



## MONTE CECILIA

### Monte Cecilia – housing homeless families in Auckland

Monte Cecilia House was established in 1982 by the St Vincent de Paul Society, Liston Foundation, the Sisters of Mercy and the Marist Brothers, to provide emergency housing and practical assistance to families with a housing need.

Originally based in Hillsborough they are now at the centre of Counties Manukau where 110,000 people live in overcrowded housing situations and garages and cars are commonly used as housing options while Auckland rents soar. Increasingly, Monte Cecilia are finding working families from across Auckland using their services. From their Mangere site the Trust have been able to continue their vital services and increase their capacity to provide emergency housing for up to 12 families at any one time.

They are recognised as a leader in this area and offer an innovative, whanau-centred programme and sustainable housing solutions. Staff are well versed in advocacy, skilled at finding housing solutions for families and in providing significant input into local housing policy.

Chief executive, Bernie Smith, is supported by administration staff, a practice manager and two social workers, an additional social worker based in West Auckland and a part-time social worker centred at Ranui Park where 300 people, including families, are living in substandard caravan park style living arrangements. They have a strong governance body of ten volunteers.

#### Enhanced service capacity

In 2007 Monte Cecilia decided to enhance its service capacity by purchasing properties for families transitioning from emergency housing. To grow their housing stock they realised they would need to be creative as they had limited resources. They now own 22 homes, have private leases on two other homes,



and rent 15 homes/units from HNZ. The Trust continues to work with HNZA to source more homes. They are collaborating with two other Trusts on the shared management of 14 units and are also in discussions with two church groups, and two other groups about potential new social housing options.

The emergency housing they provide in Mangere provides 12 two-bedroom units with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. To date \$1.4 million dollars has been committed by the Auckland Catholic Diocese and the Trust has raised another \$600k toward reconfiguring the facility into independent 5x4 bedroom and 4x3 bedroom homes. Board Member, Jim Weir and his family have donated \$800K, via the Jaleen Trust, toward another 6x2 bedroom building enabling the emergency facility to cater for fifteen families at any one time.

Monte Cecilia has funding from MSD to provide advocacy and support services for their families. Those most in need are offered up to 50 hours support per year via their emergency, transitional and long- term housing service. Face-to-face consultations seek to empower families to resolve issues and break negative cycles that have hindered independence, tenancy or employment sustainability, and provide freedom from debt.

**Winnie, Asgar and Mamoe say that Monte Cecilia helped bring their family back together.**

“Monte Cecilia helped my family with our hard journey. Without the support from the wonderful staff we would still be living in a box. My sincere thanks to staff - words cannot explain the kindness, support and help you’ve given for our family. To be honest with you, this is the first time ever we, as parents, have spent more quality time with our boys. Monte Cecilia brought our family together as one. Living in the one room, talking and sharing with our eldest son has made a huge impact on us as parents. Our son now realises small things matter: sharing, engaging with other cultures and especially our duties to each other.

**A family centred service making a difference**

Monte Cecilia’s strong advocacy skills are crucial in the work they do with the 130-140 families they see every year and the additional 35-40 families in their 12 week emergency housing.

The Trust’s work focuses on families because of the hundreds of vulnerable children involved. Many of the children have health issues and are not attached to a school due to the families transience. About 80% of our families are Pacifica, 15% Maori and 5% multicultural.

**New emergency housing funding helping meet increased demand**

Monte Cecilia is now able to access the new emergency housing funding announced by the Ministry of Social Development earlier this year. This has helped them meet the high costs for their service. But higher levels of funding would help them better manage the facility and prepare families to sustain tenancies in the long-term.

These are often very complex family situations and intensive, additional support is required. “It’s not just about finding a home in these situations,” says Bernie Smith. “Many of these families can be heavily in debt and it takes a lot longer than three months for a family to get to the point

where they can stand tall again in their community having moved beyond their financial crises.” There is a longer term need for mentoring and coaching to build self-sustainability.

“Our MSD contract covers 50% of our intensive social work support to those families using our emergency accommodation. A further contribution covers part of the work we do at Ranui Park in West Auckland including the 130 families we work with across Auckland. ”

“But the housing continuum is broken,” says Bernie Smith. “We’ve got all these people coming into emergency housing at this end of the housing pathway but nowhere to move them to at the other end. We need more social housing and more permanent housing that people can afford to rent and/or purchase.”

Bernie believes there’s a lack of a creative, strategic and collaborative approach to resolve disconnects. “We’re seeing knee jerk reactive responses that only create more or other issues because there’s no easy transition from emergency housing or social housing into affordable housing.”

Instead of working together to determine where the needs are and evaluate what has worked, he says, community housing providers, government, local government and other groups are often found to be operating in silos with limited collaboration. “Piecemeal funding is being provided to new projects without established ones being granted more funding to build agency sustainability and allow for proactive creative responses to this housing crisis.”

“Here at Monte Cecilia Trust we know there needs to be more permanent housing but we don’t have the scale to build more homes yet. As a small community housing provider we don’t have the financial resources. Community groups are competing for the same dollar to keep our heads above water and this hinders growth and capacity building,” Bernie Smith says. “Constant changes in government policy mean greater or changing compliance issues as a Trust. Or it may mean more families needing to use our social services because a policy change has deemed they no longer need the assistance they once had. This puts increasing pressure on services.”