

STEPHANIE McINTYRE

# HOPE ON THE STREETS



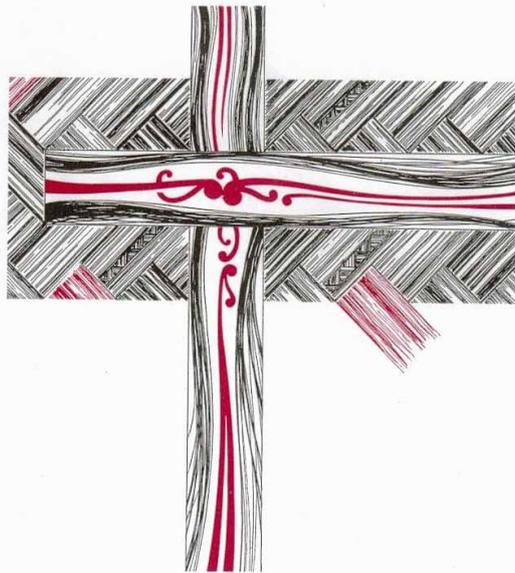
*Stephanie McIntyre*

**Stephanie McIntyre is the Director** of Downtown Community Ministry in Wellington which has a primary focus on addressing and preventing inner-city homelessness. The agency works with some of Wellington’s most vulnerable people who are living on the street or in the night shelter, and it offers practical support to help them put their lives back together and find a home.

McIntyre was formerly a Social Justice Commissioner for the Anglican Church and played a central role in organising the 1998 *Hikoī of Hope* march on Parliament which protested the rise in poverty in New Zealand. McIntyre has continued to be a public advocate for social justice issues and a champion for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. More recently, she has led the call for the establishment of a “wet” house in Wellington as an innovative solution to provide a stable home for people with long histories of alcohol dependence.

- The title of “social entrepreneur” is not a label McIntyre is comfortable with and she prefers to describe herself simply as a social activist. McIntyre: “The thing that drives and motivates me is restlessness and a hunger for positive social change — and whether that’s achieved through innovations or entrepreneurship or from age-old proven activism is of very little relevance to me. I’m simply interested in the momentum for change wherever it can come from.”

As a young woman, McIntyre married a musician and was involved for many years in managing bands. “I was caught up with a bunch of guys who were very good at making music, but we soon found it was another whole thing to create professional employment out of it. So I took over the organising role and kept them touring ... which is probably where my flair for management came through.”



# Hiko of Hope



McIntyre is drawn to how religious faith can be “given flesh” by its actions. “I have always seen Jesus as radical role model who stood things on their head and announced a vision of a very different way of living and being. As a very idealistic young person I genuinely believed that we were called to a more community way of life ... so I was very drawn to the notion that social issues should be addressed.”

In the 1990s, McIntyre become involved with the Service and Food Workers Union, and she also became a workplace counsellor with the industrial chaplaincy service ITIM. In this role she worked with bus drivers, traffic officers and the police and was also a counsellor at parliament with the employees of politicians.

In 1996, she became a commissioner with the Anglican Social Justice Commission (a job she shared with the Rev Jim Greenaway from Opotiki). McIntyre brought to the position some good networks with the unions and community activists, and a keen sense of the current state of social issues. She saw the commissioner role as a chance to influence how the church could model a more grounded role in social activism.

What she could not have anticipated was that the Anglican Church — sometimes described as “middle New Zealand at prayer” — would soon decide to make the most public stand on social issues that New Zealand had seen for a generation.

- The decision to march on Parliament was taken by the General Synod of the Anglican Church, held in Auckland in May 1998. The 1990s was a decade of political and economic change that saw some deep social consequences. Welfare benefits had been cut in 1991, Housing New Zealand tenants were forced onto market-based rentals, and the Employment Contracts Act had been passed which led to an increasing casualisation of the workforce.

McIntyre: “The fall-out from this rampant change was just phenomenal, and poorer New Zealand families were really hurting. There was huge stress also on the church and community agencies that were trying to cope. When the Synod had its usual session on current social issues, it heard many lay people from their diocese saying, “This is the pain and hurt that I am witnessing in my community”, and sharing some very stark and moving stories.”

“The debate and mood of the Synod changed from people just talking about these stories to people wanting the church to be bold and speak up for poor New Zealanders. In the end, there was a call for a great march or hikoī to be held in the spring. Bishop Whakahuihui Vercoe got in behind it, the motion was passed and the *Hikoī of Hope* was born. Within minutes they were coming back to myself and Jim Greenaway and asking us to make it happen.”

McIntyre produced briefing papers for the five main planks that the *Hikoī for Hope* would focus on, showing why each of these issues was at a level of critical concern for New Zealanders. The five planks were

1. *Addressing poverty*
2. *Real Job Creation*
3. *Affordable Housing*
4. *A Health System We Can Trust*
5. *Accessible Education*

McIntyre and Greenaway were realistic enough to know that the idea of a hikoi wasn't something that the entire church would be wholeheartedly behind. But they were fortunate that the Anglican bishops had appointed people in every diocese to represent the initiative, and to help out with the mammoth tasks of organising and co-ordination.

When it started, the *Hikoi for Hope* had teams marching on Parliament from Cape Reinga at the top of Northland, and also from Stewart Island at the bottom of the South Island. It is estimated that around 80,000 people joined the march at sometime during the month-long journey. Every evening where the hikoi stopped, public meetings were held so people could share their stories on the social and economic concerns in their communities.

At Parliament Grounds, over 10,000 people gathered for the final day of protest, making it one of the largest gatherings ever held at Parliament. McIntyre: "What was very different about that ending at Parliament was that it was a liturgy of lament and hope. I'll never forget our former Governor-General Sir Paul Reeves standing there and leading the chant of *Enough is Enough!*. It was very powerful theatre and was an important opportunity for people to express themselves and be heard on these critical issues."

Within a year there was a change of government in New Zealand, and McIntyre doesn't doubt that the *Hikoi for Hope* put momentum behind this electoral swing.

"The new Labour-led government pulled New Zealand back from the brink, to some extent, and some significant changes happened. Housing was moved back to income-related rents, and the level of superannuation was raised which meant that thousands of older people were immediately brought out of poverty. But the new government wasn't radically different from what came before — and the changes were only ever going to be as good as the people we elected."

McIntyre observes that one of the major gains from the *Hikoi for Hope* was the opportunity to have a more consistent dialogue between government and church leaders. "I don't think many people realise how significant that was. We got to speak for a good couple of hours, twice a year, with 8-10 cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister. That is a remarkable level of dialogue and engagement that gave us a continuing opportunity to keep bringing forward the social issues that we think are important."

- After the *Hikoi for Hope*, and after a decade of activism on "macro" issues at a national level ... McIntyre found herself increasingly interested in the changes she might achieve at a "micro" level of social services.

In 2000, McIntyre became the first New Zealand lay person to be offered a scholarship to attend a semester at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was a theological college with a reputation for liberal ideas and practical activism, and she saw it as a chance to step out of her own context and learn some new things. It was her first opportunity to study liberation theology, and she also studied with the evangelist and political activist Jim Wallis who was teaching at nearby Harvard University.

One Sunday morning, McIntyre attended an Anglican Eucharist for homeless people on the Boston Common ... and her learning journey took a profound turn.

"I had never given much thought to the issue of homelessness. I felt I was pretty well in touch with the critical social issues of New Zealand, but hadn't really ever confronted this



*Stephanie McIntyre*

issue before. So there I was in Boston which has a population of six million and there were 10,000 homeless people in the city — hundreds of them living on the Boston Common itself.

“Every Sunday there would be about a hundred or so of these homeless people gathering for the Eucharist, and I just found it compelling. I couldn’t have *not* kept on going to it. The people spoke during the service and there were often very harrowing stories. The service was run by a very diminutive Anglican priest called Debbie and her ability to hold these stories and their grief was absolutely extraordinary.”

“I didn’t realise it at the time, but being there on the Boston Common was one of those serendipitous connections that prepared me for my next main role. I was ready to move from social policy to much more practical services.”

- Downtown Community Ministry (DCM) was set up in 1969 by a group of Wellington city churches who wanted to support the “left-behind” people in their city — those people who have no money, no food and no roof over their heads.

In 2004, when McIntyre took over as Director of DCM, she found that the agency itself was facing several immediate challenges. The lease on its building had expired, the organisation was living financially beyond its means and was without any reserves, and its programmes were fragmented and poorly focused. While there had been a strong emphasis helping clients with income entitlements, McIntyre also felt that DCM needed to more practically address the underlying issues of homelessness, and the physical and mental health of the people who are living on the streets.

McIntyre: “I just launched myself into it. I didn’t have a real plan because everything needed addressing at once. But I knew I wanted to work somewhere that was healthy, happy, visionary, and bringing healing ... and in an organisation that was a focused on solutions and not the problems.”

There were a lot of staff changes, and also a deeper change in the way the staff and volunteers worked together to support their clients solve problems. “Our staff had expertise in particular areas, but — like many people in social services — they were working in a silo way. While recognising the value of an individual staff member building a good rapport with an



Stephanie McIntyre presenting her workshop at the NZSEF Retreat

individual service user, we have learned that it is better if we work collectively with people. We now have good internal systems that drive us towards working as a team.”

DCM took on addressing and preventing inner-city homelessness as its primary focus. A contract with the Wellington City Council made DCM the main agency charged with addressing homelessness in the city.

McIntyre adopted a *Housing First* policy which means placing a person in housing as a *first* step of support, before addressing the other social and service needs of the individual. This is in contrast to other social service approaches that offer housing as a ‘prize’ or reward for the demonstration of compliance to a system of care ... like maintaining sobriety.

McIntyre: “Research shows that the mere act of placement in housing produces a level of stabilisation that allows the individual to address their other needs more effectively. We also asked homeless people what it was they wanted, and they consistently told us that they wanted to be housed. So that became our mission.”

“The people we work with have the same aspirations as you and me. They want to be well. They want to be in touch with their children. They want to be free of their addictions, and manage them. They want disposable income enough to go to the movies and join in community activities. And above all this: they want a home.

“Having shelter is a primary human right and is absolutely necessary in order to experience wellness. The *Housing First* concept is not a radical notion and is now being embraced as ‘best practice’ around the world. As simple as it sounds, we’ve had a whole range of agencies involved in the issue of homelessness over the years and yet this same group of people at the bottom have remained without a roof over their heads.”

DCM’s commitment to the *Housing First* model saw around 75 people in the first couple of years move from rough sleeping on the streets to independent flatting, mainly within the social housing programmes of the Wellington City Council and Housing New Zealand. These numbers have tapered off as affordable accommodation has become less available in Wellington.

- The hardest group to find a “roof over their heads” are those people with very long histories of alcohol dependence as well as homelessness. These are the individuals who may have failed at rehabilitation many times, been evicted from tenancies, and are caught in a

cycle of rough sleeping on the streets, or on other people's couches, or in police cells, or the hospital emergency department. And they stay caught in this constant cycle, because there is no other accommodation option open to them.

McIntyre: "We've successfully housed lots of people in flats around the city and the vast majority have been able to make a success of it — that includes many people who were rough sleeping on the street. But there are a small number of people who need a completely different model. They are just not able to live independently and sustain their flats, or they just don't have the ability to manage the other people coming into their home without it becoming 'Party Central'. But we just won't accept that there is some group that we can't find a housing solution for. It's not appropriate to blame people personally for this failure ... because what's failing here is our community's inability to provide the raft of housing options that we all need."

McIntyre began to research the concept of a "wet" house accommodation which is a highly effective but somewhat controversial form of therapeutic housing that allows people with long-term alcohol dependence to consume alcohol on the premises. In 2007, she gained a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust grant which enabled her to travel to the US, Canada and Europe to visit examples of this form of accommodation, and to draw upon the expertise and experience of how they are run.

First and foremost, a "wet" house provides a home ... but it's a home that is a stable living environment where residents are supported to develop plans for controlling and reducing their drinking. Safety is ensured by providing 24-hour cover of awake staff at all times. Typically, there is a staffed reception area which monitors the comings and goings of residents, and manages and restricts the flow of visitors. McIntyre found that the cost of these houses was fully funded by their various governments, including significant capital investments in high quality purpose-built buildings.

McIntyre: "I was hugely impressed by the ethos and level of care in these places, and the respect that was shown to the residents. Many of these house projects had evaluations that testify to the success of this approach and showed that the quality of life of residents was significantly improved, and alcohol consumption rates had radically dropped."

Besides being a humane model of accommodation for this group of people, McIntyre points out that the "wet" house concept is probably the most cost-effective model as well. The accumulative financial price tag of hospital admissions, police and court processing and time spent in jail, far outweighs the cost of setting up accommodation that suits the needs of people from this background.

This was well described in a 2006 *New Yorker* article by Malcolm Gladwell, who argued that chronic problems like homelessness "...might be a lot easier to solve, than manage". His article focused on Murray Barr, a homeless man and former marine who was well-known to the police department in Reno, Nevada. Concerned at the regularity of their contact with this man, two police officers investigated the cost of his repeated hospitalisation. The officers realised that if you totalled up all his hospital bills for the 10 years that he had been on the



**DOWNTOWN  
COMMUNITY  
MINISTRY**



*Stephanie McIntyre in workshop at NZSEF retreat with Lani Evans (ReGeneration Trust) and Louis Brown (Social Innovation Trust)*

streets — as well as substance-abuse-treatment costs, doctor’s fees, and other expenses — Murray Barr probably ran up medical bills as large as anyone in the state of Nevada. Gladwell dubbed the man “Million-Dollar Murray” after one of the police officers concluded: “It cost us one million dollars *not* to do something about Murray”.

- Back in New Zealand, McIntyre helped to establish a new trust called *Te Whare Oki Oki* (“the resting place”) to champion a local “wet” house proposal. This trust worked with the District Health Board, the Wellington City Council and Housing New Zealand to try and come up with options for establishing a home. McIntyre concedes that the process has been a struggle on many levels:

“No one wants to fund it. They think it will be expensive to run, but that’s only in the context of not having good data on what it costs us for those people to remain homeless. There’s also a lack of ownership or understanding about where the responsibility lies for this most vulnerable group of people in the housing market. This is an issue that is partly ‘Health’, partly ‘Housing’, and partly ‘Mental Health and Addiction’ ... so you get into this triangulation where nobody really takes responsibility. And it is left to the least-resourced player — a small community group — to broker all these relationships.”

The new trust managed to gain an option on a Housing New Zealand property in Wellington’s Island Bay — a proposition which became a lightning rod for opposition by local residents and the media. Some of the critics and commentators assumed that a housing model that tolerates alcohol consumption on-site must be unsafe or something akin to a doss house. There was considerable ignorance about the high-level of onsite support that would be available, and the proactive encouragement of house residents to manage and reduce their drinking.

McIntyre: “I think one of the mistakes we have made with our initial promotion of this project has been in over-emphasising the ‘wet’ side of things. That was always a dilemma for me because we were trying to do something new, and I think it is unethical not to be straight up about what we were trying to do. But I’ve now seen similar models that promote their projects as therapeutic communities where the issue of drinking or not drinking is fairly irrelevant.”

McIntyre says she has never lost heart that this project will actually happen. “We got pretty close with Island Bay ... and have had to take some steps back. But in stepping back, we are preparing better for the next stage and we are now in dialogue with a new partner

for the project. We have the drive and tenacity to hang in there and just not give up until the changes really happen.”

- Meanwhile, Downtown Community Ministry continues to provide a wide range of services to help people put their lives back together. They operate a foodbank which provides essential food items for those in extreme need. They offer onsite support for urgent healthcare issues, such as drug and alcohol addictions, and they also assist people who are struggling with gambling addictions. They offer a banking service to people who have been refused service by the main banking institutions. And trained budget advisers are available to help people address their debt, and access their correct benefit entitlements.

McIntyre has employed a proportion of former clients or service users in staff positions, making DCM itself a role model of social inclusion. This hasn't always been an easy process, as these staff members often undergo challenges while making the transition to being part of a workplace team.

McIntyre: “It can be difficult to get the balance right, as you want to provide an inclusive environment for former consumers without creating a second-class group of staff members. But it has been very worthwhile because the attitude by people on the street has gradually changed towards us as an agency, and there is a growing respect for how we do things.”

DCM promotes cultural and social activities which foster connections between people who are homeless and the wider community. For example, once the DCM staff realised that there were many talented musicians amongst their clients, they started a music group (the DCM Ukulele Orchestra) which has rehearsal sessions on a regular basis.

Staff and service users are also involved in “Street Football Aotearoa” — soccer games which are a vehicle for the social participation of homeless people, and a catalyst for helping the players make some fundamental changes in their own lives. Players can also try to gain selection to the New Zealand team that plays in the “Homeless World Cup” — an annual international tournament which uses the power and popularity of soccer to raise the profile of the issue of homelessness.

Fundraising is a constant challenge for McIntyre and her team, especially as nearly a third of their income comes in by means other than government or council contracts. Each year,

*The annual 24-hour book fair at the Wellington TSB Bank Arena ... fundraising for Downtown Community Ministry*



DCM stages a 24-hr second-hand book fair at the TSB Bank Arena. Around 80,000 books are on sale at this event, making it one of New Zealand's largest book fairs of its kind. More than 200 volunteers turn up to help out with the organising — including local police officers, staff from inner-city businesses, and DCM service users.

DCM also has grown a significant individual donor base, as well as some support from charitable trusts. McIntyre: “I really believe in philanthropy, and being a donor is a way that connects people in a concrete way to their community. I don't want a situation where we are fully dependent on government contracts because I want people to own us and own what we do.”

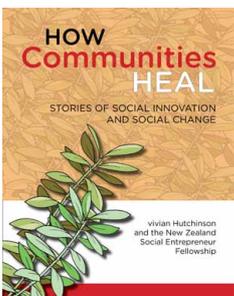
- Even while working amidst some of the most difficult issues facing the Wellington community, McIntyre likes to challenge the notion of social agencies who are always worn-thin, over-stretched, overwhelmed by needs and workload — with heroic staff constantly working at the edge of burn-out.

“I'm a very strong believer that the agency must model what you want to see out there in society. I am really, really *over* sick community agencies. I am not into burn-out ... and I've learned this the hard way. There's no badge of honour in it, and all I see in burn-out is an agency that it is modelling unhealthy behaviour.

“I know, with myself, that I operate best and give the best when I am fit and well and have enough reflection time and don't see myself as indispensable ... when I trust my colleagues and admit when I am not relating well. While I acknowledge this can be hard to put into practice, I now view burn-out as a failure of the organisation — it is a sign that we need to organise ourselves so that our ability to serve is much more sustainable.”

McIntyre sees her participation in the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship as part of that call for the reflection time that builds sustainability. And she has welcomed the ongoing encouragement that has come from regularly meeting up with a peer group of social change workers.

“What has been fantastic to me is to meet with a whole bunch of people who similarly don't understand the word 'No'. I've gone about life thinking that surely everyone didn't think that 'No' means NO. Now I feel I've had a real luxury ... that for once in my life I've had the chance of being regularly in the company of people who understand that the appropriate response to 'No' is to ignore it and go on and to find the next possible option.”



## Notes and Links

- This article by Vivian Hutchinson is part of the [HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project](#) — stories of social innovation and social change featuring members of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. It is available online at [tinyurl.com/hchmcintyre](http://tinyurl.com/hchmcintyre)
- Stephanie McIntyre can be contacted at [director@dcm.org.nz](mailto:director@dcm.org.nz) or at Downtown Community Ministry, Compassion House, Lukes Lane, PO Box 6133, Marion Square, Wellington
- *Downtown Community Ministry* website is at [www.dcm.org.nz](http://www.dcm.org.nz) and at [www.facebook.com/dcm.nz](https://www.facebook.com/dcm.nz)
- *Episcopal Divinity School* in Cambridge, Massachusetts ... see [www.eds.edu](http://www.eds.edu)

- *Jim Wallis* ... American evangelical Christian writer and political activist, and founder of the Sojourners Community in Washington. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Wallis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Wallis)
- *The 1998 Hikoi of Hope* .... for more on the march and its five planks see [www.jobsletter.org.nz/jbl08500.htm](http://www.jobsletter.org.nz/jbl08500.htm); also interview with Stephanie McIntyre by Steven Robinson Jan/Feb 1999 in Share International [tinyurl.com/3hzayrb](http://tinyurl.com/3hzayrb) ; also see vivian Hutchinson on the Hikoi of Hope "Walking for Change" speech given at Parawhenua Marae, Northland on 2nd September 1998 at [tinyurl.com/8345162](http://tinyurl.com/8345162)
- *Housing First policy* ... is considered internationally to be a relatively recent innovation in social services. The term was first coined by the Pathways to Housing project in New York City. See [www.pathwaystohousing.org](http://www.pathwaystohousing.org) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing\\_First](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_First)
- "Slipping Through the Cracks: A Study of Homelessness in Wellington" (May 2005). DCM staff interviewed over 50 service users with lengthy backgrounds of homelessness and addictions and explored their histories and their current aspirations for housing. Thirty of these interviews were subsequently analysed by students from the Wellington School of Medicine and published in the report
- "Wet Housing – a report on a study trip supported by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust" (2009) by Stephanie McIntyre is available at [tinyurl.com/4n2fyzi](http://tinyurl.com/4n2fyzi) ; also *Wet Housing interview* with Stephanie McIntyre by Kathryn Ryan on Radio NZ National programme *Nine to Noon* (23 August 2007); and *Wet house controversy in Island Bay* ... Radio New Zealand Insight programme (22 November 2009).
- *Malcolm Gladwell story* ... see "Million-Dollar Murray" *The New Yorker* (Feb 2006) at [www.gladwell.com/pdf/murray.pdf](http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/murray.pdf)
- *Street Football Aotearoa* ... see [www.streetfooty.org](http://www.streetfooty.org) and the Homeless World Cup at [www.homelessworldcup.org](http://www.homelessworldcup.org)
- "Woman with a big heart for Wellington's homeless" by Jessica Dixon 13 March 2009 [www.newswire.co.nz/2009/03/heart-homeless](http://www.newswire.co.nz/2009/03/heart-homeless)
- *Stephanie McIntyre comments* taken from workshop presentations at the NZ Social Entrepreneur Fellowship Retreats at Long Bay 2007 – 2009, and catch-up interviews with vivian Hutchinson 17 July 2008, and 22 July 2009, and interview for How Communities Heal project 11 January 2011.
- More articles in this series, and further information on the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project can be found at [www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal](http://www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal)
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- This project is on Twitter at [@HowCommHeal](https://twitter.com/HowCommHeal) using the tags [#HowCH](https://twitter.com/hashtag/HowCH) and [#socent](https://twitter.com/hashtag/socent)
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