

OPENING OF THE WELLINGTON HOUSING TRUST
Wednesday 18 February 2009; 10.30am
Hon Tariana Turia
Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector

Many of you may be familiar with the whakatauki which says

*He kokonga whare, e kitea;
He kokonga ngakau, e kore e kitea.*

A corner of a house may be seen and examined;
not so the corners of the heart.

Today we bring the corners of the home together with the warmth of the heart, to celebrate the formal opening of the Stoke Street Project.

We celebrate the vision of the Wellington Housing Trust, who have a heart for the people, who are driven by aspirations to invest in a community that enables access to appropriate and affordable housing for all.

And we look forward to a project which will truly make a difference for Wellington city – and in particular our families who are trying to make do on low and moderate incomes.

I believe that what we are seeing today, is the realisation of a dream.

I remember being told once that the word 'dream' was not as effective as talking about a plan or a strategy. I begged to differ.

Last month, on the eve of his inauguration, the new President of the United States honoured the dream of Martin Luther King – that his children will one day live in a nation where they are not judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

Nelson Mandela gave voice to a dream of an Africa which is in peace with itself.

In 1940, Te Puea Herangi had a vision where a fleet of waka each representing iwi of Aotearoa would commemorate the centenary of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In 1990 at Waitangi, one thousand paddlers in 22 waka achieved her dream.

All of these leaders were imbued with a great sense of vision – which then ignited a passion to put in place the plans and strategies to make the dream real.

What we are seeing today, is the dream that the Wellington Housing Trust had to create an affordable, safe, efficient and healthy housing stock for people who may have otherwise fallen through the cracks.

The Trust has done the hard yards to make things happen. They have put in the hours, working alongside other agencies, to ensure that the housing needs of the community are being met alongside social support services.

I really commend this approach. Increasingly as we enter into bleaker economic prospects, we must look to each other, to work alongside of each other, to create durable and sustainable solutions for the people.

We simply do not have the luxury of being able to build a whole lot of little boxes on the hillside, in isolation of each other, and all competing for limited resource.

The strength of our ability to cope with the challenge of uncertain financial forecasts, will be seen in our capacity to be collaborative.

The consequences of not talking to each other are also particularly dire. We know that poor housing conditions are linked with a huge range of health issues such as respiratory infections; lead poisoning; poorer mental health; meningococcal disease, rheumatic fever, and asthma.

Inadequate housing also has detrimental impact on educational pathways – cold, damp homes are hardly conducive to study.

And so we recognise the significance of the efforts by the Trust in working with Housing NZ, Wellington City Council, the Refugee and Migrant Service and other social service agencies, with their eyes all set on improving outcomes for this community.

The Wellington Housing Trust knows all about the importance of working co-operatively.

Over 25 years of operating as a Trust has given you ample experience in how to ensure a healthy dialogue between diverse parties.

As I understand the current Trust brings together architects, a lawyer, an accountant, a retired Minister, community workers, people in telecommunications and a Nun – as well as ensuring that at least one trustee is a tenant.

It sounds to me a bit like that lifeboat game – if you were stranded on a desert island, who would you most want to be stranded with! I'll leave it up to you to come up with the ideal answer!

We appear to be spoilt for choice - in addition to the trustees, there is a Director who handles the day to day management, and there is a Housing Administrator – and of course there are all the tenants who are just as diverse and have an equally diverse range of needs.

I want to really congratulate the Wellington Housing Trust not just for the success you have demonstrated in your use of the Housing Innovations Fund

– but also for your many years of dedicated service towards providing public housing for those on the lowest income and with the greatest needs.

I know that from all accounts it has not been a trouble free path.

I am told that in addition to some of the inevitable issues that can arise with any housing project – difficulties with neighbours or contractors or timeframes – there was also the unexpected catastrophe to contend with, in terms of land slips.

But true to form, the challenges were overcome, and so now today, we are opening six new rental units in Newtown.

I am particularly pleased that two of these units are bigger units of four bedrooms each, designed and built for large extended families.

There is such a desperate shortage of housing for particular populations regarding this type of accommodation.

- In 2006, almost half of Pasifika peoples lived in households requiring extra bedrooms;
- 23% of Maori; 23% of other and 20% of Asians also required at least one extra bedroom. The 'other' population most probably refers to recent migrants.
- This is a big contrast to the four percent of Pakeha living in houses that met the definition of crowding.

And so it is pleasing to hear that the families of Stoke Street are Maori; Pasifika; Pakeha; African and Assyrian – some single parent; some unemployed; some with ongoing health issues – and all entitled to a new home, a new start.

I know that Housing New Zealand and the Wellington City Council have struggled to meet the needs of refugee families being resettled in Wellington, and I want to make a particular acknowledgment to the Housing Trust for responding to an area of such high need.

But they did more than just provide the housing stock – the Trust has invited refugee groups to work alongside the Trust's architects to ensure that the units meet both the practical and the cultural needs of the families who will inhabit them.

The dream for the Housing Trust also included ensuring one of their units was accessible to people with physical disabilities.

In sum; the model provided by the Trust is one which gives a brilliant example of social housing.

Ultimately, no matter how successful the relationships with central and local government; how secure the collaboration with other social service providers; how sustainable and environmentally friendly, the greatest measure of success will be in the families moving into Stoke Street. Remember also to mind your own business. Because all of you who live in Stoke Street are each other's business. Treat each other with care, with aroha and understanding.

And so, my final word, is to wish them our greatest wishes, for a healthy home; an affordable home; a long term dream realised.