

NTHT Director's Report to AGM 2019

Overview

It has been a full and interesting year for NTHT. We have hit our stride in working well with the Nelson City Council properties and tenancies, and increased our own portfolio (to 45 homes) by leasing a new 3-bed house owned by the Methodist Church. We continued preparations for our bid to purchase the Council's community housing. Through FY 2018-19, NTHT has been responsible for 187 tenancies, delivering social and affordable rental housing for over 275 people in Nelson and Richmond.

Highlights of the Year

Nelson City Council Community Housing: NCC owns 142 flats that serve 152 older tenants in need; located in 9 housing clusters in different parts of the city. NTHT has a contract with Council to manage this housing; we provide responsive Tenancy Management and Tenant Support, deliver prompt repairs and maintenance, and implement cost-effective ways to make the flats more warm/dry/healthy. This year, we resolved a backlog of small maintenance items, and installed improved insulation, heating and ventilation in 47 units. Currently, 91% of NCC tenants are over age 65. Most appreciate the improvements, a few tenants still prefer not to run their heaters even with the government's extra winter energy payment.

NCC tenant turnover this year was low, just 8% (12 vacancies). Most tenants who leave Council housing go into residential care, a few move away to be closer to family. All the new tenants we selected from the long waitlist came from very inadequate or insecure housing (e.g. living in a car, shed or leaky caravan, boarding, or overcrowding with family). Our NCC Tenant Survey showed 100% tenant satisfaction, with the main positives being: NTHT communicates well, does prompt repairs and maintenance, and has responsive and caring staff.

Council formally proposed to divest this community housing through its Annual Plan consultation in April 2019. Throughout the year, I worked closely with our Trustee Task Force to develop our comprehensive proposal to purchase the NCC housing portfolio. We aim to acquire this housing stock for a fair price, as a strategic investment, in order to upgrade and grow Nelson's supply of social housing for people on low incomes.

Stability of Tenancies: In our own housing portfolio, NTHT tenant turnover remains low, at 7% (3 vacancies) for 2018-19. Low turnover means that most tenants staying with us long-term (5-10 years), and are able to put down roots in their community. It also means we need to find a way to keep building more housing, so we can help the increasing numbers of people applying with us.

Balance of Social Housing and Affordable Rents: As vacancies occur, NTHT has the flexibility to take on tenants with different levels of housing need, aiming for an overall community balance. As of 30 June 2019, we had 23 social housing tenants (receiving the Income Related Rent Subsidy from MSD), and 22 tenants on affordable rents (set at 70-80% of market rent). Demographically, 47% of our tenant households are Pakeha/NZ European, 15% are Maori, 4% are Pacifica and 33% are new migrants/former refugees. 50% have work (mostly part-time), and 50% are on benefits or NZ Super.

No Methamphetamine Contaminations: We have had no further issues with meth, unlike last year when we had four significant contaminations that required remediation. We hope the government will bring in an improved and clarified NZ Standard for residential housing with the planned updates to the Residential Tenancies Act.

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Housing Advice: Our staff provides Housing Advice for people in need, to help them be assessed for the MSD Housing Register, access emergency housing, or find affordable rentals. We had 184 such queries this year, on top of people applying for NTHT or NCC vacancies. Nelson rental housing continues to be very tight. We encourage people to be persistent and we help them to think through practical options which may include staying with friends, family, or in motor camps while they continue to seek permanent housing.

Monitoring Housing Need: This is a new project that aims to deliver more comprehensive data than what MSD is able to track via the public housing register. It involves regular surveys of community support agencies, Red Cross Refugee Services, motor camps, as well as local Councils and other affordable housing providers. So far, our two 6-monthly reports demonstrate that at least 400 households in Nelson are in need of affordable housing – this is in addition to the 139 shown on MSD's Housing Register as of 30 June 2019. We will continue to produce this data on local housing need, so that we can better inform further government investment in social and affordable rentals.

Warmer Healthier Homes (WHH): NTHT has administered this programme to install retro-fit insulation into homes occupied by Community Service Card holders since 2015. WHH is jointly funded by Nelson City Council, the Rātā Foundation, Nelson Marlborough District Health Board, Marlborough District Council, Mainland Foundation, Port Nelson Trust and others. This year, 368 homes were insulated by the installer, Absolute Energy, with clear improvements in people's living environments and health. The total number of families assisted by WHH since 2015 reached 1538 at year end. We also commenced work to establish WHH as a separate charitable trust, in order to simplify the funding and accounting for the programme which the new Reporting Standards require. Set up of the new Warmer Healthier Homes Te Tau Ihu Trust will be completed in 2019-20.

Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) Council: CHA is the peak body for the NZ community housing sector. NTHT has had a presence on the CHA Council since 2004, through two NTHT Chairs and myself as current Director. Having served as CHA Treasurer since 2015, I will step down at the CHA AGM in Oct 2019. Participating in the CHA Council has helped NTHT stay in close touch with developments in community and social housing throughout New Zealand.

NTHT People: We are blessed to have a strong and skilled team doing the day-to-day work of the Trust. Housing Manager Mira Markovic has been with us since 2014, bringing strong people skills, clear knowledge of Work and Income/MSD systems, and a great sense of humour. Tenancy Manager Judy Honeybone stepped down in June, but we recruited another experienced Tenancy Manager, Kelly Dean, who has a passion for working with older tenants. Our Finance Manager Phill Lee has contributed his business banking background, accountancy skills, and a calm, go-for-it nature. Phill also moved on to a new private sector role, and we welcomed experienced accountant Jason Templer to our team in August. Building Manager Jon Stevenson brings deep asset management experience from Housing NZ; Office Administrator Sarah Baldwin contributes clear IT and people skills. Our multi-faceted team really enjoys working together, in service to our tenants who rely on and appreciate having stable, affordable, healthy homes.

Finally, I extend sincere thanks to Keith Preston our Chairperson, the NCC Task Force members Katrina Kidson, Paul Russell and Doug McLearn, and all of the NTHT Board members for their energy, commitment and skills in governing our growing community housing trust.

Carrie Mozena
NTHT Director