house staff, frontline workers such as teachers and midwives, who stepped in to provide food or to help the family negotiate the system to access support. Much of what happened to them was avoidable as they were entitled to financial support, housing and job seeking assistance, all of which could have kept them out of homelessness, debt and poverty.

The situation highlights the lack of support for migrants from the Islands and, given that New Zealand promotes immigration from the Pacific nations, there is a need to ensure that those who come receive the right information in a timely and appropriate way to ensure that they have the best possible start in their new lives.

For her part, Kabwenea now spends time making sure to talk to other new migrants, connecting them with a local agency and letting them know what they can access. She does not want others to go through the same struggle she did. As Kabwenea knows 'with knowledge comes power'; that is, when you know what you can access, and where to go for help, you are empowered.

“I’m a victim of the struggle. We can’t end up in the struggle if we know where to go [to get help].”

*Having a
long-term home*



Rāwiri's Story

Trouble!

The impact of others

Rāwiri is 49 years old and of Māori descent, with whakapapa links to Tauranga Moana and Hauraki. He has a fulltime job at a local business where he has been working for the past four years. He lives in a one room furnished bedsit which he keeps immaculately tidy. Rāwiri pays around \$310 per week for his unit; this covers furnishings, rent, amenities and use of the laundry. He has been living there for about two months and has found it a good place to live. The neighbours keep an eye on each other and the location is practical as it is close enough that he can walk to work; a necessity since Rāwiri does not have a car.

Recently, a relative of Rāwiri's turned up at his unit while he was away and made trouble; drinking outside Rāwiri's unit and verbally insulting the neighbours. The result was a complaint being made and Rāwiri receiving a 90-day notice. This incident happened a few weeks before Rāwiri was interviewed for this research and he was understandably concerned about having to move again. Fortunately Rāwiri has been a client of one of Tauranga's community housing providers for the past four years and they are working with him to solve this situation.

But things were not always like this.

Rāwiri used to live with his parents and after they passed away, he stayed with other relatives, some of whom caused 'trouble' for Rāwiri. A few years ago Rāwiri ended up in hospital after an incident and, on discharge, had nowhere to live and found himself staying in temporary housing. Rāwiri's experience of homelessness includes emergency housing and transitional housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS HIS STORY

Rāwiri's story is linked in with the same 'trouble' relative who has caused the recent issues for Rāwiri. His story is also about the impact for people with health and ability challenges when family circumstances change, how families can be supportive or unsupportive and how providers can be valuable and necessary advocates.

THE EARLY YEARS

While Rāwiri has whakapapa links to Tauranga Moana and Hauraki iwi, he was raised in Auckland with his parents and two siblings. Rāwiri is the middle of the three children; he has an older sister and a younger brother. As a child Rāwiri had a speech disorder and other special needs. His parents took him to speech therapy as a child and he explains, in the interview, that without the therapy he would not be able to communicate verbally. Rāwiri went to high school and says that he was "in a special class" at college.

After leaving school Rāwiri started working. While his brother and sister moved away, Rāwiri stayed living with his parents in Auckland. He worked at the same workplace for 22 years where he was a valued employee. One day a workplace accident occurred which resulted in Rāwiri sustaining a head injury which caused epilepsy. He remained working fulltime, but since that incident Rāwiri has had to take Epilim on a daily basis. The medication generally keeps the epilepsy under control provided that

he takes it regularly, although stress does aggravate the condition.

THE MOVE TO TAURANGA

About seven years ago Rāwiri's mum passed away and his sister decided that Rāwiri and his father needed to move to Tauranga Moana where she was based. Neither Rāwiri or his father were keen on the move but they did make the shift.

"My sister said, 'Dad had to come home.'"

Rāwiri had to leave his job of 22 years and move to a new city. He found it difficult to find employment and spent a number of years on a benefit while looking for work.

"The family wanted me to move down here and it was hard for me to find a job."

TROUBLE

Not long after moving to Tauranga, Rāwiri's father also passed away and Rāwiri moved in with another relative. Unfortunately, this relative was 'trouble' for Rāwiri. The relative took half of Rāwiri's benefit in board and felt that he had the right to tell Rāwiri what to do and who to socialise with. Rāwiri lived with the relative for some time until he was told to leave, as his relative did not like the friends that Rāwiri was spending time with.

"His [relative] kicked him out. He didn't like Rāwiri mixing with other friends, drinking with the next door neighbours. He tried to control Rāwiri. He just wanted Rāwiri for the money. Rāwiri gave him half his benefit money for board.¹⁰"

¹⁰ Note that Rāwiri's partner was present at the interview and assisted Rāwiri with communication as his speech disorder sometimes made it difficult for him to communicate. Therefore some quotes are from the partner.

Rāwiri did not know what to do; he felt as though he had nowhere to go and in this state he took an overdose of his medication. His cousins found him unconscious and took him to hospital where he remained for a week. It was after this that Rāwiri's homelessness began.

HOMELESSNESS: TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Rāwiri was discharged to a transitional housing provider as he had nowhere else to go. The accommodation set-up meant that he had to share a sleeping room with others, and as well, share bathroom and living facilities. He remained there for the next four to six months. Although this provided him with somewhere to stay, Rāwiri would have preferred to have his own place.

“I didn’t like it because I had to share with all the other men. Like five men to a room with bunks.”

During this time, Rāwiri kept busy doing volunteer work for a local charity during the day and kept looking for paid work and a place to stay. His doctor had referred him to a community housing provider (CHP) to enable Rāwiri to access affordable rent options.

“The doctor helped put me under [CHP] to find a place of my own. Then it would be cheaper [than a private rental].”

HOMELESSNESS: TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Rāwiri was contacted by the CHP who had found him a place to stay at one of the properties they managed. This new place was transitional housing which Rāwiri could stay in while a more permanent option was sought. At the new place the living and kitchen areas were shared, although everyone had their own bedroom. Rāwiri liked it as he had his own room and space, it was closer to his volunteer workplace and to town and he got along with the other people there, often sharing kai.

“I moved to [CHP-run transitional housing]. There was men on one side and women on the other. It was good. Close to town, closer to work. We can have dinner together and share food.”

Whilst at this place, Rāwiri managed to get a job at a nearby business, initially being employed as a casual worker. However, after about six months the residents had to move as the CHP's lease on the property had expired.

The CHP helped Rāwiri find another place to live. This time the residence was a one bedroom flat which Rāwiri lived in by himself and paid around \$160 per week in rent. Whilst Rāwiri was happy with the flat, it was still transitional housing, a little way out of the CBD, further from work and with no 'township' so he found it a little bit boring and less practical for getting to work.

“I wanted to move closer to town, work and family. There was no township [nearby]. I got bored.”

HOUSING: COMMUNITY HOUSING

The CHP managed to find Rāwiri another place to live which was closer to town and his workplace. The new place, managed by the CHP as community housing, was a one bedroom flat which suited Rāwiri because of its proximity to work and town, and he stayed there for about 18 months.

HOUSING: PRIVATE RENTAL

While Rāwiri would have been happy to stay at his new place indefinitely, that was not to be. The flats were scheduled to be redeveloped into a new facility so tenants were not able to stay long term.

“Had to move here because [the flats] were getting pulled down to make health units. Going to be health care, or something.”

The CHP had been working to find another secure rental for Rāwiri. They found him the unit that he is currently in, and helped him to shift. The new place is a private rental overseen by a property manager. Although smaller than his previous place, and a bit more expensive as it is fully furnished, Rāwiri likes it and would prefer to stay there if possible.

It is a good place to live because people look out for each other. It is close to work. I would definitely like to stay here.

Rāwiri has recently received a ‘90-day notice’ due to a relative of his turning up and upsetting the neighbours. This situation is stressful for Rāwiri who

does not want to move and is not sure what he can do. He contacted the CHP about it, and their staff are now working on his behalf to resolve the situation.

TURNING POINTS: AGENCY SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

The CHP Rāwiri was referred to by his doctor, have been a key support for him over the past four years. They helped him to move out of the shared-living accommodation, and from there into different places, as needed and are working to try and solve his current ‘90-day notice’ situation. The CHP has also helped in other ways; they have physically helped him to move his belongings and helped him to apply for the job he currently has. As well they have been with him to Work and Income to get more financial support and assisted him with getting furniture for his previous flat, allowing him to pay it off over time. It is clear that for Rāwiri, the CHP workers are the ones that he turns to when he needs assistance and he has had the same workers for the last four years which provides some consistency.

“My job. I found it online and needed someone to help with applying online. Tenancy worker from [CHP] helped with that.”



Insights

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

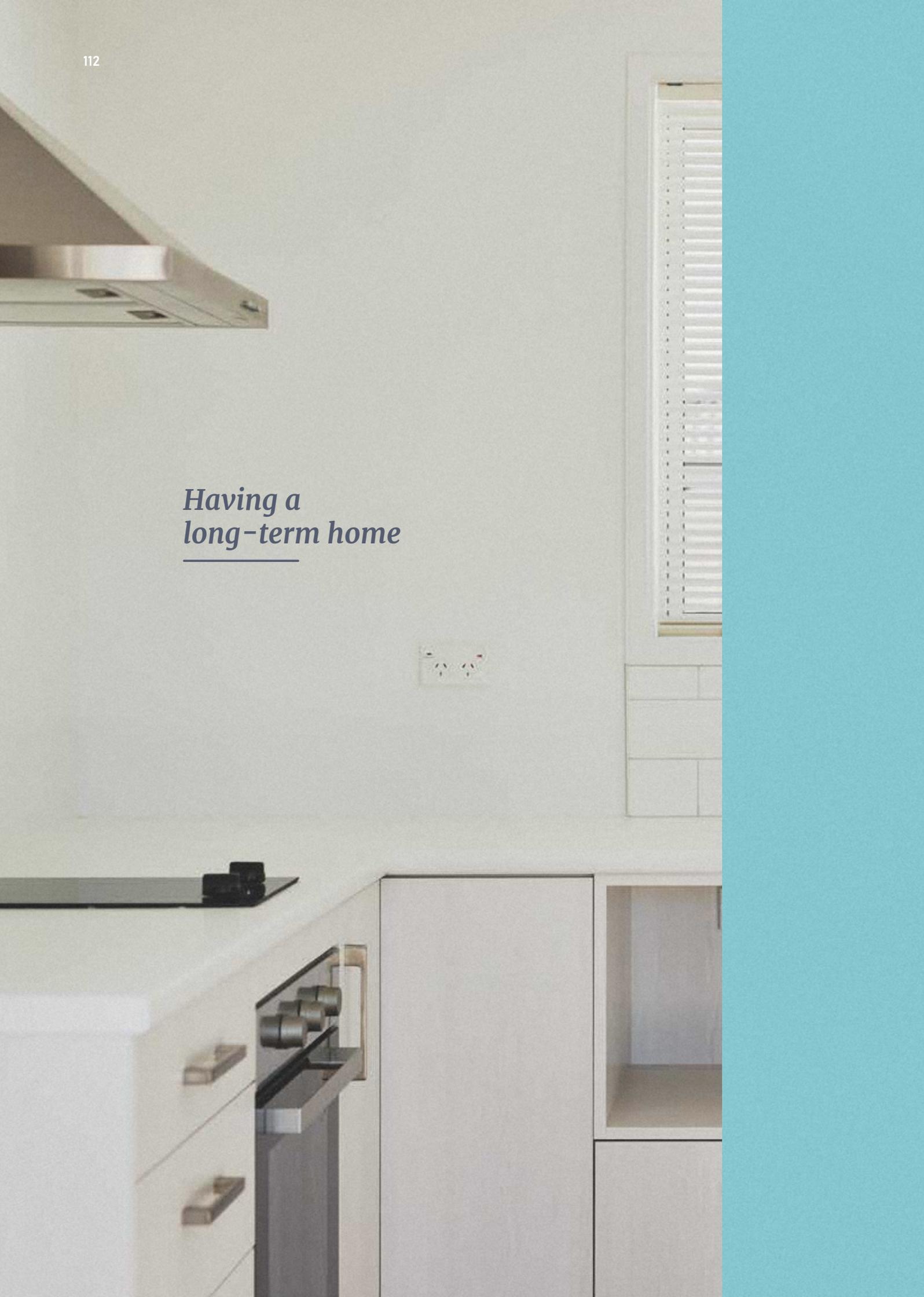
Rāwiri's story highlights the risks faced by adults with specific challenges or special needs, when their primary caregivers or supporters are no longer around. Rāwiri's parents were his main support and provided a home for him, and he lived with them for most of his adult life. Following the deaths of his parents, Rāwiri had to leave his home and work of 22 years and move to another city at the request of his relatives. Since he had to move, Rāwiri has experienced being homeless and having to move a number of times.

Some of Rāwiri's whānau are supportive of him and he has good relationships with many of his nieces and nephews. However, others in the whānau have

been less supportive, have taken advantage of him financially, caused him to self-harm and become homeless and are still making 'trouble' that resulted in him being given a 90-day notice.

Rāwiri is fortunate to have a new partner who is supporting him during the recent family 'trouble.' Rāwiri also has advocates in the CHP workers who actively work with him to provide support over and above just providing accommodation. The work the CHP does with Rāwiri illustrates that housing, especially for vulnerable adults, is about more than just bricks and mortar. It is about supporting people to be able to access a home to live in where they are safe and have secure tenure, and that support does not necessarily end when a key is handed over.

*Having a
long-term home*



Māia and Shane's Story

A domino effect

Māia is of Māori descent with whakapapa links to Tauranga Moana. While she was born and raised in Tauranga, she has lived almost half her life in Australia, “moving back and forth between here and Oz since 1998.” With family in both countries she has split her time between the two, and has permanent residency status in Australia.

Māia and her partner, Shane who are in their late 30s and early 40s, both have good well-paid jobs working in the social services sector. They currently live in their own house with three of their children who are aged between ten and 19 years old. Māia and Shane moved the house on to whānau land about 18 months ago. The house still needs some renovations and they have to sort out some ‘paperwork’ related to the land, but it is their own place and one they have plans for. They hope to finish off the house renovations, sort out the paperwork and stay there for the foreseeable future.

But things were not always like this.

Seven years ago Māia and Shane found themselves being evicted with nowhere to live, ineligible for financial or housing support, subject to racism and discrimination, and forced to move back to Australia where they had more options and could get more support. Their experience of homelessness includes sleeping in a car, temporary accommodation and emergency housing.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS THEIR STORY

Māia described what happened that led to her being homeless as ‘a domino effect’. The first domino was financial when they started paying higher rent, followed by a redundancy, which then cascaded into unpaid bills and eviction notices.

“I remember being able to manage one minute, then the rent went huge and we couldn’t manage.”

THE FIRST DOMINO

A mother of four children, Māia and her partner were working in Australia in the early 2000s when they faced job losses due to a worldwide financial recession that was occurring. At that time, they were not Australian permanent residents and realising that, because of this, there would be little financial support for them, they decided to return home. They were soon set up back in Tauranga living in a three bedroom house, both working and paying a manageable rent of \$300 per week. The four children were in school and daycare. The house was affordable but not in the best state, being damp and mouldy.

Māia’s mother became unwell and it was decided she would move in with Māia and Shane. This coupled with the unhealthy house, prompted a move to a larger, four bedroom house. The rent for the new house was significantly more, \$460 per week compared to \$300 per week, an increase of fifty percent.

“We were renting a three bedroom and it was mouldy and damp so we needed a different place. Mum needed to come in with us and the kids were getting sick.”

Despite having four dependent children and Māia’s mother in the household, with their two incomes coming in, Māia and Shane were able to manage. Māia worked as a receptionist and Shane worked in construction. Although Māia’s work was not highly paid, Shane made reasonable money by working long hours. Then Māia was made redundant and the financial struggle began. They needed both incomes to make ends meet. In addition, as Shane was paid monthly rather than weekly this put pressure on them to pay rent and bills on time.

THE DOMINOES BEGIN TO FALL

Māia was looking for another job, but wasn’t having any success. The bills were piling up, the eviction notices started coming in and the power was being cut off. Borrowing from family helped to pay urgent bills, but was also adding to their debt.

“I was made redundant. I was a receptionist. It was a domino effect. Not able to afford to pay the rent and the bills. Eviction notices started pouring in. Then I got another job, but by then we were so far behind it was too late. The power had been cut off a number of times. I was borrowing money from my sister to pay the bills.”

DISCRIMINATION, RACISM AND NO SUPPORT

When the power was cut off for the second time, Māia went to Work and Income to see if she could get some financial help. She had not sought assistance from Work and Income up until this point, but was desperate and so decided to go there. Unfortunately, the experience was upsetting, embarrassing and ultimately of no help. She did not meet the criteria; Shane's earnings and Māia's final pay had included some holiday pay, which put them over the threshold. In addition, she was subjected to assumptions, discrimination and racism and left the building in tears, worse off than when she had gone in.

“I went to Work and Income. It was embarrassing. I was employable. There is already a stigma to going there. I couldn't get any assistance because of what I had earned. I had some holiday pay. I couldn't qualify for anything. The power was disconnected at the time. There was an issue with the subsidy for the kids in daycare. Being so poor [was so awful]. I can remember being asked what my job was and how did I get it. The inference was, ‘how did someone like you, i.e. Māori, get a job as a receptionist?’”

There was some media attention at the time in regards to some matters before the courts and Māia was asked, inappropriately, by the Work and Income worker, if she was related to the persons who were in the news.

“During the appointment, the [matter before the courts] was brought up. It was ugly. I didn't bother to claim anything or get accommodation support. I just left in tears. I still remember the language and the treatment.”

DECISION TO LEAVE

Māia had got another job, but they were too far behind in the rent and couldn't catch up and had to move out of their house. They didn't qualify for Kāinga Ora housing or Work and Income support and felt that they would be better off in Australia. Although they were not permanent residents of Australia, Māia only had to reside in Australia for two more months and then she would qualify for residency and be entitled to, for example, housing support and other benefits. They also had family over there and felt that the support from them as well as social service and government agencies would be better. So they decided to move back, gain their permanent residency and ‘start over’ in Australia. The journey was not all ‘smooth sailing’ and they would experience a range of homelessness situations before they eventually got a secure rental house in Australia.

HOMELESSNESS: TEMPORARY HOUSING

Māia and Shane sold up their possessions and moved out of their rental. They had a month to finish up work obligations and sort out their situation before they could shift to Australia. A niece loaned them her house; moving in with her in-laws for a month so the family could stay at her place. This was the first of their temporary housing options, which would continue over the next nine months until they were able to get a 'state' house in Australia.

After a month, Māia, Shane and the four children, moved to Australia. The money they made from 'selling up' gave them enough to afford an off-season furnished holiday rental in Australia for two months, while Māia waited for her residency to become permanent. The local Salvation Army gave them a car, which was a huge help. After two months in Australia, Māia became an Australian permanent resident. She had been looking for a house to rent, but was not having any success as market rents were unaffordable.

The family was on the housing list for a 'state' house, but they were not classified as 'urgent' as they currently had a roof over their heads. However they soon had to move out of the holiday rental and this shifted them up the 'scale' on the housing register. An emergency housing unit was found for them, but there was a gap of four days between moving out of the rental and being able to move into the unit, where they had nowhere to stay.

HOMELESSNESS: SLEEPING IN A CAR, EMERGENCY HOUSING

Māia sent the oldest two children to stay with their grandmother, her ex-mother in law, for the four days in between houses, whilst Māia, Shane and the youngest two children, slept in their car. The car was not ideal, but they knew it was temporary and they had enough food and petrol and spent the time driving around, then parking somewhere for the night.

"Staying in the car was a blur. I had tunnel vision. But there is so much community support there. You can't go hungry. We got petrol vouchers from the Salvation Army so we could just drive around in the car until the children fell asleep."

After four days in the car, they moved into the emergency accommodation. As Māia says "it was a bit of a dive" but it was "better than the car."

"It had no carpet. It was a concrete floor. The organisation gave me some carpet. It was dirty but it was okay."

TURNING POINT: PUBLIC HOUSING

The 'turning point' for Māia and Shane was not one event but more a process. Once they were connected into the Australian 'system' they began to get assistance and each step was one step closer to secure tenure. This was not a quick process however.

Although they were on the 'list' for a state house, it was still another six months in emergency housing before a house became available. Eventually though, and after nine months of

homelessness which had started with a redundancy event out of their control, Māia and Shane and their four children had a secure tenancy in a 'state house' in Australia, where they stayed for the next three years.

MOVING FORWARD

Once they were in the 'state house' and determined to not find herself in the same situation again, Māia took up further study to enable her to go into the workforce at a higher level. With her *tohu*, Māia was able to get a well-paid job in Australia and after three years they moved out of the state house and into a private rental. Māia also invested in income support and income protection insurances.

"We stayed in the state house for three years. During that time I was able to study, then went into the workforce. That qualification changed everything for us because I had options. Then we moved out and into a rental. Had a really good job. Stable."

Although settled in Australia and with good jobs, Māia and Shane made the decision to return to New Zealand a couple of years ago due to some family circumstances. They did stay with family when they first arrived back, as the move had been a sudden one, so they had not had time to arrange housing before they shifted.

The insurances Māia had invested in provided income support while they got themselves settled. They initially stayed in a 'portacom' on the *whānau* land they now stay on, and that was 'home' for a while until they moved their

current house on to the property. With both of them working in 'good jobs', the youngest children still at home, and having their own place, the experiences of homelessness is in the past. However, Māia can still remember how it felt when the dominoes started falling.

Insights FROM OZ

Māia's experience of both New Zealand and Australia's systems provides valuable insight into what works and what doesn't, enabling her to compare the two.

Australia gave her and her family financial and practical support, and was a 'hand up' which enabled her to move forward. She was able to get secure housing so she could focus on studying, eventually gain better employment and move out of public housing into her own home.

By contrast, she struggled at the time to get help in New Zealand which prompted the move back overseas.

"The agencies in Australia were supportive, but not here. Coming back here, New Zealand is so behind in terms of support. There needs to be more resourcing going into grassroots organisations. There is a lack of moving people forwards and supporting them to do that."

*Having a
long-term home*



Stan and Dawn's Story

A series of unexpected events

Stan and Dawn are 82 and 76 years young. They identify as New Zealand European and this is a second marriage for both of them. They have been together for 19 years. Originally from the South Island, they came to the Bay of Plenty eight years ago for a six week visit and decided to stay.

They currently live in a council-owned unit, part of the Tauranga City Council's 'elder housing portfolio.' Their house is one of twenty one-bedroom units, and whilst small at 60sqm, it is warm and cosy with an outdoor garden area off the living area, off street parking and a good community of neighbours.

Stan and Dawn have lived there for five years and are very happy with their home and the facilities provided. They are active members of their village and their wider community, involved in volunteer and committee work.

But things were not always like this.

Six years ago, Stan and Dawn found themselves in housing stress and did not know where they were going to end up. They had both been unexpectedly made redundant and could no longer afford the rent on their home. With no assets to sell, buying into a retirement village was not an option and private rentals were scarce and expensive. They were in their 70s with limited employment options, no way to get a mortgage, buy a house or a unit. They did not know what to do.

“It was really spooky, really scary and frustrating. We had worked all our lives, paid all our taxes and had nothing to fall back on.”

Faced with having to move out of their home, with an uncertain future ahead, the initial plan was to move in with relatives on a temporary basis until they could find somewhere affordable to live. In the meantime, whilst they made plans to move in with Dawn's brother or Stan's son, they applied for a council house. Although they were not hopeful, their application was accepted and they have been there ever since. Stan and Dawn avoided being homeless, although only just; they were on the verge of having to move into temporary accommodation with relatives, when they managed to secure a council house.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? THIS IS THEIR STORY

Stan and Dawn's story is one of hard-working taxpayers with good jobs and a good lifestyle, who because of a series of life events, got to 'retirement age' with no home of their own and limited savings.

LIFE AND WORK EVENTS

Many years ago, as a successful businessman and business owner, Stan used to help out with a local community group providing budget advice and support to people in financial difficulties. The irony of finding himself, a number of years later, in financial 'dire straits', does not escape Stan. If asked back when he was a volunteer budget advisor, he never would have predicted that 'it' could happen to him. At that time, he was married to his first wife with a family and a successful business. He owned his own home, had a couple of cars and helped out in his community. Then a series of events occurred which caused financial difficulties and ultimately left him with few savings and reduced assets.

The first of these events, and the one that had the most impact was when Stan's first wife, Marina developed early onset dementia. She was only 56 years old. The disease took its toll; Stan initially juggling work and caring for his wife. Eventually, outside care became inevitable, but this came with significant financial cost. Subsidies are available but they are age and means-tested and as such, Stan found himself having to pay substantial costs for his wife's care. These costs depleted his assets and reduced his ability to save.

The other significant event which occurred at around the same time was that Stan's firm, which he had established with business partners, folded and Stan was faced with both loss of income and financial responsibilities to meet. The result of these events was that by the time his wife passed away, after nine years in care, Stan's assets had visibly depleted. He no longer owned his own home or business and his savings had been significantly reduced. However, Stan was not a man to stay down. He dealt with the results of the business situation and found himself another job earning a reasonable salary.

RELATIONSHIP EVENTS

Dawn was raised in Christchurch and has two brothers. She has worked all her life in various industries including retail and hospitality. Whilst her jobs have not necessarily been 'high paying' they have been enough to cover household and living expenses. Dawn's first marriage ended in divorce. The divorce settlement was far from equitable, leaving Dawn with very little in the way of assets or money.

With the marriage break-up, Dawn had to move from her home. She did not have the finances to purchase a house and private rentals were expensive, so she rented a unit from her brother and carried on working as she always had. She made enough from her job to pay her rent and living expenses and even when her brother sold the unit, the new landlord was happy for Dawn to stay on, and she did.

Dawn met Stan and they got along well. He soon moved into the unit with her and after the life events they had both been through, things were beginning to look more promising. They had found each other, got married and both had good jobs; Dawn at a local business and Stan as a sales representative. There was money coming in, affordable rent and fun social lives; going out for meals with friends and enjoying what Christchurch had to offer. Then, the earthquake struck and this changed their paths, again.

GEOGRAPHIC EVENTS: EARTHQUAKE!

The move to Tauranga was prompted by the Christchurch earthquake which left Stan and Dawn without a home to live in and Dawn without a job. The business Dawn worked for closed because of the earthquake and she took redundancy. Their rental house was in 'the red zone,' so they could no longer stay there. As well, like many of the city's residents they were not keen to remain living in an earthquake-prone place, so when Dawn's brother suggested they move north to the Bay where he was located, it seemed like a good idea. After an initial holiday to see what the Bay could offer, they soon made the move to the sunny Bay of Plenty.

Stan's job at the time was a national sales role, so he was able to transfer his work, whilst Dawn soon picked up a part-time retail job at the Mount. They rented a three bedroom house for \$400 per week. The house had two bedrooms upstairs and one downstairs, and so they took in international language students for extra income and for fun; enjoying meeting the students and spending time with them.

Between their two jobs and the income from the students, they could afford their rent and a lifestyle which enabled them to pay their bills, still eat out occasionally and enjoy social activities. For the next few years they enjoyed living away from 'the earthquake prone city,' getting involved with the community and having a good lifestyle. Things were looking positive; until the next events occurred.

EMPLOYMENT EVENTS: REDUNDANCY

Three years after their move Stan's job was going well. He'd recently had a performance appraisal and had very positive feedback. Then his boss came to see him, and without any prior warning, told Stan that his job was being made redundant. This was completely unexpected and to make matters worse, Dawn's work made her job redundant at about the same time. Even with Dawn's income, they would have struggled, however, as her weekly wage would have only covered the rent with all other costs for two people having to come out of Stan's single pension.

“It happened all of sudden. We were paying decent rent and then, we couldn’t afford it. We went from ‘there’ (well off, doing okay) to ‘there’ (in financial difficulty) all of a sudden!”

We never saw this happening. Who could have predicted that we would both get made redundant? We hadn’t saved. We didn’t expect this to happen.”



ALMOST HOMELESS

Stan and Dawn were now without paid work, unable to afford to rent their house and due to the events in their lifetimes, were not in a strong financial position. They had little money in the bank, did not own a house nor could they afford to buy one or to buy into a retirement village. They were going to have to move and rents were expensive. Shifting in with relatives, her brother or his son, whilst not what they wanted, looked like their only viable option.

TURNING POINT: ASSISTED RENTAL HOUSING

Stan was looking for housing options and discovered that he and Dawn might meet the criteria for the Council's 'elder housing.' They had assets of no more than \$4,000 and were on a limited income, the New Zealand Superannuation, and they had nowhere else to live. They applied for a unit not expecting that they would be successful due to the waiting lists but they were in luck; there was an available unit and they met the criteria. They were accepted and feel grateful that the affordable housing was available for them.

Looking back, Dawn says it was scary, not knowing what they could do, feeling frustrated and disbelieving that they had reached the ages of 70 and 76 after a lifetime of working, and were basically homeless. The affordable housing provided by the council was a lifeline for them at an incredibly stressful time.

“If we hadn’t got here we would have been in the poo! I don’t know what we would have done.”

Insights

HOUSING FOR OLDER ADULTS

Dawn and Stan’s story highlights issues faced by older people who have worked all their lives, but due to various life events, find themselves at retirement age on a reduced income with limited or no assets, and no longer able to afford to pay market rents.

The availability of affordable community housing for older adults provided Stan and Dawn with the option to continue to live independently, in their own place. Without it they would have been homeless, sharing with relatives, while trying to find a house they could afford.



Key Themes

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HOMELESSNESS

- The research supported the findings of other research¹¹; that is that there is no 'one' factor that starts a family or an individual on the path to homelessness, but rather it is a range of interwoven individual, structural and systemic factors.
- For some of the individuals and families there was one event such as redundancy, eviction or illness which started them on the path to homelessness, but then other factors such as past debts, tenancy history, addictions, mental health issues, ineligibility for assistance, lack of support, affordable housing and discrimination combined to keep them on that path.
- For other people, factors such as trauma, abuse, mental health issues, disconnection, lack of belonging, addictions, relationship breakdowns, poor transitions from care, lack of support and information combined and accumulated over time leading to a path of homelessness.

INDIVIDUAL OR PERSONAL FACTORS

- The individual or personal factors which contributed to participants becoming and/or staying homeless included; childhood trauma and abuse; disconnection from family, whānau, whenua and te ao Māori; early school leaving; life events and circumstances such as business failures, earthquakes, illness and hospitalisation; loss of employment; relationship breakdown; family harm; mental illness, addictions and inconsistent medication use; poverty and accumulating debt.

STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC FACTORS

- The structural and systemic factors which contributed to participants becoming and/or staying homeless included: criteria-driven services; lack of housing; racism and discrimination; language barriers; lack of information or understanding of processes and entitlements; inadequate medical discharge practices; lack of addiction and mental health services; and inadequate rehabilitation, reintegration and transition from care.

¹¹ E.g. Amore, (2016); Aotearoa/New Zealand Homelessness Action Plan 2020–2023, (2019); Gaetz, Donaldson, et al., (2013); Pleace, (2019).

WHAT HELPS: ONE SIZE FITS ONE

- The experiences of the participants demonstrated that 'one size fits one' and that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for a family or an individual to move out of homelessness. The pathways out are complex and dependent on the characteristics, circumstances and needs of the individual or family.
- The research findings support the approaches of Kāinga Tupu – Growing Homes: Western Bay of Plenty Homelessness Strategy (2020) and the Aotearoa/New Zealand Homelessness Action Plan (2020–2023) which address homelessness from a framework of four action areas, Prevention, Supply, Support and System Enablers.

Factors that either helped, or would help, the participants to move out of homelessness and into safe and secure housing included:

- 1 Support to access and transition to secure housing;
- 2 Medium and long term support to sustain a tenancy;
- 3 The 'right' advocate to walk alongside, negotiate and overcome barriers;
- 4 Informed, knowledgeable and helpful frontline staff at government agencies and services;
- 5 Support and information from other frontline workers such as teachers, midwives, health visitors and community workers;
- 6 Help and support from caring communities of neighbours, friends, family, whānau and workmates;
- 7 Appropriate and available therapeutic support for mental health and addictions;
- 8 Access to options for cultural and identity development;
- 9 A range of housing options to cater for different needs;
- 10 Affordable housing for older people;
- 11 Availability of whānau land; and
- 12 Support for newcomers and ethnic communities to ensure access to entitlements.

How to Help

WHO CAN HELP?

Tauranga has many social service agencies working tirelessly to support our individuals and families in need¹².

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Firstly, thank you for wanting to help. If we all do a little, it adds up to make a huge difference to the community we live in, and the city we love. There are a number of ways you can help. Here are some ideas:

- If you feel safe to do so, check in to see what the individual and/or family need for support and help connect them to the right agency.
- Use our 'He Awhina Mōu – Need a Hand' flyer to help direct people to the right service to meet their needs.
- Spread the word among your friends, family, community groups. With greater understanding, comes greater empathy.
- If you have spare time, consider volunteering with agencies that are supporting homelessness. A list of these agencies is located in the 'He Awhina Mōu – Need a Hand' flyer.
- Next time you are having a clean out of furniture, clothes, sports and recreation equipment – consider donating to one of the services listed in the 'He Awhina Mōu – Need a Hand' flyer.
- If you have food to spare, there are plenty of community meal providers who are able to distribute on your behalf – these are listed in the 'He Awhina Mōu – Need a Hand' flyer.

¹² For more information visit: www.tauranga.govt.nz and search for the 'He Awhina Mōu – Need a Hand' flyer to see a list of our local support agencies. This resource is updated annually.

All of the people in the stories found the experience of being homeless to be stressful, scary and unsafe and all of them expressed a desire to have their own home, to have a place of their own that was safe and secure.

Achieving the goal to ensure that everyone 'has a home' requires understanding, caring, co-ordination and working together to address the drivers of homelessness and reduce the barriers to accessing safe, secure and suitable housing.

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