

just actions

People desperately need affordable, safe and healthy housing



Caring for people, transforming lives, reforming society by God's power



'A house is a home when it shelters the body and comforts the soul.'

Phillip Moffitt

New Zealand's tradition of providing housing for vulnerable households stretches back over a century. Compared with other countries, we do reasonably well when we look at our levels of homelessness and waiting times for people in real housing need. But things are changing.

In 2007, The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit published a report entitled 'Rebuilding the Kiwi Dream' identifying serious and growing social and economic problems in providing social housing to all the people who need it. This highlighted that New Zealand faced a growing shortage of affordable homes. Three years on, some families are forced to move three or four times a year, while others pay 60% or even 70% of their income on housing.

Areas where jobs are available attract people, and this is true in South Auckland where the demands on housing are intense. For every new house, an equivalent 14 people need accommodation. Some South Auckland streets have two or three families in each house. Salvation Army Community Ministries centres are often forced to place people in housing that is not healthy or safe, or that requires residents to pay over 60% of their income.

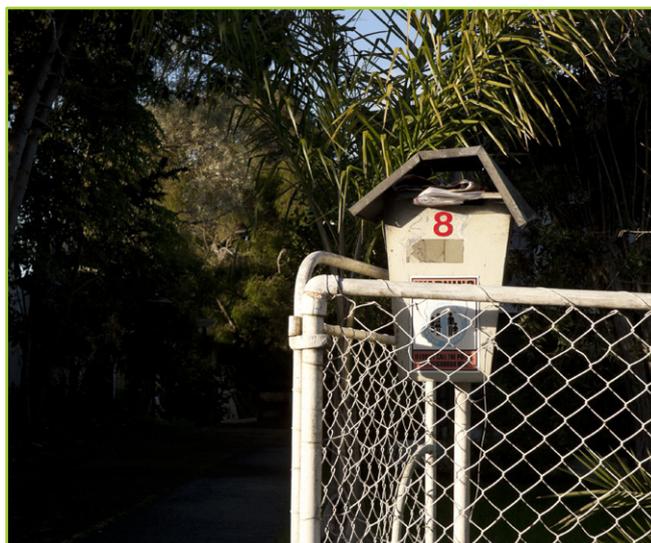
Construction of new houses is not keeping up with demand, with a major shortfall projected over the next 30 years. The proportion of Kiwis owning their own homes has declined from 74% in 1986 to 67% in 2006. This is forecast to drop further to 62% by 2016.

At the same time, the make up of the typical Kiwi family needing social housing has changed dramatically. There is a huge growth in demand for one and two-bedroom houses for older people, and four-bedroom or more houses for large families. Yet New Zealand has relatively few houses to meet that demand within the current state housing stock. Instead, we have a surplus of three-bedroom houses across the country that suit neither group.

As a result, a growing number of New Zealanders most in need of state housing are not getting it when, where and how they need it. Our state houses are often in the wrong place, of the wrong type, and of the wrong quality to meet people's needs.

The Government has put more and more money into social housing support, but this has made little difference. In real terms, Crown spending on social housing has increased almost 7% each year over the past decade, but the number of people helped has only increased by an average of 1% each year. Statistics New Zealand is signalling a need for 540,000 new houses over the next 25 years. If the share of social housing remains at its current level, around 30,000 of those houses will need to be affordable social housing.

This lack of housing has enormous social consequences, particularly for children. Those who live in cold or damp houses develop severe health problems that can affect them for the rest of their lives. Children in very crowded houses experience more violence and abuse. When families move frequently, children often don't develop the relationships with doctors and teachers that enable educational or health problems to be identified and addressed.



Re-thinking the stakes: get together and discuss

- 1** In what ways is getting people into decent housing consistent with the biblical call to social justice?
- 2** How can a corps support those people or families that are struggling to get into decent housing?
- 3** How can the reality that people are without adequate housing alter the way we use our homes and the sort of houses we live in?

Re-actions: what can we do?

- 1** Are there people needing housing in your corps area? Could you timetable a specific time each week when people having difficulty getting properly housed can come to get advice, advocacy or other help?
- 2** Arrange for people in your corps to be part of a Habitat for Humanity housing programme.
- 3** Arrange a party for people living in Salvation Army independent living units, emergency or supportive accommodation.
- 4** Arrange a discussion group that looks at Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit reports and other papers on housing need. Go to www.salvationarmy.org.nz/socialpolicy

Re-actions: what can I do?

- 1** Join a local Housing Trust or Habitat for Humanity branch and help provide housing.
- 2** Write to my local MP when there are issues of housing that need addressing in my area.
- 3** Read factual information about housing need in New Zealand.

Resources for re-formative worship: take a fresh look

- 1** Arrange a thanksgiving meeting for the houses that we live in. Include prayers and activities for those who don't have shelter in the world.
- 2** Have a family live in a car outside your hall for a week to draw attention to the plight of homeless people.
- 3** Screen Salvation Army videos on homelessness and discuss what you see.