

Psychologist leaves over rent hikes

Longtime Waiheke resident and former Piritahi Hau Ora clinical psychologist Paora Joseph says he felt he had no choice but to leave the island for good last month because of ever-inflating rental prices.

Mr Joseph, an award-winning filmmaker who has spent his career working in suicide prevention and formerly ran cultural tours for Waiheke Horse Worx, decided enough was enough and decided to move to Whangarei after his family were looking at yet-another move between rental properties.

"My daughter said to me 'you realise we might have moved 20 times or something?'" he says. "But that is the culture on Waiheke now unfortunately - tenants have to move on as the prices rise and rise. That is not a good, stable situation for families."

His family of six previously paid \$1,000 per week for accommodation on the island, along with a \$4,000 down payment in bond. When such a sum proved too much Mr Joseph had to look for somewhere else.

"We found one at \$870 per week, but we had to move out of that property when it came around to summer time again. It was just the same old story, and that is when I made up my mind to leave - I just thought 'no way, I cannot do this again.'"

Having secured a specialist psychologist role in Whangarei some time ago, Mr Joseph had been living between the island and Northland until he opted to move. Partner Karina and the family's four children have stayed on the island for now, until Mr Joseph secures a permanent



Mr Joseph has moved to Whangarei after living on Waiheke since 1990.

property for the whole family up north.

"For a while I was travelling back and forth to Whangarei, but the travelling proved too much," he says. "Specialist work like my current role was also not available in Auckland or on the island, so it was a twofold decision to move. Ultimately, I feel that there will be more opportunities for the children up here."

Rising rental prices are a national issue,

but exacerbated on Waiheke by its popularity with tourists. Council research into short-term rental site Airbnb, published last month, found that 16 percent of rental homes on the island were "frequently available" on the site, at an average cost of \$998 per week. "In a tight housing environment, this potentially could have an impact on the residential rental stock and prices on the island," the report says.

Waiheke Budgeting Service manager Amelia Lawley backs increased council regulation on rental properties, such as caps on what landlords can charge. "The higher into the stratosphere that property prices soar, the higher the rents will rise, and the harder it will be for people on middle and low incomes to afford to stay here," she says.

"We are at the stage where conscience is pitted against commerce - we need landlords to make the decision not to charge the rents that they theoretically can, because they want to promote and help manifest a reasonable rental market, and not contribute to the economic cleansing of our community."

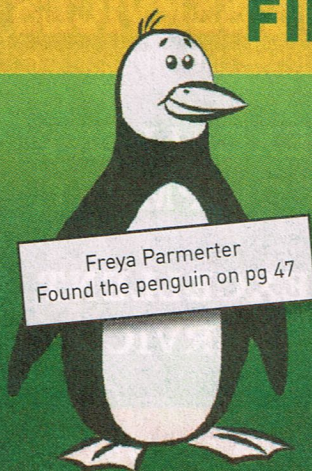
Whether increased regulation could work for island rental prices is likely to be a tightly contested debate in future, but comes too late for those like Mr Joseph.

"Community is really important to me. I have seen it dwindle over the years, and have seen a lot of good people leave," he says.

"What I love about Waiheke is the variety of community that we had, and I think that is now changing, sadly."

• Richard Jones

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