

Ending homelessness- Thirteen practical suggestions

(14 August 2020 by Kate Frykberg, kate@thinktank.co.nz)

Ending Homelessness - we thought it couldn't be done. Then along came COVID-19, and, thanks to a significant collaborative effort, a large proportion of the homeless population had some kind of roof over their head at last. It wasn't perfect, and it isn't a permanent solution, but it happened.

So how do we build from this? What is philanthropy's role? What is our role as individuals? And how can we work together for a nation where everyone has a home to go to?

On 30 July 2020 Philanthropy NZ (PNZ) hosted a zoom-based workshop for PNZ members where an expert panel provided their advice. Panellists came from multiple perspectives:

- A lived experience perspective - Mary Moeke, a South Auckland-based lecturer in Early Childhood education.
- A marae-based perspective: Hurimoana Dennis from Te Puea Marae in Māngere.
- An outreach worker's perspective: Natalia Cleland from DCM in Wellington.
- A local government perspective: Manda Grubner from Wellington City Council.
- A central government policy perspective: Jeremy Steele from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Here is a summary of their suggestions for how we can all be part of ending homelessness:

A. We can give money - and there are needs to suit any budget. For example:

1. If we have modest amounts to give we might consider things to help people moving into social housing (for example kitchen packages, education packages or technology packages), or we could simply set up a monthly donation to an organisation working with homelessness.
2. If we have more funding available we might consider supporting the operating costs of an organisation working with homelessness, supporting advocacy or providing funding for housing needs which don't meet the criteria for government support.
3. We can remove barriers to funding by radically simplifying application forms and/or sharing application processes. (As one panellist noted, "the application form looked more like an English test - it would have been easier to apply for a mortgage.")

B. We can invest money to provide both housing and a financial return. Arguably the biggest barrier to solving homelessness is the lack of appropriate housing stock. Examples of how we can help solve this challenge include:

4. If we have an investment portfolio, consider investing in social housing. This is a great example of “Impact Investing” where we can make positive social impact and get a financial return.
5. If we own property, consider placing the property with a [Community Housing Provider](#), who will use it to provide housing to those who need it most - while also managing the property and providing us with a market return.

C. We can give our time and expertise. For example:

6. This could be as simple as helping out in the kitchen at the marae or providing baking to a drop in centre.
7. We can share our expertise, eg providing communications, accounting, or legal support
8. We can share our social capital, for example by making connections with funders, investors, property owners and policy makers.

D. We can get going quickly and easily by learning from others. Homelessness is an issue which is best addressed by working together and finding the needs and gaps where we can maximise our contribution. Examples for how to find our niche include:

9. Get the big picture by reading the very practical [Aotearoa New Zealand Homelessness Action Plan](#) created by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.
10. Talk with your local council and/or Iwi, to get a picture of what is happening regionally and where the gaps might be.
11. With Māori making up approximately 60% of people experiencing homelessness, kaupapa Māori or Treaty-based approaches are good to support.
12. Transition points from government care is an area where we need to do better, for example people leaving hospital, Oranga Tamariki and Corrections have higher risks of experiencing homelessness. Another area of need is people who fall outside the criteria for government support.
13. Connect up with other funders, for example joining a regional funder collaboration, or start one up to share knowledge and leverage funding.

We all deserve to have a home, and COVID-19 has shown that it is possible to house all our citizens. Philanthropy, and each of us as individuals, have an important role to play - and it is neither difficult nor expensive to be part of the long term solution for ending homelessness. Let's do our bit!