

Sisters of Mercy Wiri

ANNUAL REPORT 1998/1999

Producing an Annual Report is an amazing experience. It provides the opportunity to go back, to look over the previous year's activities, and to reflect on all that has been done. Writing this report has provided such an experience for the Sisters of Mercy Wiri. In many ways we have been busy with more of the same, but there have also been those different activities and ideas, the new families and the unexpected and perhaps unwanted challenges. Whether the work has been new or different we have been busy doing it, and, as before, have had as our inspiration the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the charismatic example of Catherine McAuley, the first Sister of Mercy.

Our involvement continues to be in the three areas of:

- **Social service** where we respond to the needs and requests of families
- **Systemic change** where we work to address the causes of poverty and injustice
- **Community development** where we work with the local community on issues which when resolved will improve the lives of the people and the environment.

While the Sisters of Mercy Wiri continues to be a small agency, consisting of two full time workers and five volunteers, this year we embarked upon a process which may lead to far reaching changes. This year the Sisters of Mercy Wiri celebrated the tenth anniversary of their coming to live and work in Wiri, and even though we recognise the very real strengths of living in the area in which we work, of late, we have felt somewhat constrained by working from the house in which we live. This arrangement has worked well, but for many reasons, one of which is that we are unable to increase our staff, we decided to begin to look at alternatives and search out the most suitable option.

Thanks to the Manukau City Council we have had limited use of the Wiri Community House to run courses and other activities, but this has not always been totally satisfactory either.

And so, we embarked upon a review, and called upon a Reference Group, comprised of ourselves, Anne Hurley and Margaret Martin, Carol Mollard (Principal Wiri Central Primary School), Vicki Sykes (Director Friendship House), Gavin Rennie (Head of Community Studies UNITEC), Ken Allen (Co-ordinator Strengthening Families) and Mary Foy (Congregational Leader Sisters of Mercy Auckland) to engage with us in this process. We held our first meeting on 4 April 1999 and began a process of visioning a way forward for the Sisters of Mercy Wiri.

By the time of writing this report the group has meet three times, the last meeting being 23 June, and the process is not yet completed.

It was agreed that the Sisters of Mercy Wiri would continue with most of their involvements (see later in this report), but some alternative arrangements would have to be made with regard to premises. There were several suggestions, but finally Carol Mollard proposed that the Sisters of Mercy Wiri combine with Wiri Central Primary School to establish a Centre from which the Agency would be based. The Sisters of

Mercy Wiri would retain their independence and autonomy as a social service provider. The school would own the buildings, which would be situated on school land.

This was the best and most advantageous solution for the Sisters of Mercy Wiri for many reasons, and has been accepted gratefully by them. The acceptance of the offer is exciting, and offers many new opportunities, but at the same time, we are very aware of the extra demands that the planning and commitment that such a project will take. Our thanks to Carol Mollard and to the Board of Trustees for the invitation to work together to establish a Centre and to search out suitable programmes to meet the identified needs. It is an extension of the partnering that already exists between the Sisters of Mercy Wiri and Wiri Central Primary School.

FAMILIES IN NEED OF SUPPORT

'the poor need help today'

Catherine McAuley

During the year we have been in contact with many families, some briefly and some more extensively. Lack of money and consequently food continues to be a major source of need. We have continued with a bread distribution three days a week, which has often helped families through a rough patch. Foodtown supplies 'yesterday's' bread which is collected by a volunteer, and which we take to different parts of the neighbourhood. This service has been in operation for almost six years now, and besides providing bread for families keeps us into contact with a large number of Wiri families.

Food parcels continue to be a need, which is a reflection of the high market rents and the harsh economic conditions many families are living in. We distributed 78 parcels this year plus ten Christmas food parcels generously donated by the Mercy Hospital Outreach Programme.

Families are still seeking help with money management, and we have worked closely with 18 families to help them bring their indebtedness to a manageable level. This is a real work of art as there is usually insufficient money coming into the household to meet just the basic necessities of rent, power, clothing, food and medical costs. The food parcels and bread are very helpful to supplement families' diets and budget constraints.

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMME

'I was hungry and you gave me food'

Matthew 25:35

A related programme is the School Lunch Programme. This has been in existence for over 6 years, and continues to serve a very real need. Most weeks over 30 school lunches have been provided to children without lunch. Home visits to the families of the children who receive lunches are part of the programme in order to work towards alternative solutions, and also to ensure the lunches are really needed. This programme is a very good example of the school, Wiri Central Primary, and the Sisters of Mercy Wiri working together. The commitment of the women volunteers to

making the lunches on a daily basis is outstanding. Provision of food supplies for the lunches continues to be provided by the Food in Schools Programme.

COURSES AND PROGRAMMES

Courses and Programmes held this year in the Wiri Community have been parenting, driver licence classes and painting designs on T Shirts.

The Driver Licence Course continues to be the most popular. Since it began 3 years ago 60 people have gained their learner's licence. Unfortunately, we are unsure about the future of this course, as the impact of changes in Government policy has, as yet, not been clarified. We hope we will be able to offer these classes in the future.

The Painting Design on T Shirts Course also proved to be popular. We ran two terms of the course. The participants discovered talents they didn't know they had, and certainly enjoyed themselves taking time out away from their children for two hours each week.

We see the Parenting Course as being the most important of the courses that we run. However, they continue to be the least popular. Parents from only three families completed the course this year. More positively we can say though that those involved did benefit from what was provided.

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND PROJECTS

This year our involvement in the community has continued on many fronts.

It has been our perception that the need for our social services has been greatly affected by the high market rents that most of the residents of Wiri have had to pay. Consequently, we have continued to be active members of the Housing Action Collective, and to lobby central government for a change in the housing policy. As yet we have not had a large measure of success.

We have also continued our association with Habitat for Humanity and their project of building eleven houses in Trevor Hosken Drive. So far six of the houses have been built.

This year too we were happy to work with Johnson Nsiha, a student from the Albany campus of Massey University, who undertook research with eight families from Wiri as part of a thesis 'Assessing Housing of Low Income Groups in Auckland.

We again gave time to students from Unitec, both at their campus and at our premises, and students from the Catholic Institute of Theology at Auckland University.

We have worked with the Wiri Whanau Support Group on many local issues. Together we made submissions to Manukau City Council regarding water and wastewater remaining in Council control, the non adoption of user pay charges for rubbish and council facilities, Council keeping its airport shares and the Wiri Pond.

For the Wiri Pond project we worked with Wiri Central Primary School to clean up the Wiri Pond, and to raise community awareness regarding its state. The Manukau City Council took away three truckloads of rubbish collected by the children on several different occasions. We began to realise that the problem was much deeper than the surface rubbish we could collect and after conducting some tests of the water ourselves which were sent to the Institute of Environmental, Science and Research Ltd for a microbiological analysis, we have made a submission to council to clean up the pond.

COMMUNITY LINKS AND NETWORKS

Maintaining existing relationships and developing new links with community organizations 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:

- Friendship House
- Habitat for Humanity Manukau
- Housing New Zealand
- Manukau Central Kindergarten
- Manukau City Council
- Manukau the Healthy City Child Advocacy Group
- Manurewa Community Board
- Manurewa and Papatoetoe Council of Social Service
- NZ Council of Christian Social Services
- Salvation Army Service Centre Manukau
- Wiri Central Primary School
- Wiri Community House
- Wiri Whanau Support Group
- Work and Income NZ

CONCLUSION

And so as we reflect back over the year we not only realise how much has been achieved but also how much more there is to do. We look forward to next year, a new millennium, and the hope that we will be able to expand from our existing premises in order that we may by doing so, assist the people and the families of Wiri to be part of a 'place' where together we can help those in need and improve the quality of life in our neighbourhood and community.

Sisters Margaret Martin and Anne Hurley
Community Social Workers