

'Scary' housing crisis hits workers

A lack of rental accommodation on the island has property managers, social service providers and employers asking what this means for the future of Waiheke's workforce.

Manager of Waiheke Budgeting Services, Amelia Lawley, says the service has five clients who have to move by Christmas and cannot find anywhere to go.

"They are all looking at leaving the island, which costs a hell of a lot and is a total upheaval. The property market generally is so hot, houses are being snapped up by Kiwis returning from overseas almost as soon as they are advertised. Some of these were rentals, and tenants have been displaced. The pool of rentals seems to have shrunk overnight."

She is concerned that people are still moving to Waiheke and optimistically advertising for houses.

"I feel sad that they will have such a hard time finding a place. It's almost as though people need to be warned. What will happen when there are no longer homes for all the people who keep the island serviced - the cleaners, the wait staff, the road crews etc. It's pretty scary."

General manager of Waiheke Health Trust Julie Cairns says the situation is impacting the organisation's ability to recruit staff.

"I'm advertising for nurses at the moment and the first thing I say is 'Do you live on the island already?'"

Julie says it is long-term, mid-range housing where people are suffering and the worry is that the lack of affordable housing makes it difficult for a diverse community to be here.

"Our only solution is to put it out there to the community. There are lots of wealthy people on this island, some have one or two houses, maybe they could make those

available.

"Awareness is probably the first thing. It does make you wonder just how aware people are of the actual problem," Julie says.

Nelly Toia at Waiheke Best Rentals has been in the property management business for around 18 years and says the situation is the worst it's ever been.

"We've got quite a few tenants that have to move out permanently and we have nowhere else for them to go."

The scarcity of rental housing began with the start of the global pandemic, she says and deteriorated around two months ago.

A large number of the owners of the properties Nelly manages live overseas and she's seen many return this year to live in their Waiheke homes.

"Some of my tenants have been with me 17 or 18 years, they've made it their home and they've raised their children in the house. It's sad, but I do understand for the owner, it was always going to be their retirement home," says Nelly.

She's seen the issue grow over the years and says the Waiheke Local Board and Auckland Council should have got together 10 years ago to build communal housing for workers, but it would be a very expensive exercise now.

"I just feel so sad for the people that rent, most of them have become my friends, and then the owners become your friends too."

She says along with the dearth of accommodation has come a steady rise in the cost of renting with a three-bedroom home now

costing \$700 or more per week.

She says people can't cope with the stress and she sees many burst into tears. "Without security nothing in your life will be smooth, you can't make decisions if you haven't got security."

Kaitiaki at Piritahi Hau Ora Judy Davis says the service is seeing more people

than usual being asked to vacate their rental accommodation for the summer.

"We're seeing a lot more in this environment. We've already had more than 12 people come to us saying the owners want us out for the next two months."

Judy says they encourage people entering a rental agreement to be clear around this.

"Some people are very fair, others are quite demanding. It feels like because of the amount of problems and the amount of support we've had to do in the month of November it's tracking to be worse than other years."

Some of the temporary solutions people are finding are setting up camp early at Whakanewha, setting up in the backyard of friends, or moving in with others.

"One whānau-of-three has chosen to rent a caravan and put it on a friend's property. Others have had to move off island."

Judy says the issue is the same across Auckland and the solution is to get Housing New Zealand houses on Waiheke.

"Do we face looking at the big high rises in the city, is that what we need? The solution isn't emergency accommodation," says Judy. • Erin Johnson

"What will happen when there are no longer homes for all the people who keep the island serviced... It's pretty scary."
Amelia Lawley,
Waiheke Budgeting
Services Trust

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