

SISTERS OF MERCY WIRI

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND MISSION

*We, the Sisters of Mercy Auckland,
grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
and the charism of our foundress Catherine McAuley,
are committed to providing a presence of Mercy in today's world
and working for justice and peace.*

*In this spirit the Sisters of Mercy Wiri
are committed to working with the poor
especially women and children
and to foster bilateral partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand*

ANNUAL REPORT 1995/1996

OVERVIEW

This year has been a full, varied and challenging year. There has been significant growth in every area. This has been:

- on a **social service level**, where we have been called upon by an increasing number of families for assistance as they struggle to keep their lives together on a day to day basis
- on a **systemic level**, where we have been involved with addressing the causes of poverty and injustice
- and on a **community development level**, where we have been working on existing and new community issues to enable processes to happen and so enhance the lives of people.

The main reason for the increased work seems to be that more and more South Auckland families are feeling the effects of unemployment, the reduction in wages and benefits, the Employment Contracts Act, increased rents and mortgages, and increased health and education costs. These factors, while being essential to New Zealand's recent economic restructuring, have resulted in advantage for some but disadvantage for others. The local primary school has been ranked Decile 1 and Funding Step A according to the TFEA (Targeted Funding Educational Achievement), which is a very clear indication of the deprivation in the area.

Our inspiration continues to be the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the charism of the first Sister of Mercy, Catherine McAuley. We endeavour to proclaim in word and action that people are more important than the systems that deprive them of their basic rights - the right to eat, the right to shelter, the right to work, the right to healthcare and education, and the right to participate in decision making processes.

We continue to be a small agency, with two full time workers and seven volunteers. One volunteer helps with office and support work and the others assist in a variety of ways, for example, by driving - collecting and delivering. Because of our smallness we have found networking with other agencies and groups very important.

Our most distinguishing feature has been and continues to be that we live in the area in which we work. This means we are available whenever we have been home, and we have responded to calls at all times of the day and night. While we see the positive side of working from where we live, we are also aware of the limitations of space, both storage and work, and the need for regular personal space.

What follows is an outline of the services and activities in which we have been involved over the year, as well as an indication of their range and diversity.

FAMILIES IN NEED OF SUPPORT

'the poor need help today' Catherine McAuley

This year we have worked with 89 families. The work is varied and ranges from dealing with domestic violence and related issues to assisting families to manage financially. This includes:

- HOME BASED SUPPORT
- ADVOCACY
- CRISIS COUNSELLING
- INFORMATION AND ADVICE
- REFERRAL
- PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE
- MONEY MANAGEMENT

As well we have continued with a **bread distribution** three days a week. We are grateful to the volunteers who have collected the bread from the supermarket and who have been outstanding in their commitment and reliability.

Food parcels continue to be a need and this year we have provided 147 parcels.

On fourteen occasions money was advanced to families to assist with outstanding accounts or unexpected costs, such as, rent arrears, power and gas accounts, funeral expenses, health related costs. Total amount advanced \$3342.65

By far the majority of these family units include women and children, but not all include men. In those families which do, it is usually the women who come asking for help. It is part of our policy that in these situations to involve the male partner in any solution, no matter how reluctant he may be.

As stated in the overview, and in line with our Gospel perspective, we see the necessity of not only meeting the immediate need, but also challenging the unjust systems and addressing at a systemic level the causes of poverty.

HOUSING

Escalating housing costs continue to be a major reason for the increasing hardship and stress many families are experiencing.

We continue to advocate on behalf of many of these families to enable them to remain where they are presently living, or to be housed in more suitable accommodation.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION ...

One example of such action meant addressing the need in a public forum. The family was threatened with eviction because they were unable to keep up their rent payments. Before the eviction date we organised a public gathering to highlight in general, the difficulties that families were facing, and in particular, the specific need of the family in question. Over one hundred people, including local residents, attended this meeting to offer their support in solidarity with the family. Because of the publicity generated the eviction was aborted and the family was able to remain in its house. This action was assisted by Manukau City Council, Manukau the Healthy City Housing Group and the local primary school.

HOUSING RESPONSIBILITIES BILL

In April a submission was made by the Sisters of Mercy Wiri supporting the Housing Responsibilities Bill and the amendments to the Housing Restructuring Act 1992.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY MANUKAU

A way of dealing with housing need, which was an alternative to the existing structure, was presented to us when Habitat for Humanity indicated they were considering building houses in Wiri. They were willing to do so only if the Wiri community wanted them to. We were invited to facilitate the process. With other local groups, we lobbied the Manukau City Council, who were in a position to provide land, and to provide it at a greatly reduced price. This was successful and the process began. The Sisters of Mercy Wiri became the liaison between Habitat for Humanity and the community.

An example of process and consultation ...

The first public meeting to raise awareness of Habitat for Humanity Manukau in Wiri took place on 29 September 1995 in the Wiri Community Hall. Both Ken Stevenson (Chairperson Habitat) and Alan Johnson (Manukau City Councillor) addressed the meeting.

A second public meeting was held on 4 December 1995 and a third on 12 February 1996. From the February meeting a small working party was established to continue the ongoing development of the project at the local level. There are ten members of the Working Party - six local residents, a representative from Habitat and Manukau City Council and the Sisters of Mercy.

This group planned the signing of the contract ceremony which took place in April on the site in Trevor Hosken Drive. About 150 people attended the launch, which included entertainment, a hangi style lunch and the formal signing of the contract by the Mayor of Manukau City.

The Working Party has met four times since it was established in February. It organised a further public meeting held in June. This meeting was an opportunity to

look at the proposed design plans for the houses as a result of a design competition run by Manukau City Council for the Trevor Hosken Drive project.

Community involvement and consultation takes time. This process has allowed for more and more people to be informed about what is taking place in their local community and an opportunity to be part of it if they so choose.

To date 23 families have registered their interest in the scheme. It is envisaged that the site will accommodate 7-8 houses.

We look forward in the coming months to being part of the selection process for families for the proposed houses, and later in 1997 being part of the building project.

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMME

'I was hungry and you gave me food' Matthew 25:35

The Sisters of Mercy Wiri have continued to coordinate the school lunch programme this year. This programme was begun in 1993 in response to a request made by the Carol Mollard, principal of the local school, Wiri Central Primary, because of increasing numbers of children coming to school with no lunch or an inadequate lunch.

On the average 40 lunches have been provided each week. This is a 50% increase on the previous year. Volunteers from the community prepare the lunches each day. There have been 12 volunteers involved in the programme during the 1995/96 year. We rely on their dedication and generosity to cater for this need.

The Sisters of Mercy have made 68 home visits over the period to ascertain need and to seek solutions which would eliminate the need for the school to provide the lunch. While these visits have kept the number of lunches down, we have not been able to eliminate the need as many families are living on minimum incomes.

One of the key components of this programme is the close working relationship between the school and ourselves. Regular review meetings are an important part of the scheme.

Thank you to the Manukau Healthy City Food Coordinator who provides all the supplies for the lunches and to the volunteers who make the lunches.

Unfortunately, we do not see an end in sight for this programme. Again, this highlights the need to continue to work for solutions that bring about a change in the systems that have created this need.

COURSES AND ACTIVITIES

We have been able to continue to provide courses and other activities on Tuesdays in the local community house and the community hall. These have included Adult Reading and Communication Skills, Emergency First Aid, Women's Support Group, English as a Second Language, Positive Ways to Communicate with and Discipline Children and Aerobics.

Number of participants for the year was 64.

Our thanks to the tutors/instructors who have assisted with these classes.

We also provided a childcare service at the Wiri Community House during these courses and activities to ensure that participants with young children could gain maximum benefit. Our thanks to Sala Roach for her excellent skills in working with preschool children. While mainly women attend the courses/classes men also take part.

Any bettering of people's skills or self image or sense of achievement is a way, however small, of equipping them to participate more fully in society.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES AND OUTINGS

Because of an identified need for after school activities for children we conducted a survey through the local primary school to ascertain an indication of preference. Drama was one of the most popular choices. So in the August school holidays, we arranged for two sessions of Theatresports for children aged 6-8 years and children aged 9-12 years, on two different days. These were well attended, over 20 attending each session. Because of their popularity they continued in the third term as after school drama classes for six weeks. Again attendance was good. We were able to hold these classes at no cost to the participants.

When a further 10 week programme was arranged in February 1996 at a charge of \$5.00 per child, numbers were insufficient to maintain the classes. This reflects both the lack of appreciation that many parents have regarding the benefit that such activities can bring their children, and the lack of money in families.

Also during August we arranged for two groups of children (over 100 in all) aged 5-12 years to visit Miranda Hot Springs for a day's outing. Grateful thanks to our parent helpers.

Unfortunately, this year we were unable to take children to either the Omana Reserve and Beach, for what has become an annual pre Christmas outing in December, or to the Children's Film Festival in May.

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND PROJECTS

Community Development happens when the community works together for the common good. Three projects, which are at varying stages of development, actualise this statement.

TRAFFIC SIGNALS

In June of this year, traffic signals were installed on the Great South Road/Kerrs Road intersection. This was as a result of several years work on our part, with the community, which involved such activities as public meetings, leaflet drops, submissions to Manukau City Council, collecting signatures for a petition and meetings with Manukau City Council and Manukau City Council staff at many different levels. As an interim measure, since 1993, the community had had the use of refuge islands to cross the road. This meant that children had to be supervised each morning and afternoon crossing the road. Two volunteers from the community did the supervision each morning. The Sisters of Mercy Wiri were responsible for the training of these volunteers and the coordination of the system. A highlight occurred for the volunteers when, in December 1995, Sir Barry Curtis, the Mayor of Manukau City, presented them with certificates acknowledging the wonderful contribution they had made to the community's safety. Sir Barry had already made a major contribution at the Manukau City Council meeting which approved the funding for the traffic signals by strongly endorsing the proposal. Thank you Sir Barry.

This project will not be considered complete until full signalisation occurs at this intersection.

A big thank you to the 24 volunteers who generously gave of their time, during all types of weather to supervise the children.

RALLY TRACK

Our involvement in this issue resulted in a public meeting held in May with concerned residents, Smokefree Rally New Zealand and Manukau City Council councillors, community board members and staff. There were many concerns expressed by the residents. After several meetings the following outcomes were achieved:

- that the Wiri Whanau Support Group be the point of contact for the consultative process for future events
- that Rally NZ be permitted to use the rally track twice a year (subject to Resource consent)
- that the all-weather footpath suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs be reinstated between Trevor Hosken Drive and the City Centre/Wiri Station Road no later than 2 weeks after future events.
- that adequate parking control be exercised to avoid nuisance to local residents.

This issue will continue to be monitored in the coming year.

GARDEN PROJECT

In Spring 1994, we initiated a garden project, whereby a group of families joined together to grow vegetables in their back gardens, and rotate planting crops in such a way as to provide a constant supply of vegetables for all the families. Over the past year there have been six families involved, and while they have not been able to provide vegetables for themselves all the year round, they have produced quite a volume of produce. At times some of the excess has augmented our food parcels. This programme is potentially very productive, but personnel and equipment constraints have so far prevented its expansion.

COMMUNITY LINKS AND NETWORKS

Maintaining existing relationships and developing new links with community organisations and groups is an important component of strengthening community action. Among those which have enabled us to better meet our objectives and keep abreast of current issues affecting our area as a whole are:

- Manukau Central Kindergaten
- Manukau City Council
- Manukau the Healthy City Housing Group
- Manukau the Healthy City Working Party'
- Manukau the Heatlhy City Policy Monitoring Group
- Manurewa and Papatoetoe Council of Social Services
- Wiri Central Primary School
- Wiri Community House
- Wiri Whanau Support Group

This year as well we responded to invitations to stand for the **Manurewa Community Board** in the local body elections, to be one of the Catholic representatives on the **Friendship House Board**, to be a community representative on the **Manukau the Healthy City Executive Committee**, and to be a director on **the Habitat for Humanity Manukau Board**.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE POOR...

When we first moved to Wiri our intention was to be as open as possible to any requests that were made of us. In no way did we foresee the following situation arising, but in fact it has brought together the integration of all aspects of our lives here as Sisters of Mercy.

In 1993 a group of Catholics, who had been coming to our house monthly on a Wednesday morning for Mass followed by morning tea, requested of us and the Parish Priest of St Anne's Parish, Manurewa, to replace the monthly weekday Mass with a monthly Sunday Eucharist in the local Wiri Community Hall. Eucharist, monthly, in the local community hall began in August of that year. The following year, at the people's request again, two services a month - Mass and a Service without a priest, were held. At the end of 1994 this little flock asked us to provide a service for the community **every** Sunday morning instead of fortnightly. We agreed to this and with the help of Fathers Terry Dibble and Bill Fletcher we were able to have Eucharist twice a month and a Service without a priest on the remaining Sundays.

The commitment has been demanding of us in many ways. Besides the time and energy in actually ensuring the liturgies go ahead, we are sometimes tempted to think that we are 'missing out' by sharing in what could be regarded as the poverty of the people. In no way is this true.

In our saner moments we understand fully that rather than sharing in their poverty we are sharing in their riches.

As this small faith community goes from strength to strength in its growth and development we thank God for the privilege of sharing this journey together and for the many blessings we have received through it.

CONCLUSION

As we move from the 1995/1996 to the 1996/1997 year we are aware of how varied 'community work' is. The sheer diversity of needs and requests is a constant challenge. The words of Catherine McAuley seem particularly apt at this point.

'We can never say it is enough'.

We are especially grateful for the goodness and the courage we meet daily in the people of Wiri.

THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Without the goodwill and financial assistance of individuals, organisations, trusts and funding bodies, the ministry of the Sisters of Mercy Wiri would be greatly restricted.

Our thanks to the following who have donated money, goods or expertise over the past year.

F. Anderson
Catholic Caring Foundation
Foodlink
Foodtown Manukau
R. France
M. Ireland
Manukau City Council
Manukau the Healthy City
Mercy Hospital
NZ Community Funding Agency
R. Peguero
K. & J. Potter
Rev. T. Dibble
Rev. B. Fletcher
N. Ross
St Vincent de Paul Manurewa
Salvation Army Manukau
Sister M. Juliana
M. & F. Turner
Wiri Central Primary School

We have also received anonymous donations, which we acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude. Thank you all for your ongoing support.

Sister Anne Hurley and Sister Margaret Martin

Sisters of Mercy Wiri