

St John of God Hauora Trust: Social Housing Creates HOPE for Young Whānau

In 2015, [St John of God Hauora Trust](#) (SJGHT) launched a new project called HOPE, or Housing Opportunities for Parental Enhancement, in Christchurch. Designed to support young whānau who are homeless or highly vulnerable, it was supported through a philanthropic collaboration between The Todd Foundation, The Vodafone Foundation and the J R McKenzie Trust.



HOPE provides vulnerable and homeless young parents and their children with access to short- to medium-term supported accommodation. The need for the service was identified after the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes when it became apparent that accessing affordable housing was becoming increasingly difficult for young whānau.

Perhaps the best illustration of HOPE's far-reaching positive impacts is mum-of-three Kimberley's* [story](#) which featured in *The Press* in May 2016.

The wrap-around service includes social supports, education and training opportunities which are mindful of each family's unique circumstances and requirements. Young parents are supported and encouraged as they gain the social and economic skills needed for sustainable independent living.

The focus is on working with parents aged 16-24 years and their children who are living in the greater Christchurch area, and who are either homeless or at risk of becoming so. Other factors may also be at play: the young families may be experiencing poverty, domestic abuse, mental health issues, alcohol and drug addiction, lack of family support, lack of resources, and limited parenting skills and experience.

Social workers provide one-on-one support, including parenting education and interventions. They assist young parents to access various services, community programmes and education/training opportunities that will help them to build capability, knowledge, skills and resilience. Establishing the programme wasn't without its challenges.

“In the beginning, sourcing accommodation/housing was a big challenge. We needed to link in with Christchurch City Council and other housing providers to locate accommodation that would be suitable. The accommodation options in Christchurch at that time were really scarce as there was reduced housing stock due to earthquakes, ongoing repairs etc. Another challenge was the location of the accommodation. Our young parents were very clear on where they wanted to live in terms of geographical area,” says Sarah Williams, SJGHT Regional Manager (Southern) – Community, Youth and Child Services.

There have been many wins too. Since 2015, 103 families have been supported to access a safe and stable platform for positive development through the provision of bespoke wrap-around services appropriate to their individual needs. Sarah has this to say:

“The biggest win was working with such a large number of young parents to ensure that their families were housed in safe, warm accommodation and had the wrap-around social work support that was required to ensure they were well set up with what they needed i.e. fridge, beds, bedding, furniture etc. Supporting them to receive the correct entitlements through Work and Income NZ, helping them to develop the skills to parent through parenting programmes and early childhood education options for the children, and enabling them to undertake future planning e.g. training and employment options, were the highlights for us.”

Participants in the HOPE project have been proactively supported to access safe, warm living environments where they and their children are free from harm and have the means to grow and develop positively. Its success is probably best summed up by one of the young mums:

“I truly feel at home for the first time in a very long time.”

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.

The J R McKenzie Trust is proud to have supported SJGHT to deliver the HOPE Project.

