



URBAN NEIGHBOURS OF HOPE - NEW ZEALAND - December 2018 - Issue 3
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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of running a Social Enterprise

www.steppingstoneslawns.co.nz

There is a real exciting buzz in the neighbourhood. Together, with a group of local leaders, we'd all invested hours and hours of time in meetings with Auckland Council, planning and designing our new Community Centre and Park. It's winter 2014, the air is cold, but our hearts are warmed by the hopes and dreams of what a better future could look like.

I remember walking around the Park with a Council champion, someone who had advocated and supported us in the developments (inside champions are vital when trying to get the best for others). I shared this crazy idea that was sitting in my head, "Tania, see all that grass on the park, what's the chance that we could get a contract to mow it and employ locals to do it?" Tania's response was thoughtful, "*Umm... we can ask, but I'm not sure if they would say yes. Let's try. Would you like me to speak to Downers?*"

That was 2014, three years later and we have a pumping Mowing and Gardening Social Enterprise working. We went from one park to mowing twelve, a local school ground, three Early Childcare Centres, eight domestic lawns and we are contracted as a Caretaker at a local Intermediate. Our work also includes mulching, weeding, planting native trees (often as a community event), weed eating, rubbish collecting and cleaning public toilets. We employ five blokes and have another five casuals that we can pull in for the odd jobs.



The beauty of working together is Time; time spent pulling out weeds, laying mulch and mowing gives ample opportunities for laughter but also for in-depth discussions about life, raising kids, dealing with the tensions in relationships, making decisions about budgets and lifestyles.

Working alongside others, generators trust and, especially men, are more open to talk while they are using a spade. This is so different from running a weekly programme (e.g. anger management). Running a programme only gives 3 hours a week contact, working together gives anything from 20 - 30 hours a week. Generating extra income from physical labour helps build the character of others, especially after years of unemployment. I've seen men grow in dignity and in leadership. As their confidence grows, so does their inner strength and they are able to become a positive influence in their family. Comments like, "Bro, my kids are now adults and I wasn't the greatest dad, but I'm now a grandad and I can use my extra earned money to support my grandchildren." Or "Your ideas and voice is the only alternative one that I have from my family and friends, it gives me different options and helps me to think differently." I've watched some of our guys embrace new ways of dealing with conflict and violence, that have had surprisingly good results.



But it isn't all a bed of roses. All of our workers must pass a drug test. It takes 6 weeks for the substances to leave the body and I've seen the struggle that some go through as they change years of habits and dependency. While many do pass, and it's a great celebration, some don't and it's heartbreaking to watch.

'Let Mercy Limit Mercy' is another phrase that sits in my head. While we give workers a lot of grace with changing their working ethos, there

comes a time when it is more merciful to limit, or to no-longer give mercy, and instead give the tough message - "This must happen or you will not be working here anymore!" Moments like these are hard, but when a worker fulfils his requirements e.g. obtains a driver's licence, there is often real graduate for challenging their status quo. At other times, workers refuse, and we've had to let them go.

"F_ _ _ Jesus works!" was one statement I'll never forget. One worker had experienced an incredibly hard time with gangs threatening his family. Together we prayed, asking Jesus to intervene with this dangerous situation, and He did. For no logical reason, the tension and threat of violence completely disappeared. Praying for each other, is one of the most precious parts of being involved in this work.

I am very thankful for everyone that has worked behind the scenes to make this happen and to CityCare who continue to support and enable us to care for the Parks around Randwick.

Launching of new UNOH NZ Webpage...

After months and months of work, UNOH NZ has finally completed its own webpage. Feel free to have a look and give us some feedback.

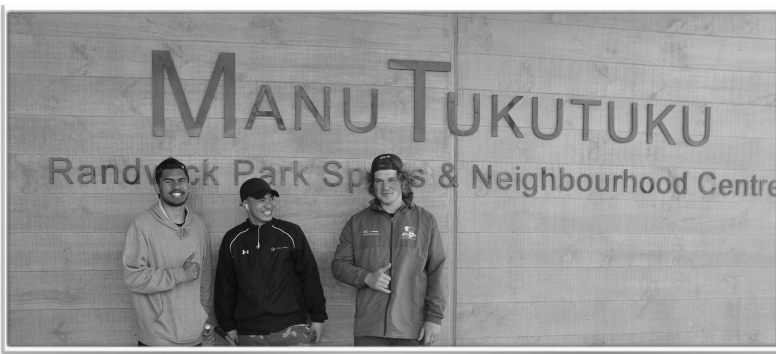
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Rethinking, Returning, Revisioning.

It's been 18 months since I walked in the door and stepped into a shared role as Lead Navigator at our Randwick Park Sports and Neighbourhood Centre called Manu Tukutuku. This was an unexpected turn in the road, but I felt it deserved some time and energy, with the support and skills that I could offer. Manu Tukutuku has been a place that has been on many of our community's hearts and like them, I have always wanted to see the dream of a Community and Sports Centre flourish and to have local residents help shape and steer the direction of such a place.



In reality I have not only found this a special opportunity but, I have found it to have been one of the toughest and challenging places to work. I have realised that wearing different hats, can cause obstacles for some and the validity of your values and intentions, can be challenged and questioned. This has tested my own emotions and has saddened me, when wrong assumptions have been made. I realise that taking a Manager role in a Community Centre, is not an easy task and it can also be difficult for others to see you hold a position of power and responsibility, that one had not seen you hold previously. There has definitely been heart-ache and learnings that have come from this.



From the very start of choosing to take this detour in the road, I knew there would come a time within the next year or two, when I needed to rethink, and return to my original roadmap. This year has been such a time. I have felt systems, structures and some financial security are now established, and Manu Tukutuku is in a healthier state to allow someone new to step into this space. As I have entered into my fifties, I have seriously reflected, prayed and returned to some dreams from many years prior. So it is with this, that I have been reflecting, rethinking, returning to dreams not yet realised and revisioning.

Therefore, 2019, is a new road to journey. Some of you will remember, that I have been studying part time at Laidlaw Theological College for the last 4 years and this year I completed my final 8th paper in Indigenous Theology. My hope has been that these qualifications allow me to enter into a Masters Programme, but before doing this, I believe I need to complete a one year immersion Te Reo Māori course. I have enrolled in Te Wānanga Takiura o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa.



I would like my Masters programme to focus upon Māori intentional community living and development. I am still tossing ideas around but I love the idea of learning more about the keys to healthy intentional living, community led development, Māori Christian Leadership based upon a depth of theology and wairuatanga. At the end of the day, academic study is only worthwhile to me, if it is lived out; so I hope that these studies will better inform and give a greater understanding of ways we can live differently, more holistically and influence and impact others. For years Dave and I have given our lives to community in general but I am planning the next phase needs to have a particular focus upon Māori Christian development.