

WORDS ON THE STREET

Working, playing and living in our neighbourhood brings both a lot of laughter and tears. Laughter helps to lighten the load in the midst of the struggle. Some say *"the more you are mocked the more you are loved."* I hope that's true 'cause people often mock me'. Behind the mocking however is a very real struggle. The struggle of poverty. It is so complex that there is no simple answer to the issue.

Last month, a crowd gathered on our street to intervene as two families clashed head to head with each other. It was a horrible sight as violence against each other escalated. Police arrived, arrested individuals and settled the two families down. As neighbours we talked about what had happened and the importance of creating street strategies to keep us all safe.

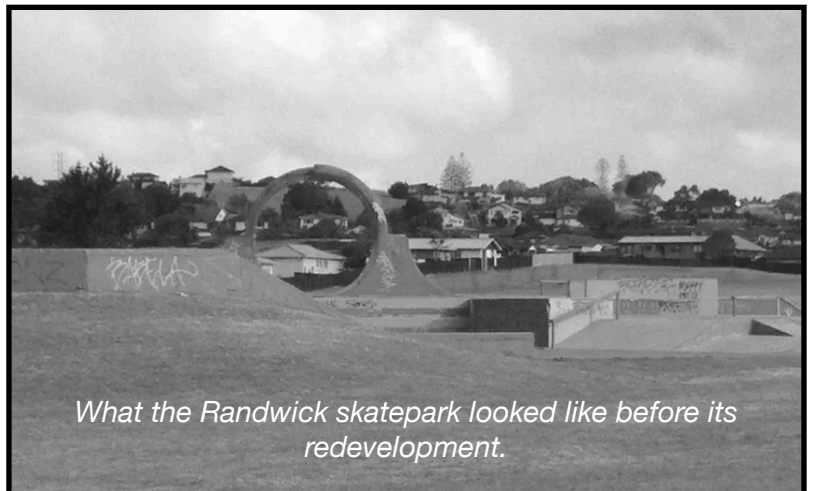
COVID-19 also highlighted the issues of poverty. Some people struggled to purchase the basic necessities such as food. There was ongoing stress as petrol and food prices increased. Many neighbours lacked digital devices or had limited devices which in turn meant their children's education suffered as they could not access online learning. Despite this, poverty is much more than just "stuff." If it was just stuff we would solve poverty by giving away more stuff. Poverty is also a lack of perceived options. We see this in neighbourhoods like Randwick Park and Wainuiomata, where UNOH teams are based. Doing the work of the God King, is about partnering with neighbours to uplift our community to help bring change that opens up opportunities and options. This is kingdom work. Just as important as the work though is also introducing neighbours to "the King," our Creator God.

Skate Park Kindness

A few weeks ago I was asked to check out a post on the Waiuku Grapevine Facebook page about a mum who was wanting to acknowledge and thank the kindness Randwick Park skaters had shown to her daughter.

She explained how the older skaters looked after the younger ones. How they often loaned their skate boards to those without, they gave lessons to others, bought drinks and food and stopped to check in on kids, even her own daughter. *"We are often the only white family at the park, and it didn't matter. We were included and cared for."*

After reading this I felt it was important to share it so I



What the Randwick skatepark looked like before its redevelopment.

contacted Justin from the Spinoff Media. He wrote their story. We have adapted and shortened his writing with his permission.

Why do a pair of Waiuku mums drive their daughters 40 minutes to a skatepark in Manurewa? A park that was once known for drug dealing and gang fights?

In 2008, a Manurewa liquor store owner was gunned down **during a robbery** (1) of his shop. The shop is located close to the Randwick skatepark. According to long time local and avid skater Walz Brown many crimes perpetrated in and around the sprawling reserve.

"Back in the day, you could buy anything here... drugs, women, you name it. Today, looking out over the park with an array of smooth concrete ramps,



Shontelle Thomson and Louise Newbury at Randwick's Skate Park



quarter pipes and bowls it is hard to believe that this is the same place.

Brown says the key to the change was [Auckland Council's \\$5.3 million redevelopment](#) (2), which kicked off in 2011. By 2020 a new playground, skatepark, basketball court and community centre had been all added to the site. So instead of drug dealers and pimps, the site is now full of children zipping around on scooters and skateboards.

Among the melee are two mums from Waiuku, Shontelle Thomson and Louise Newbury. Since the level four restrictions were lifted, the pair have been making the 40-minute trip up the southern motorway a couple of times a week with their skateboarding daughters, Sienna, Marcie and Bella. Newbury says one of the biggest challenges when it comes to supporting their kids' passion has been finding a place that isn't dangerous or intimidating for their 10 and 12-year-old girls. *"The vibe at our local park in Waiuku is very much about smoking and vaping," she says. "So we've been touring around Auckland,*

going to skateparks in places like Waterview and Mt Albert, and the atmosphere in these areas is terrible. The kids are nasty, we've seen punch-ups. And then we just happened to come across this one."

Thomson says their daughters were immediately made to feel welcome – which she says is significant, given how macho the skateboarding scene is known to be. *"We know what a bad rap Randwick Park gets, but the vibe here is totally different," she says. "The people are so lovely and when my daughter fell the other day, you should have seen how many kids got around to help her."*

The mothers have felt so moved by the kindness they've been shown that they did a fundraiser to help out the kids who don't have skating gear. *"We come here all the time and we've seen that some of these kids have nothing," Newbury says.*

Brown knows the local community really appreciates the donations of boards and scooters and he hopes it will help spark a new generation to take up the sport he loves. Dave Tims says much of the credit is due to the mentoring work Walz Brown has been doing in the area for the last decade or so. *"Walz and his boys have played a major role in creating the culture there. He worked with them when they were teenagers and now they are young men with families, so they are passing that on to their kids.*

He says seeing that people from out of the area are now hearing about the changes shows what happens when you invest in local communities. *"When something is stunning it does something to your spirit, and this development has lifted the mana of the area. If you go down now, you will see all these different groups playing together, working together, without the need for any formal structure or supervision because we have people who take ownership of the place."*

(1) <https://www.newshub.co.nz/nznews/guilty-verdict-in-navtej-singh-case-wont-bring-closure-2010030505>
(2) <https://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/manukau-courier/8814343/Reserve-plans-get-started>



Street Chats

What a year 2021 has been! Who would have ever imagined that our worlds would be turned upside down. At times it has felt like we have been living in a Hollywood futuristic movie.

In December we were invited to join a combined approach to a neighbourhood health strategy. The message said *"Dave, Counties Manukau are wanting to experiment with a new approach in regards to vaccinations."* *"They want to try a more relational "soft approach" and are looking for a neighbourhood friendly themed concept - are you interested?"*

Boom! That was us. We quickly gathered a group of local leaders and talked

about putting on a “COVID-safe Festival Party.” This was an opportunity to enjoy life and have some fun after whānau had experienced a lengthy time in lock down. We still had to be careful but we had bouncy castles, free Mr Whippy ice creams, sausage sizzles and good music. This combined to create a festive atmosphere for neighbours to join. Local workers, were all masked and knocked on doors, inviting neighbours to the event. We asked neighbours to participate in discussions regarding their own well-being, strategies they used with their whānau over lock down and their thoughts on the vaccination push.

The event was sponsored by Counties Manukau DHB, Bounce for a Cause contributed a free bouncy castle, UNOH helped co-ordinate the festivities and local workers ran 5 days of festivities that reached across local streets

Later that week, Manurewa Marae were able to follow up upon the hard work that had been done by our local workers. They

released their nurses to visit homes - giving vaccination shots to guys on home detention and to whānau that had struggled to get to a previous vaccination location. They successfully vaccinated over one hundred people in some of our most challenging households and streets. Hard Work Pays Off



HARD WORK PAYS OFF

It's a great privilege to serve our neighbourhood. As many of you will know, serving is often unseen, unnoticed and lots of hard work.

This is true of Francois Viljoen who has managed our Stepping Stones lawn mowing social enterprise for the last 3 years (www.steppingstoneslawns.co.nz). Francois and his wife Nicole intentionally moved into the neighbourhood offering their time, resources and love to their neighbours. Nicole has helped run a weekly youth club, while Francois poured his energy into caring for our local parks and schools.

At the end of 2021 Francois resigned as the manager after deciding to take up a new role of spending more time with foster kids in their home. Francois has worked hard over the years; walking alongside local staff, supporting them in their different roles, creating spaces for community planting, maintaining the equipment and making sure our parks look stunning. For three consecutive years Randwick Park has won the Green Flags Award as a reflection of high neighbourhood participation. This is one of the key Stepping Stones values - “Locals serving locals.”

The role hasn't always been easy, but Francois calm personality and hard work ethic helped carry him through the dramas of illegal dumping of rubbish on parks, training and working with staff (all who live in Randwick) as well as working outside in the heat. It is a role that is often unnoticed or unrecognised, but, on behalf of UNOH and the neighbourhood, we want to say “thank you!”

Thanks for the hours of hard work, for the aroha/love that has been poured into the people around you and into the whenua/land of the neighbourhood. You have walked through our parks, praying, caring, thinking. Your hard work has and will continue to be appreciated.



Evil creates fear, Jesus creates hope.

As Auckland began to move down in lockdown levels and the ability to reconnect with each other opened the opportunity to enjoy more freedom, we became aware of a more sinister spiritual entrapment whose chaos and darkness was causing fear and sleepless nights to a family.

It is not often that I am compelled to seek one particular passage of scripture that provides me with hope and reminds me of the power of Jesus Christ as we look to him in the face of the demonic but this was such a time.

Mark 5:1-20 tells the story of Jesus restoring a demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes. Chains to the man's hand and foot could not bind him. Day and night he cried out and cut himself as he clambered amongst the tombs, Clearly he was not in his right mind. When meeting Jesus he shouts at him as the Son of the Most High God. Jesus responds in mercy and calls out the impure spirit tormenting the man, thus restoring peace and his well being.

While sitting outside the family's home masked and socially distanced, Dave and I listened to the accounts witnessed by the family. A relative had recently visited them and her bizarre and hostile behaviour had left them anxious and afraid.

"One moment our niece was her normal self and then suddenly she completely changed. Her voice changed, she started acting really weird and then began muttering strange words and curses. She grabbed our little girl and tried baptising her under water. When we tried stopping her she got violent. It was like she had some superhuman strength. We had to physically restrain her to the ground to stop her from hurting anyone. It took a couple of hours before she finally calmed down. What happened? Has she left something horrible in our home? Are we safe being here?"

How do you respond to such a story? In today's western world, the supernatural is often dismissed or labelled as a "mental health issue." The strange behaviours that had manifested appeared to have been supernatural and they reflected similarities to a person possessed by a spirit. Mental illness could have been part of the cocktail of this awful night and as we listened we felt both were worth considering.

This whānau needed their house to be blessed and assurance that there was no evil presence around. Other whānau members wanted to know more of God. We gave them some key scriptures, taught them how to pray and gave them prayers they could also recite. We briefly introduced them to Jesus and told bible stories of how He dealt with the spirit world. A couple of weeks later we returned with some bibles as they had decided they wanted to have their own bible study as a whānau.

For many of our Māori neighbours, the supernatural world is real and infused with the physical world. Logically and scientifically it is difficult to explain. One book that is worth reading that gives some insight into this world is called "*Tātaihono – Stories of Māori Healing and Psychiatry*" by Wiremu NiaNia and Alister Bush. This book has recently been used by some Universities. It gives an insight into both a scientific and indigenous response to real clinical situations in some of NZ's key mental health facilities.

This recent experience about flesh and blood but surrounded by the Our love for Jesus is darkness of we see our share and May they l o v e

has been a sharp reminder that the work we do is not only about principalities and powers. Our lives are physical and spiritual though often we forget the latter. deepened when we see His love penetrate into the spiritual fear and we are reminded of his power when neighbours feeling safe again. It is a privilege to know His protection. Please pray for this family. know a sense of peace and grow in a deepening and understanding of Jesus.

