



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

## Reaching out with the Mayor

GUEST WRITER: LEE-ANNE DUNCAN

DCM's Toro Atu (Outreach) Team were delighted when Wellington Mayor, Tory Whanau, accompanied them as they checked on people sleeping rough on the city's streets. She declared herself "an advocate" to see their heart, passion – and impact.



"Kia ora, gidday, would you like to say hello to the Mayor?" says Rowan McCardle, introducing a man sitting in Te Aro Park to the Wellington Mayor, Tory Whanau.

The man – who Rowan knows well from his visits to DCM – is keen to chat, almost flirtatious, from his spot in the bright afternoon sun. After a quick chat, Tory, Rowan, and her co-worker Clifton Raukawa, head down to Courtenay Place responding to a notification just through from the Wellington City Council. A woman has been rough sleeping outside a business on Courtenay Place, and while it's sunny, it's June, so it's chilly.

"She has only a thin blanket, and the person who notified the council about her is concerned," says Clifton to Mayor Tory, reading off the email on his mobile phone. "We know this woman. She's been away but must be back in town, so we will need to see how we can support her."

The WCC email notification is great timing as this is exactly what Rowan and Clifton, workers from DCM's Toro Atu, or Outreach Team, want to show the mayor – how DCM responds when a member of the public calls the council to report concerns about someone sleeping rough. It's a service the council helps fund.

It's also not great timing – the woman's blankets are spread out in the lee of a post box, but she is nowhere to be seen.

"It's okay, I'll circle back in a few hours. She won't have gone far," says Clifton.

He's troubled though. As the woman has been out of town for some time, she's no longer eligible for emergency housing here and must start the process again. Clifton's already thinking about how he can support her, ensuring she's connected in with DCM's Aro Mai Housing First team.



*Tory and Mere – Photo by Damon Keen.*

Rowan, Clifton and the Mayor (and, yes, a couple of photographers and journalists) continue down Courtenay Place. Within a few steps, Rowan spots another familiar face.

"Nanny! I haven't seen you in ages! Kia ora!" It's Mere, whose face is also familiar to Wellingtonians who spend time at this end of town. However, for some weeks her usual spot outside the St. James Theatre has been vacant as she's been settled into a rest home.

Rowan introduces the Mayor, and Tory and Mere sit down on a bench to discover their whanaunga – who they know in common. It doesn't take long to find connections, to the evident delight of both.

"DCM worked with Mere for a long time to get her into the rest home," says Clifton. "We had to build a lot of trust with her, but she agreed to go and it's clearly agreeing with her. She's looking really good."

Nonetheless, here she is back on Courtenay Place? "Yeah, but that's her social connection. Coming here to chat to people, to connect with her friends, that's what she knows. But now we know she's well housed and cared for, so that's okay," says Clifton.

Some of the people street begging are housed, but having a house costs money. Benefit payments don't go far, and often street beggars aren't physically or mentally able to work. Being on the street supplements their income, but, also, like Mere, gives them the chance to meet up with their mates.

[Clifton has his own experience of homelessness.](#) Living and working in Auckland, he was

visiting Wellington when the COVID-19 lockdowns began. Suddenly, he was homeless and jobless. Luckily, he found a flyer for DCM, which found him housing, then offered him a job as a peer support worker, as DCM values lived experience. Clifton is now studying to bring theory into his practice. Like Rowan, he loves his Outreach work, as tricky as it is at first to bowl up to people who – quite honestly – might tell you to bugger off in no uncertain terms...



*Clifton - Photo by Juan Zarama Perini.*

A little further down Courtenay Place, the trio have a quick chat with Mark. With everyone they meet it's a quick, "Kia ora, how are you, how's it going?" Much of their work is making repeated connections, building trust, finding the right supports at the right time, even after someone is housed, like Mark. He was rough sleeping but now is permanently housed and being supported by DCM's Noho Pai (Sustaining Tenancies) Team, as keeping house is tough when you've not had to do housework, be a good neighbour, or pay bills for quite some time.

The Outreach Team were lucky with the weather the day they took Mayor Tory for an up-close look at their mahi. On the streets of the capital city, the days are not always so clement. Wellingtonians are generally compassionate people, they want to help, and the way many action that support is by handing over food, money, blankets, clothes.

"But that's short-term assistance, which actually makes their situation more long-term," says DCM Director, Stephen Turnock. "It teaches people they can get money and food by street begging or rough sleeping. At DCM, we are about providing long-term change. So we say, if you want to buy kai or provide support to people on the street, then look at donating to DCM. You're still helping by ensuring people who are trained to engage will work with that person long term to get more sustained outcomes than just that brief moment where you give someone some lunch."

DCM's Outreach Team approach street beggars and rough sleepers with nothing more than a warm smile – and often, like Clifton, their own lived experience of homelessness. Every week day they're out on Wellington's streets, in all weather, stopping and chatting to people they already know by name, and, importantly, scanning for people they don't know. If so, they will approach them, encourage them to come to DCM to access the many support services available at Lukes Lane, and get connected with social agencies, all in the one place.



*Social Issues reporter Hanna McCallum (left) wrote [this great article about Outreach in The Post](#)  
– Photo by Damon Keen.*

The other thing Wellingtonians can do, especially as winter grips tighter, is call the Wellington City Council on 04 499 4444 if they spot someone sleeping rough on the street, in the bush or in a car. After that call, a 'ticket' is created and emailed to the Outreach Team. The team receive at least two a day, but sometimes 10, usually numbering between 90 and 120 notifications a quarter. Sometimes notifications are for the same person, showing people are really concerned. After receiving the notification, the team races off to try to connect with the person, wherever they are across the Wellington region, whether out on the streets or tucked in the bush.

"The team's tagline is 'Whatever it takes,'" Stephen says. "If they're told to go away, they'll respectfully keep checking back in, and usually the person will come into DCM. When they do, that's a great win for the team.

"For people experiencing homelessness, the value our team brings is showing them that someone in the community cares. For the wider city, our team is about recognising that the people we see rough sleeping are people. Yes, they might have some issues, and they come with a history, but they're so much more than that. Our team brings that insight and knowledge to the wider public."

Walking out with the team has also brought insight to Tory Whanau. The Outreach Team has been walking the streets since 2016, with Wellington City Council providing funding for the team since 2019. Mayor Tory is more than reassured it's money well spent, and she – like DCM – is perplexed no other council in Aotearoa New Zealand does anything similar. Her walk-out with the team has spurred her to urge other Mayors to follow suit.

"Until you come out here and see what the team does, you don't really see the value. I can see that clearly. Until all the systems are fixed – mental health, welfare, housing, which are all long-term issues – homelessness won't go away. As a society, we need to have more compassion and see the human side of homelessness. If more of us know the people sleeping rough on our streets, we would be more compassionate and understanding. This city is also where they live."



*Tory and Rowan – Photo by Damon Keen.*

Stephen is equally warm about the council’s support. “Everyone there is truly invested in the social wellbeing of our people. There’s a continued and genuine passion that’s shared about these vulnerable communities. That, I would say, is the primary reason the Outreach mahi exists and is so well supported here in Wellington.”

The final stop on Mayor Tory’s tour is for Rowan to check in on a young woman in her early 20s, ‘living’ behind a piece of cardboard down an alleyway an arm’s length from Wellington’s home of high culture, the Michael Fowler Centre. Her behaviour – caused by a history of trauma, mental illness and drug addiction – has seen her evicted from emergency housing, which means she’s no longer eligible for it. So, if she’s not on the psychiatric ward, she must live on the street or with her abusive boyfriend. Usually, she prefers the street.

Rowan walks up to the cardboard, calling the young woman’s name. After a few words, Rowan’s back. She wasn’t up for talking today, but Rowan knows they’ll likely see her tomorrow at DCM, at Te Hāpai, where people can come for a cuppa, a chat, and have any health, addiction, housing, benefit and money issues dealt with, and maybe collect some kai from the Foodbank.

“She’s engaged with us and we have a rapport with her. If we don’t see her, someone from our team will look for her. We’ve got her working with Aro Mai Housing First, so hopefully we can find her a permanent home soon.” And from there, the Sustaining Tenancies team will step in, guiding this traumatised young woman to keep her home.



*Photo by Juan Zarama Perini.*

Back at DCM in Lukes Lane, Mayor Tory Whanau is vocal in her admiration of what she's witnessed. And she's hopeful more Wellingtonians will call the council if they see someone street begging or sleeping rough this winter, rather than handing over food, money, blankets, clothes.

"It's been great to be here and see the notification process in action, and then to see the heart Rowan and Clifton have when they approach people in response. That's how they deserve to be treated. I was already a big supporter of DCM but being out here today has taken it to the next level.

"Seeing what's happening here, and meeting the people, hearing the stories, it brings it home to me even more. If more Wellingtonians could experience what the Outreach Team sees each day, they would have a greater understanding of homelessness, and how we must protect our most vulnerable."



Reaching out with the Mayor (Ngā Kōrero, 4 July 2023)  
to subscribe for regular updates visit [www.dcm.org.nz](http://www.dcm.org.nz)

*Lee-Anne Duncan is a freelance writer and editor who has written many stories for DCM, such as [‘We count, we matter – and we vote’](#), the 2020 General Election at DCM, and [‘Right at Home’](#), the story of Arthur. Thank you Lee-Anne for hitting the streets with Tory and the DCM team.*

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## It's getting cold out there

As we have shown in this story, help is just a phone call away. If you spot someone sleeping rough on the street, in the bush or in a car, call **Wellington City Council** on **04 499 4444** and they will notify us.

You can also help by telling all your friends and whānau about DCM and our important work in Wellington with those who need us most. Please forward this email on. Because 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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