



A RESTORATIVE APPROACH WITH A PENSIONER HOUSING COMPLEX

A recent request came from Mayor Annette who believed a restorative approach could help resolve a tenant's inappropriate behaviour at one of the Council's housing complexes. The inappropriate behaviour had been occurring for over a year and when Council staff received complaints about the behaviour, they approached the tenant to resolve it. Unfortunately, the behaviour continued and as Council were concerned for the welfare of the other tenants, there were grounds for the tenant to find alternative accommodation.

Shelly Harkness and one of our Restorative Justice Facilitators, Rere Sutherland, implemented a restorative approach firstly meeting individually and confidentially with all those concerned to hear their stories about what they were experiencing. A number of issues were raised and the majority were not about the inappropriate behaviour of the tenant in question, but were about issues that contributed to it. Shelly and Rere decided the focus of the meeting, when everyone came together, would be to discuss the major issues of car parking, who tenants contact for particular needs and finally, what type of behaviour the tenants wanted to enjoy in the housing complex. The issue of the tenant finding alternative accommodation would be considered in private following the meeting.

Careful preparation before bringing everyone together led to a successful restorative meeting. Four tenants, a Social Welfare Worker and three Council staff experienced the magic of restorative meetings where the incredible tension and angst felt in the beginning was relieved through everyone sharing their stories and of course, everyone listening to others' stories. There were certainly some heated moments! However, this is conducive in a restorative process where sharing concerns and releasing built up emotions in a safe environment, is the first step clearing the way for the group to then work together towards a positive outcome.

At the end of the restorative meeting, there were acknowledgements the process helped them to understand each other and what everyone needed to live compatibly in the complex. Council were to make changes to the car parking to alleviate that major issue, everyone now knew who to contact for what need (eg Council for landlord issues, Police for safety issues, Social Worker for welfare issues), and the group came up with a Code of Conduct to ensure appropriate behaviour was encouraged. Subsequently, the tenant in question had a meeting with Council and with the new Code of Conduct in place, did not have to find alternative accommodation.

"it was a worthwhile intervention...we could all see the reasons behind the inappropriate behaviour and address those"

**Restorative Meeting
Participant,
September, 2015**

Continued...



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Towards a Restorative City: Honoa ki a Rongo ki Whanganui

A sound restorative approach always includes follow up to ensure what was promised in the meeting has been actioned and whether the changes needed had been sustained. Seven weeks later, Shelly and Rere were pleased to hear the following:

“everyone’s got the message [about the behaviour] and are getting on well now”

“it’s made me realise how I come across to other people”

“it was a worthwhile intervention...we could all see the reasons behind the inappropriate behaviour and address those”

“it’s a good process”

“there’ve been no issues since”

“we’re not so closed minded now, we’re willing to discuss things”

The following quote reflects sustained behaviour change:

“[the tenant] has realised [their] behaviour was inappropriate and hasn’t done it again”

This example reflects how the principles of restorative practice can be applied in any environment where people interact. We’re thankful to Mayor Annette Main and to all the participants who were open and willing to resolve the difficult issues through restorative practice.

We look forward to continuing working closely with the Whanganui District Council, and other organisations / community groups in Whanganui to transform conflict in a respectful way. Every time we implement restorative practice we are working towards the Restorative City vision: creating an environment for all people to thrive and succeed together through respectful relationships.

Restorative Practices Whanganui

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