

Client Services AGM Report July 2018 – June 2019

It has been a year of growth for client services, both in the services we offer and the demand for those services.

Pressure on the capacity of our accommodation services has remained an issue in the past year. In January, Housing New Zealand conducted a renovation of our hostel. While we really appreciated the marked improvement in the appearance and condition of the hostel, the renovation itself presented significant logistical challenges. We had to reduce our capacity by 50% while the work took place, meaning moving a number of vulnerable people on, with no ability to accommodate new arrivals for the six week duration of the renovation.

Since the start of the year Tim has had a strong focus on expanding our reach to support those that are detained by Immigration New Zealand at Mount Eden Prison. As a result, we have had a number of people previously detained at Mount Eden released to the hostel. We are really pleased that we can be considered a viable alternative to detention and we hope to continue this work in the coming year to ensure that fewer people need to be stuck in detention because a viable accommodation option is not present. However, it raises a significant issue around limitations in capacity in our accommodation service; as such in the coming year we will be continuing to explore different models of accommodation support so we can help as many people as possible at this crucial time in their journey.

A major challenge in the past year has stemmed from the slow down in Immigration visa processing times. Asylum seekers applying for a work visa for the first time face a wait of around four months or more before they receive their visa, this processing time is not much less for those applying to renew an existing visa and for convention refugees applying for residence the waiting time can be as long as 20 months. What that has meant for us is accessing entitlements has become more complicated. Due to anti-money laundering legislation, opening a bank account for a client on a visitor or interim visa has been increasingly difficult and has required much more intervention and advocacy on our part.

For asylum seekers with school age children, enrolment in school on a visitor or interim visa was also very challenging, with most enrolments requiring intervention from the Ministry of Education to ensure their entitlement was recognised. For client services at ASST, these complexities mean more work and more time spent trying to find creative solutions and loopholes

A real highlight of the year has been the establishment of a weekly community meal at the hostel thanks to a funding grant from Auckland Council. This has been part of a wider effort to increase community engagement. The meals are an opportunity for staff, hostel residents, community clients and invited guests to come together to share a meal. Clients who have contributed by cooking have reported feeling empowered by the experience of sharing their culture and food traditions with others. Feedback from those that attend has also been overwhelmingly positive and we feel it has helped contribute to an increased sense of community for those that participate.

To finish, I would like to acknowledge the continued strength, resilience and graciousness that our clients demonstrate in the face of incredible adversity. While we face great challenges in the work we do, with limits on capacity and resource, we are privileged to walk alongside these people in their journey claiming asylum in New Zealand.