



Paul's piece

Kia ora. It's been another incredibly busy few months for the Trust, as you'll see from this newsletter.



In April we held our first planning day for Dwell, joined by board members from Mahora House Incorporated. Part of our work was to develop and agree a new vision and business plan for Dwell Housing Trust, which properly reflected the strong histories and kaupapa of both organisations, and our core values.

We have also been liaising with the Social Housing Unit, the government's funding body for community housing, about applying to be accepted for pre-qualification for future funding of new social housing. We submitted our application in early June so watch this space...

As well as having a great team of paid staff – Alison, Chris and Fiona – the Trust is also really lucky to be supported so many other people and organisations who volunteer time and resources.

There's too many to name here, but I want to thank all of you for your generosity and support, and the difference you make to the Trust, and help the Trust make for others.



Mahora House and WHT to merge

In our last newsletter we reported that the Trust had been working more closely with Mahora House Inc (MHI), a provider of mental health supportive landlord services in Wellington. In early 2012 the Trust entered into a memorandum of understanding with MHI. We also began the sharing of office functions and the last few months have seen MHI and WHT staff and records sharing the same office space. Work to integrate the two organisations' systems is ongoing.

The next step is to merge the two organisations to form a single entity and, earlier this year, both WHT and MHI boards made the decision to merge fully. Both organisations recognise that joining together would enable us to further improve and increase the quality and range of services we currently provide as well as release efficiencies. Joining expertise and resources to work together will also create significant benefits for our combined organisation and for those people who need our services.

The outcomes of the merger are to:

- Reduce duplication of governance, management and operational resources and overhead costs in the long term
- Increase the reserves and asset base and offer more leverage for financing new schemes
- Provide a fresh focus for the partners and enable us to reposition ourselves in the market

In order to create the merged organisation MHI will be merged into the Dwell Housing Trust (Dwell) entity from 1 July 2013. Dwell was set up last year to enable the WHT to expand its work to areas outside of Wellington City. After the MHI-Dwell merger has been successfully completed, WHT will merge into Dwell later on in the year. Dwell will be in a far stronger position than either of its parent organisations to grow to meet some of the increasing housing need in our region.

The merger is a huge milestone in both organisations' history and comes with many varied emotions. We are however excited by the change as we shape our future together. In April both boards agreed that the vision for Dwell will be "Affordable quality homes where people flourish". Our mission will be to the leading provider and partner of community housing in our region. The Dwell values which be much the same as those currently held by WHT and MHI – Integrity, Community, Empowering Others, Sustainability and Innovation. We will continue to focus on better services, more homes and strong advocacy.

Book chapter

Otago University will be publishing a book on affordable housing later on this year and the Trust was invited by Prof Philippa Howden-Chapman to contribute a chapter. Our Chapter "More than a landlord: realising the potential of the community housing sector" was written by Trustee Clare Aspinall, Director Alison Cadman and supporter Louise Carrington. The focus of this book is the concept of partnership to increase investment in affordable housing and is based on presentations and debate from a one-day workshop held in the University of Otago, Wellington in June 2012 - *Partnerships for Social and Affordable Housing*.

The book's Introduction states "The Wellington Housing Trust is one of the first community housing organisations in New Zealand. Interestingly, as one of the oldest organisations they have become victims of their success - unable to qualify for the current social housing fund because of levels of indebtedness from a previous government lending model." The book was a fantastic opportunity for the Trust to outline the added-value of community housing and the challenges groups like ours face.

Raising awareness

The Trust continues to advocate for more community housing and affordable housing and continues to be approached by the media and others for comment or to present on the issues.

Director Alison Cadman continues to be interviewed by and quoted in the media. She also spoke about the community housing sector over the last 10 years at the Australasian Housing Institute conference in Auckland and about community housing at the launch of the Green Party's policy on affordable home ownership.

Vennell Street

Our next new build development of four three-bedroom homes reached a further milestone when we obtained resource consent for the project in January.

We have contracted Primesite Homes to build the homes and they are now working on the construction drawings and building consent. We look forward to this project commencing sometime in the next three months. We will keep you updated on the project on our website.

AGM

The Trust 2012 Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday 25 July 2013 at 12 noon at the Trust's office – Level 5, 173-175 Victoria Street, Wellington.

Please let us know if you plan to attend.

Thank you

G Trust – for their generous donation and ongoing support of work, we love you!

Working Together More Fund – the Trust was successful in obtaining a grant to help with the work needed to merge with Mahora House Inc. The Fund was established to help groups wanting to work together to achieve greater results for our communities.

To our volunteers **Trevor Bleakley** and **Shirley Vollweiler**. Trevor is helping us with some communications and advocacy work. Shirley has developed a tool that is helping us evaluate each of our properties as part of our ongoing asset management strategy. We are grateful to both for their contributions.

Budget 2013

We have heard some commentators describe this year's budget as the "housing budget". While we would have liked to have seen numerous other initiatives and investment announced in the budget WHT was very pleased to see many of the announcements. We are also delighted to see debate about housing need and the growth of the community housing sector.

These are some of the housing components of the Budget 2013:

- Government stated it wants to facilitate the development of a more diverse range of community providers in the social housing sector.
- The introduction of the Social Housing Reform (Housing Restructuring and Tenancy Matters Amendment) Bill which Government says will "create the right environment to support the growth of the social housing sector."
- Budget 2013 provides \$27 million over four years to support the extension of income-related rents subsidy – currently only available to Housing New Zealand – to community housing providers.
- Housing needs assessments are to be moved from Housing New Zealand to the Ministry of Social Development. "The housing needs assessment will also be made independent of housing providers to enable a more holistic view to be taken of people's needs alongside other social and income support", stated Minister of Housing Nick Smith.
- The initiatives above will only be available to "registered" housing providers so the Bill proposes the introduction of a regulation system for community housing providers.

In 2007 the Trust produced the discussion paper "Are we really serious about the community housing sector?" This paper laid out the case for the introduction of an income related rent subsidy for community housing providers to assist the sector to grow to some kind of scale so it could meet some of the growing housing need in NZ. We argued this would create a level playing field between HNZC and the sector. After all these years of advocating for this change it was a milestone for the Trust to see a government announce its introduction. But as usual the devil will be in the detail and we hope to see positive changes for social and community housing and most importantly NZ.

Next steps: The Bill passed its first reading 63 votes to 56 with the support of the Maori Party, United Future and Act. It has been sent to the Social Services Select Committee with submissions due at the end of June. WHT will be making its own submission on the Bill and the proposed initiatives along with being part of a Community Housing Aotearoa submission. The Select Committee will report back to Parliament by 1 October 2013.

Study Tour by our Director

We were extremely proud of our Director Alison Cadman when she was advised last year that she was a recipient of a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship for 2013. The Fellowship will enable Alison to travel to Australia, the UK and US to research and investigate the growth of community housing organisations in these countries, particularly looking at what structures and financial/income streams organisations have used to encourage their growth.

Alison spent two weeks in Australia in May. "My head is spinning with all the information gained, the experiences I had and the people I met during this time", says Alison. "To be able to spend time with people working in community housing one to one and really get time to discuss many issues was invaluable and incredibly useful. It was such a privilege and I loved it."

Alison and the Trust are very grateful to Greg Orchard, Director - Property & Housing Wellington City Council, for being a referee to Alison and also to Robert MacBeth from the Social Housing Unit who introduced Alison to many people and groups in Melbourne.

This newsletter is produced by the Wellington Housing Trust

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