



*communities where whānau are housed, connected,  
valued and thriving*

## Kia atawhai – Be kind On the road with DCM's Aro Mai Housing First Hutt Team



*DCM's Aro Mai Housing First Hutt Team led by Barrie (left), with Karen, Te Paki, Ashleigh, Cindel and Daniel, at the office in Kokiri, Seaview, Lower Hutt. (Not pictured: Luisa.)*

DCM is well-known for the work we do in Wellington, but did you know we have a team working in the Hutt? Since July 2020, our Hutt team have been part of the Tākiri Mai Te Ata Whānau Ora collective, providing services to people who are experiencing homelessness in the Hutt Valley.

Based at Kōkiri Marae, our Hutt team are part of the wider Aro Mai Housing First whānau, and they remind us of an old DCM saying, "We might be small. But we are working on some of the biggest problems facing our city." Along with providing Housing First services, the Hutt Team do Outreach work, and collaborate with Wā Kainga to ensure the whānau they are working with remain housed, and that no one falls through the cracks.

In this month's update, we are using the motto Kia atawhai (Be kind), and it is thanks to the kindness of the people of the Hutt Valley, and the hard mahi of our amazing Hutt Team, that we have been able to see people like Michelle thrive.

## From a bus stop to a whare by the beach – Michelle's story



It was just before the pandemic when Alex and Paula from DCM's Aro Mai Housing First team managed to meet with Michelle at a Lower Hutt café. Michelle presented as very tidy, and happy to sign a consent form so the DCM team could work to help get her housed. She listed her address as 'Waterloo bus stop'. Michelle was very thin, and it was clear she had been roughing it for a long time.

The meeting came about due to the concern of the general public in the Hutt for Michelle's wellbeing, which led to many calls to Hutt City Council for a response. Soon after the meeting, Michelle disappeared again, as her mental health challenges took hold once more.

Alex did not give up, searching for Michelle at some of her favourite hot spots, such as MIX, a service supporting those experiencing mental health distress, where Michelle could have a hot meal and charge her phone. Michelle was also a regular at the local library, where the staff knew her well.



*Michelle with her current key worker Daniel Patelesio. It takes a team to support the whānau we engage with, and others who have supported Michelle include Alex, Paula, Charloh, Kat, and Te Paki.*

Michelle was sighted sleeping in doorways and on a mattress a member of the public had given her. The public continued to make multiple notifications to the Hutt City Council. Everyone was worried about her wellbeing. When Alex finally found her again, Michelle did not remember her – she could not even recall that they had met.

This is a very familiar story for the DCM team. Mental health is an ongoing issue for many of the people we engage with, who often suffer from trauma and undiagnosed disorders.

Another familiar story is how the pandemic helped many of our whānau move into housing for the first time in a long time. This was true for Michelle too – because without any of the usual supports available to people out on the street, and with services such as libraries closed, emergency housing suddenly became a necessity.

DCM does not believe that emergency housing is a good solution for New Zealand's housing crisis, and though it temporarily provided Michelle with a roof over her head, it was a struggle in many ways. Michelle became unwell and ended up in hospital, but by this time – mid-2020 – DCM had established a Housing First team in the Hutt Valley.



While Michelle was in hospital, Vicki, an Emerge Aotearoa tenancy manager who works with DCM as part of the Aro Mai Housing First collaboration, found her a permanent whare. Michelle was delighted to be able to move in when she was discharged from hospital.

This is where the hard work really started – and it took time for DCM's vision for communities where whānau are housed, connected, valued and thriving – to become true for Michelle.

By moving people from homelessness into housing, then providing wrap-around support and regular home visits, we uphold people's mana – and their right to an adequate standard of living as per the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But sometimes, once people are housed, we start to understand what led to their homelessness in the first place. For Michelle, much of our support has been to address her health and wellbeing – other cornerstones of the Housing First concept.

Michelle is now housed by the beach, which she loves. Her neighbourhood is great for walking, which she often does during the day to keep fit and healthy. Michelle also enjoys a close relationship with her mother and two daughters who now live nearby.



Michelle's current key worker is Daniel, who visits regularly. Michelle says she is "Learning to trust people" again through her relationship with Daniel. She now sees how her life has changed in positive ways through her willingness to work with DCM. "I was homeless," Michelle says, "There is no other way to describe it."

Daniel has seen Michelle grow, and observed how she has turned her whare into a home. Everything is so well organised. The Housing First team will eventually 'graduate' Michelle, as she becomes more confident – and independent.

Meanwhile, the concern of the people of the Hutt Valley didn't end when they stopped sighting Michelle out on the streets. A DCM staff member who worked with Michelle overheard concerned members of the public speaking about her one day, and was able to inform them that Michelle was now safe, and housed.

It is good to Kia atawhai (Be kind) to people who are rough sleeping or street begging wherever we may see them. But how proud we are to see Michelle go from the Waterloo bus stop, to her very own whare by the beach.



**WORDS: MIRIAM HENDRY / PHOTOS: SUPPLIED.**

## What to do if you are concerned about someone rough sleeping or street begging

You can make a difference! Don't give people money or food when you see them out on the streets. Acknowledge people and, if appropriate, direct them to DCM services. But better still – if you are concerned about someone rough sleeping or street begging, call Hutt City Council on **0800 488 824** or Wellington City Council on **04 499 4444** – and they will notify our team.

Together – with your help – we truly can end homelessness in our city.

**Support DCM**

**Nāku te rourou, nāu te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi.**

With your basket and my basket, the people will thrive.

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