



Emerge Aotearoa: greater than the sum of its parts

Emerge Aotearoa has its history in the amalgamation of two organisations: Richmond Services and, Recovery Solutions.

With a longstanding history in New Zealand, Richmond Services, formerly Richmond Fellowship, first set up in 1978 in New Zealand operating largely in Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington providing housing and a therapeutic environment for people coming out of psychiatric institutions or experiencing major mental health challenges and stress in their everyday lives. This organisation grew over the years to have a hub in most large centres.

Recovery Solutions operated in Auckland, Northland, Waikato, Tauranga, Rotorua, Eastern Bay of Plenty and Gisborne similarly supporting people affected by mental health challenges with housing and support that provided them with the opportunity to lead a regular life in the community. One of the core conditions for living well is to have a home.

The Richmond Services and Recovery Solutions Boards first came together to talk about how they could better meet the needs of the people they served, while operating in a sustainable way within an increasingly tight funding environment. They saw the opportunity to do this by merging so that they could be financially more efficient and better utilise the resources available across both organisations. The two Boards wanted to create a new entity that would better support individuals and communities who faced the greatest challenges in today's world.

“Together we are greater than the sum of our parts, and we move forward together as EmERGE Aotearoa.”



Being fit-for-purpose a key driver

“We have a great Trust Board with really, really capable people,” commented Barbara Disley. “It is really important for us to have people knowledgeable and experienced in the housing sector.” The Board, she said, are very aware how critical housing is, and how stable, healthy housing contributes to people’s welfare and enables them to live well.

“When we formed EmERGE Aotearoa we were committed to new drivers for the organisation – and as the CEO, I’ve really valued the clarity the Board has shown in identifying our priorities.”

The organisation’s key drivers centre on being fit-for-purpose to work effectively in Aotearoa - hence EmERGE Aotearoa. “This means that the ability to work with Māori and Māori communities is critically important to us if we are going to effectively meet the needs of those who are often the most disadvantaged in terms of

housing, health and employment opportunities,” Barbara Disley says. “For similar reasons, and because we have a high presence in Auckland, we run a number of dedicated Pasifika services.

A commitment to the participation of people with lived experience and peer services is also crucial to the organisation. “We want to show that we value and include people in our organisation who have ‘lived experience’ - incorporating their views and perspectives in our services, providing peer services and bringing on board staff who have shared the experience of our clients.”

The fourth priority for the organisation is to provide a range of social housing options to meet the broad range of needs that people have.

Emerge Aotearoa’s clients come from a broad base. “We provide services and housing to people who may have mental health and/or drug and alcohol challenges, who are disabled, have experienced trauma or violence, who have been incarcerated or are homeless. Getting in early to support people to have a home first and foremost, is a critical part of supporting people to get well and live well,” comments Barbara Disley.

To provide high quality housing, supports and services that enable people and their whanau in distress due to mental health or addiction issues, disability, trauma, violence, homelessness, poverty or dislocation to fully participate within the contexts of family, whanau and community.

Maximising housing options

“We have a number of pathways to support people to move from more intensively supported environments where we own the housing, through to services to support people to access accommodation in the open market. We want to make sure people get the support they need to access and maintain that accommodation.”

In mental health and drug and alcohol services, the supported housing model still exists but more and more services like EmERGE Aotearoa are looking at supporting people on their journey while they are in their own home. In periods of acute distress wrapping services around people early so they don’t lose their housing is accepted as the way forward. Health services are starting to see this too, says Barbara Disley– “Many of the older ways the health system did things inevitably meant people lost their homes as they were hospitalised for long periods. Helping people keep their housing is important in ensuring they retain greater control over their lives. This allows them to recover in their own communities where they already have support networks.”

Emerge Aotearoa own 82 properties throughout New Zealand with a majority in Auckland. These properties are a mixture of social housing and residential service properties. This gives them a capital base where they can leverage and grow the housing they can offer. But EmERGE are acutely aware that to make a meaningful difference in providing more homes they need to be working with other organisations, landlords and investors.

Emerge Aotearoa know there’s a lot happening in the social housing area and they are looking at how they can make more, longer-term, high quality housing available including leasing options to help meet housing demand.



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In this pic from left to right: Raj Sodhi - Regional Manager Central & South Auckland, Magdel Hammond - Expert Practitioner Contractor Emergency Housing, TeAtuanui Lankshear – Emergency Housing Administrator , Simons Hughes - District Manager Mobile Services South Auckland and Wendy Daley – Emergency Housing Facilitator

New emergency housing funding

In March, [Government announced](#) that Emerge Aotearoa would receive funding to provide emergency housing “for 30 places for individuals or families, for a stay of up to 12 weeks.” Emerge Aotearoa want to provide a greater supply of housing with as many options as possible – some of this will be through owning and some through leasing; to meet the requirements of the emergency housing contract.

“The emergency housing service we’re operating helps people who have fallen out of accommodation and have few options – we can provide interim housing while we support the person or family to secure longer-term sustainable housing. We wrap comprehensive support around these families and individuals to identify and address the challenges they’ve had.”

“Our approach is strongly influenced by the Housing First Model¹, says Barbara, “and we’re connecting with people all over the country on this.”

How does leasing fit with the permanent and long-term housing proposed by a Housing First model? Barbara Disley says Emerge Aotearoa have a range of housing— owned and leased as well as access to the private rental market. Because they are a large, stable organisation they can be the head tenants and take the leasing responsibility on. “And then we can support people into that accommodation knowing that we can build longer-term stability to maximise the opportunities that are there. These people would otherwise not be able to take on these leases. In the modern world this is the reality – we can’t possibly build or purchase enough houses but we think this can give people some good housing for a suitable length of time. Sometimes this is the best you can do.”

In less than two months of operating they’ve already moved a number of families through the emergency housing into sustainable accommodation and they’ve been thrilled with the results. “We moved a mum and

¹ Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that provides people with housing as quickly as possible — and provides support services as needed.

two children into one house and they are loving it – a decent furnished place that they can stay in for longer than three months rather than having to move.” Other families who had fallen out of accommodation but had good credit ratings and rental references have been supported to move back into housing. This includes one young woman with her five young children who were living in a van and have now moved into comfortable accommodation while working hard with the team to find a home.

Challenges- but also an exciting opportunity

There’s a lot of competition for a limited range of houses and the lack of housing is a challenge but Emerge Aotearoa say at least they can take the burden off these families and individuals by working assertively to find the housing with them.

Barbara Disley believes this is a really exciting and rewarding area to be working in and, while there’s challenges, they have people on board that want to enter into the spirit of their way of working: listening to what the people they work with really want, valuing these people, and helping them realise their potential by giving them their rightful opportunity to have their own place in their own neighbourhoods and to be part of a community.

Go to www.emergeaotearoa.org.nz for more information.