

Dialogue

FIONA SUMMERFIELD WITH TRACEY BUUNK

A local treasure

Fiona Summerfield talks to Tracey Buunk about what makes community work successful.

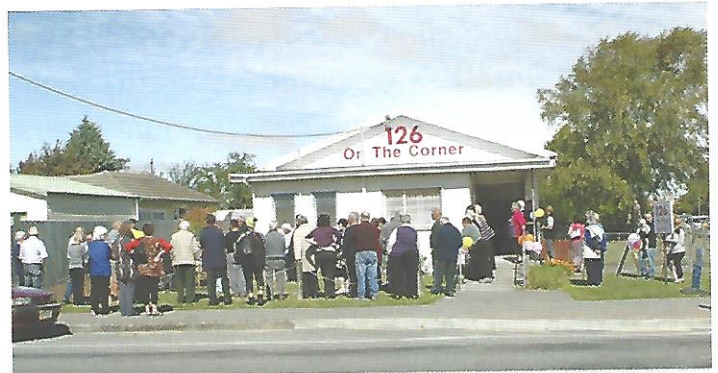
WORDS: FIONA SUMMERFIELD
PHOTOS: TRACEY BUUNK

Tracey Buunk has been a community worker in Hei Hei for fourteen years and she is still excited about the work the team is doing.

A recent exciting event was the opening of the newly purchased St Aidan's hall, renamed *126 On The Corner*. God was there helping the party along. While the team run a free lunch once a month, for the opening under the new name Tracey wanted the lunch to be a community celebration. Tracey and a team member went to the wholesalers and there was a beautiful ham on the bone. It was perfect for the lunch but outside the budget. Despite not having the money, Tracey trusted God it would work out and bought the ham. A donation arrived shortly after covering the cost of the ham. She also wanted a cake but knew it would be expensive. She asked a cake decorator and explained why she needed the cake. When the cake arrived there was no charge.

"It was an absolutely marvellous time, really good fun," Tracey says. "I believe in the power of prayer. Whatever we haven't had, God has come to the party."

Even the purchase of the building by the Hei Hei Broomfield Community Development Trust was an answer to prayer. "God's in control," she says but it was "done in God's time, not in my time and nothing is smooth."



Opening of 126 On The Corner.

Tracey says the cooking groups, walking groups, grandparent raising grandchildren, and other groups run from the hall, all aim to "break down social isolation and give people back their confidence to get out and do things". She says, "Our community is really blessed having such an amazing community focused trust board, that has the community's best interests at heart."

Tracey says, "I love the people, they are great. I like the different cultures, twelve different ones at last count and seeing people working together and teaching each other." Tracey remembers one lady: "She used to come and sit in the corner and would not talk to people. She would shake if people talked to her. She had lots and lots skills as a spinner. It took two years but she ended up coming on board as a volunteer and running her own group."

"There are a lot of encouraging people supporting each other and not just in the groups but across the groups. I remember the cooking group were inviting the young families over to their place for dinner and showing them how to cook. The older ladies in the cooking group and the young families were in the same building



The community enjoys delicious cake provided free of charge for the opening celebration.

at the same time and something just clicked." Tracey says, "I didn't even know about it."

Another piece of exciting news is a men's group that has grown rapidly in the last few months, along with offers of a building and a container of equipment. A local Men's Shed is to open shortly.

The shed will be going where previously there was a community garden run in association with the Salvation Army. This project was successful in teaching people to garden and provided vegetables for the free lunches but the energy to keep the garden going was gone. On this same area before the community garden was a playground used by a successful playgroup. Tracey is happy to let projects change to fit the demands of the community. "It's sad to see things go but it usually works out for the best," she says.

Tracey gives the example of an exercise class that had been running for twelve years but the instructor was no longer available. Tracey tried to find a replacement but when she couldn't, with her "can do" attitude, she attended a training course in running a gentle exercise course and took



Recent four wheel drive outing by the men's group.

over the instructor role. Unfortunately a chronic injury in her feet meant she had to give up instructing. The class was cancelled but has been replaced by a Tai Chi class. This has proved so popular that it is running twice a week. "They have lots of people that don't come to other things," she says.

There is also the ladies' group that is now called the variety group. "Some men were interested in the activities the group were doing and we thought, why not? So that is pretty cool."

But Tracey doesn't think the successful community development in Hei Hei could be replicated in the same way elsewhere. "Different communities have different needs. You couldn't take the same things to a different community. You have to first find out the needs of that community and what they see as their needs." Tracey learnt this early on in her career as a community worker when she worked for the council.

"I actually thought I knew the needs. I put things in place but no one came. I had to get out there and let them tell me what they needed."

Despite her years working in the same community, success isn't always guaranteed. "You shake the dust off and get on with it," she says. And there is always another good news story to tell like the new church services in the hall. "Rev'd Fitifiti Lutua from the EFKS (Samoan Congregational Christian Church) is overwhelmed with being able to start services in our area. This is also an answer to prayer, as not only is this church a really fun bunch of people, but more importantly the Gospel message will be shared every Sunday from our building. How cool is that!"

Tracey is employed for thirty-two and half hours a week by Anglican Care Community Development. ■