



Social Services Sunday
Rev Linda Murphy
Social Services Sunday
27 July 2025

My sympathy is with the friend in bed being asked for three loaves of bread in this morning's Gospel. I can guarantee there wouldn't be three loaves of bread in my cupboards, however I am sure we would manage to find something to offer.

Today is Social Services Sunday and as I am very slowly and reluctantly moving towards retirement at Te Tāpui Atawhai after working with our homeless CBD whānau for the last twenty years. I am going to share some reflections of those twenty years 2004 to 2025 this morning.

I have worked with three Missioners, and I do remember Dame Diane saying to me when she retired, she regretted that she hadn't made an impact on homelessness. When I first became aware of our homeless CBD whānau I genuinely expected to have every one of them housed and safe by the time I retired!!

How much I had to learn, and what I have learned.

I can now use very technical terms such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and PD(Personality Disorder).

They aren't much use most of the time as they are labelling and belittling terms. We need patience and aroha and this needs to be in an unending supply.

We had many knocks on our door when we lived in Hampton Court requesting mainly bedding when it was

cold. In fact, I was walking down the laneway at Homeground recently when a Streetie who I hadn't seen for some years said to me "When did you move out of the city?" He had buzzed our old apartment wanting a blanket to be told we no longer lived at Hampton Court. We moved out twelve years ago and it seems this address has never been forgotten.

I remember a very cold winter when we had ten Streeties sleeping in each of the porches at St Matthews and it was so cold I was very tempted to ring the Vicar and ask if I could open the church.

That group has been housed for many years, and I rarely hear from them except when they have an event and need someone to listen to them. Many have passed away, as a Streeties' life is far too short. All have had challenges and those still with us have made changes that have taken time and courage and every one of them has my aroha and admiration.

Housing long-term homeless whānau is not as simple as finding a whare and giving them the key. It requires time, support and it doesn't always work out.

Imagine having your earliest memory being that of being unsafe in your whare.

Imagine never feeling safe in a whare.

Imagine always being in a state of hyperarousal.

We now have Homeground which is housing forty of these long term homeless whānau. Every day presents a challenge and every day you see small steps of joy. Be it those looking after the gardens on level nine or those volunteering at the Mission Grocers.

One memory I will hold in my heart for ever was watching a tāne who had been on the streets since he was nine

years old. The Mish was always home but now he had his own whare at The Mish and that smile was unforgettable. He has recently passed away. He was only forty-seven years old.

In 2016 our now Manutaki, Helen Robinson talked me into taking up a role in Calder Health she said I could make it into a role I saw need. Jump to 2025 we have an Outreach Nurse, Health Coach, Health Improvement Practitioner and Awhai ora support workers working with our whānau for health needs social needs or just support with MSD. It is about relationship building and acknowledgement of our whānau and their story. Cat our Outreach nurse and I work with all the other services that Te Tāpui Atawhai now offer. We support our Outreach Team, Street to Home's Housing Key workers and our residential services. Our whānau have health needs that most of our population face at sixty-five plus they are in their forties!

The Mission has changed in the twenty years I have been involved. I remember when Outreach was Wilf Holt and one other Social Worker this service is now a team of seven. Their work never stops as homelessness doesn't stop. I also wish to acknowledge this Team's amazing mahi. I get sent some very difficult referrals from Auckland City Hospital and one I received recently made my heart sink. How were we going to help this wahine. Well Outreach did help this wahine and her partner and they are now housed with support in place.

We knocked on doors and the people of Tamaki Makaurau responded with donations that allowed us to build Homeground. I have heard Helen say we could fill three more HomeGround! She is right!

Some years ago, we used to count the rough sleepers of the CBD on a Sunday night. The figures are immaterial as

you never found your usual sleepers as they were hiding. Rough sleepers are not keen on being a number and I don't blame them.

I have deliberately not included statistics this morning as they are depressing, shocking but helpful to our leadership when negotiating government funding. There is a meaninglessness to them. The number of homeless is not the problem, it is the trauma they carry that is the problem. I remember our current Missioner saying on Social Services Sunday in 2015 "We need to love our Tamariki". This is where we need to start the healing of our most vulnerable.

I have been called Nana or Whaea for many years now and I am very honoured and humbled when I hear these terms of aroha from our whānau.

In 2004 I thought this issue of homelessness would be sorted.

Twenty years later it isn't.

Will it ever be sorted?

My prayer is it will be, and it will happen with the mana and aroha of our Tangata Titiri working together. The Mission's values are: Manaakitanga, Rangapū, Atawhai and Manatika, this will lead I hope to the end of chronic long-term homelessness.

It will require our society to acknowledge that kia, housing and fair access to health care and an end to poverty are basic Human Rights and all our whānau must have access to these rights.

Amen