



Auckland Community Homelessness Workshops

Reflections, learnings, and community conversations
across Tāmaki Makaurau





Most importantly, we acknowledge all participants who attended the workshops and contributed openly and respectfully to conversations about homelessness within their communities. The willingness of people to engage with complexity, ask difficult questions, share lived and professional experiences, and remain connected through a shared desire for better outcomes made these conversations possible.

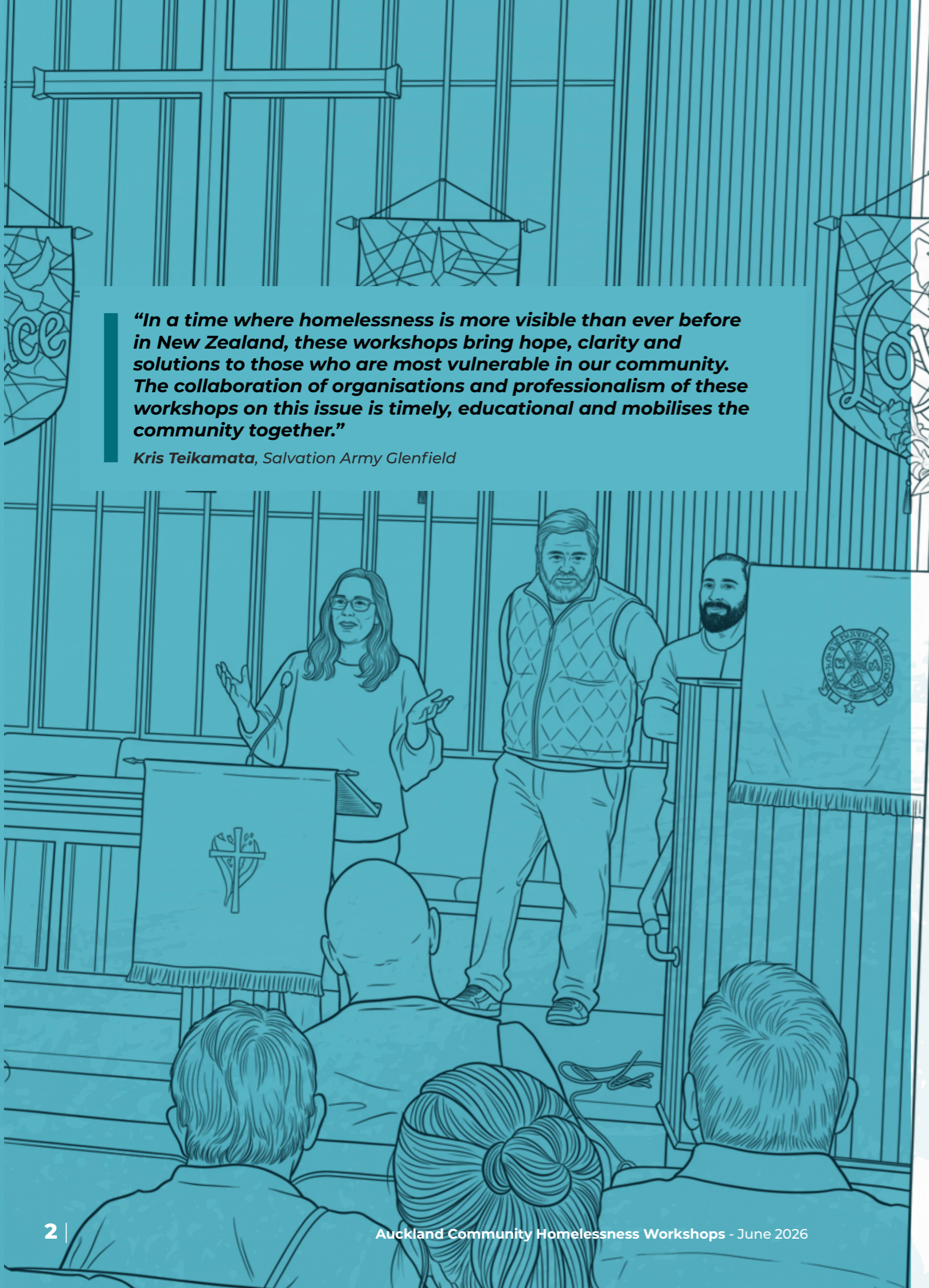
Acknowledgements

Housing First Auckland would like to acknowledge and thank Auckland Council for its funding, leadership, and support of this initiative. Through its role as a funder, connector, and partner, Auckland Council helped create opportunities for collaboration and community engagement that made these workshops possible.

We also acknowledge the many homelessness providers, community organisations, local leaders, faith groups, people with lived experience, and community members who contributed their time, knowledge, honesty, and care throughout the workshops. In particular, we acknowledge the support and participation of organisations including De Paul House, Kāhui Tū Kaha, The Salvation Army, Visionwest Waka Whakatitanga, and Manaaki Rangatahi.

Our community workshops were strengthened by the generous guidance and expertise of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH). We are grateful for their willingness to share learnings from years of delivering community workshops in Canada, and for their practical advice on workshop design and facilitation approach. Their contribution reflects the spirit of collective action that drives global work to end homelessness. We are proud to carry their learnings into our work here in Tāmaki Makaurau.





“In a time where homelessness is more visible than ever before in New Zealand, these workshops bring hope, clarity and solutions to those who are most vulnerable in our community. The collaboration of organisations and professionalism of these workshops on this issue is timely, educational and mobilises the community together.”

Kris Teikamata, Salvation Army Glenfield

Introduction

The Auckland Community Homelessness Workshops were developed in response to growing public conversations, concerns, and tensions around homelessness across Tāmaki Makaurau. These conversations were occurring in many forms, through community meetings, online commentary, local media, public opposition to housing and support initiatives, and increasing questions from residents wanting to better understand the causes of homelessness, the realities faced by people experiencing it, what solutions exist, and how communities themselves could respond constructively.

The workshops emerged following public opinion research commissioned by Auckland Council and facilitated through a collaborative approach involving Housing First Auckland, homelessness providers, community partners, and local leaders. The research, which included surveys and focus groups with Auckland residents, highlighted both strong community compassion and significant misunderstanding about homelessness. Alongside concern for people experiencing homelessness, the research identified fear, misinformation, frustration, and a sense of hopelessness about whether homelessness could realistically be solved.

The workshops were designed to create informed, human, and solutions-focused conversations about homelessness. They aimed to bring people together to better understand the complexity of homelessness, hear directly from frontline practitioners and people with lived experience, and explore how communities, organisations, and systems could respond more effectively together. Alongside honest conversations about the scale and complexity of homelessness, a strong emphasis was placed on practical examples of solutions, collaboration, and community response.

The workshops were intentionally grounded in collective impact principles. They brought together homelessness providers, local MPs, local government representatives,

community organisations, faith groups, residents, business owners, and people with lived experience of homelessness in shared conversations that centred evidence, relationships, and practical solutions. Throughout the process, a strong emphasis was placed on creating psychologically safe spaces where difficult questions, tensions, and differing perspectives could be explored constructively.

This report reflects on the development and delivery of the workshops, the conversations that emerged within them, and the key learnings that arose through the process. More broadly, it explores what these workshops revealed about community engagement, narrative change, and the importance of relational and coordinated approaches to addressing homelessness.



Workshop delivery overview

The original project scope proposed delivering workshops across multiple regions of Tāmaki Makaurau, including North, West, East, and South Auckland. While this remained an important objective throughout the project, early workshops on the North Shore generated strong interest, high levels of engagement, and requests for additional conversations within those communities.

As the project progressed, the approach became increasingly responsive to community interest, emerging opportunities, and existing local conversations relating to homelessness. Rather than adhering to a fixed geographic plan, the project evolved in response to where communities were actively seeking engagement and dialogue. This adaptive approach reflected one of the key learnings of the project: meaningful community conversations are often most effective when they respond to local context, relationships, and momentum.

At the same time, engagement with other parts of Auckland has continued through ongoing relationship-building, conversations with community partners, and exploration of future opportunities to expand the workshop model into additional regions across Tāmaki Makaurau.

Seven community workshops were completed or scheduled across Tāmaki Makaurau. Rather than following a predetermined geographic spread, workshops evolved in response

to community interest, existing relationships, and opportunities for meaningful dialogue. This adaptive approach reflected one of the key learnings of the project: meaningful community conversations are often most effective when they respond to local context, relationships, and momentum.

The workshops were supported by a range of homelessness and community organisations who contributed frontline expertise, local knowledge, lived experience perspectives, and practical insights throughout the conversations. These included De Paul House, Kāhui Tū Kaha, The Salvation Army, Visionwest, and Manaaki Rangatahi, alongside local government representatives, community leaders, and other sector partners.

“It is important to recognise Whakawhanaungatanga and Rangatiratanga as important components of community voice – that bringing numerous voices into a space is good as long as the tikanga of utilising knowledge gained from the process is done with the rangatiratanga of tangata in mind.”

Tupara Morrison, Kāhui Tū Kaha

Workshop approach and design principles

The workshops were intentionally designed to move beyond awareness-raising alone and create spaces for genuine dialogue, reflection, and shared understanding. The approach recognised that conversations about homelessness are often shaped by fear, misinformation, frustration, personal experience, political tension, and deeply held assumptions. Creating meaningful engagement therefore required more than simply presenting statistics or information.

A key principle underpinning the workshops was the belief that communities need to be taken on a journey. Rather than approaching conversations through confrontation or simplistic messaging, the workshops aimed to create environments where people could engage honestly with the complexity of homelessness, ask difficult questions, hear multiple perspectives, and explore practical responses together.

The workshops combined evidence and systems insights with human stories, frontline expertise, and lived experience perspectives. This balance was intentional. While participants wanted to understand what solutions exist, what responses are already underway, and where they fit within the collective effort to address homelessness. Many participants expressed a desire to understand what practical role communities could play in creating positive change.

The workshops were also grounded in collective impact principles and reflected the understanding that homelessness cannot be addressed by any one organisation, sector, or community group acting alone. The conversations consistently emphasised coordination, relationships, and shared responsibility across government agencies, homelessness providers, community organisations, local leaders, businesses, and residents.

A strong emphasis was placed on creating psychologically safe spaces

where differing perspectives and tensions could be explored respectfully. This included acknowledging community concerns openly, while also ensuring conversations remained grounded in evidence, compassion, and practical solutions. In many cases, the workshops created opportunities for people with very different experiences and viewpoints to sit together in dialogue and better understand one another.

Another important feature of the workshops was the role of trusted local relationships and community champions. Local board members, community leaders, faith groups, and sector partners played an important role in creating spaces where communities felt comfortable engaging in conversations that are often emotionally and politically sensitive.

Throughout the workshops, the focus remained on creating conversations that were human, practical, and hopeful, while still being honest about the scale and complexity of homelessness across Tāmaki Makaurau.



Conversations, tensions, and human connection

The workshops varied in size and composition, with attendance ranging from smaller community conversations of around 8 to 10 participants through to larger sessions of approximately 45 people. Each workshop developed its own dynamic and tone depending on the local context, the people present, and the conversations already occurring within the community. Different workshop sizes created different types of engagement and conversation, from intimate discussion and reflection through to broader cross-sector dialogue.

Across the workshops, participants brought a wide range of experiences, perspectives, concerns, and assumptions about homelessness and community safety into the room. In some communities, homelessness had already become a highly visible and emotionally charged issue. Participants included local government representatives, business owners, residents, community organisations, faith groups, outreach providers, and people with lived experience of homelessness.

The workshops did not attempt to eliminate tension or force agreement. A significant learning from the process was that meaningful engagement did not require differences to be fully resolved in the room. Instead, the workshops created space for respectful dialogue, shared reflection, and a stronger understanding of both the complexity of homelessness and the shared desire across communities to respond constructively.

Several workshop contributors reflected on the emotional rawness and honesty present within the conversations. At the same time, participants consistently demonstrated a willingness to listen, engage respectfully, and remain connected to a shared kaupapa of wanting better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

A particularly important feature of the workshops was the role of lived experience and frontline expertise in shaping the conversations. Across the series, people with lived experience of homelessness contributed both formally and informally to discussions, helping ground the conversations in human realities rather than abstract assumptions or stereotypes. Alongside lived experience voices, frontline practitioners and outreach providers played a critical role in helping communities understand both the complexity of homelessness and the practical responses already underway across Tāmaki Makaurau.

“I appreciated the opportunity to better understand the complex factors that contribute to homelessness and to hear about the incredible work Housing First and the other organisations do. The presenters’ passion, emotion and commitment were clearly evident, and I have a great deal of respect for the work they unconditionally and non-judgementally undertake.”

Helen Wilkins, Orewa Business Association

In Albany, ongoing public conversations relating to the Hooton Reserve encampment created an important context for engagement. The presence of local board representatives created opportunities for more informed conversations about homelessness, local concerns, housing responses, and the complexity of balancing community tensions with compassionate and practical responses.

Across the workshops, many participants reflected that hearing directly from frontline workers, people with lived experience, and organisations actively responding to

homelessness helped shift conversations away from fear, blame, or hopelessness, and towards greater understanding, empathy, and curiosity about solutions.

Importantly, the workshops also highlighted the role of human connection in shifting perspectives. In many cases, people entered the conversations with differing assumptions, concerns, or levels of understanding, but left with a stronger appreciation of both the complexity of homelessness and the collective effort already underway across communities and organisations to respond.



Emerging outcomes and shifts

While the workshops were not designed as formal consultations or evaluation processes, a number of important themes and outcomes emerged through participant feedback, follow-up conversations, and ongoing community engagement.

One of the clearest shifts observed across the workshops was movement from abstract or polarised discussions about homelessness towards more human, solutions-focused, and community-centred conversations. Participants frequently reflected that hearing directly from frontline practitioners, people with lived experience, and organisations actively responding to homelessness helped deepen their understanding of both the scale and complexity of homelessness and the coordinated efforts already underway across Auckland.

Several participants described leaving the workshops with a stronger understanding of homelessness and a greater appreciation for the role of collaboration and collective responses. Feedback suggested that many participants shifted from asking 'why is this happening?' towards questions such as 'how can we help?', 'where do we fit?', 'what solutions already exist?', and 'what practical role can communities play?'

The workshops also appeared to strengthen understanding of homelessness as a systems and structural issue rather than solely an individual issue. Conversations explored the interconnected impacts of housing pressures, poverty, trauma, mental health, addiction, social isolation, and gaps across public systems.

The workshops also created space for discussions about the ongoing impacts of colonisation for Māori, including how historical and structural inequities continue to shape both experiences

of homelessness and the systems, policies, and responses that can unintentionally exclude or disadvantage many people seeking support. These conversations helped create more nuanced understanding of the drivers of homelessness and the limitations of simplistic responses.

Importantly, many participants left with a stronger sense of hopefulness and possibility. While the workshops did not minimise the complexity of homelessness, they consistently highlighted practical responses, examples of collaboration, and evidence-informed approaches already making a difference across communities. Several participants reflected that understanding the range of work already underway helped reduce feelings of hopelessness and reinforced the importance of coordinated action.

The workshops also created opportunities for ongoing relationships, collaboration, and civic engagement. Local leaders, board members, businesses, community organisations, and residents continued conversations beyond the workshops themselves, with several participants expressing interest in future workshops, deeper collaboration, and stronger community coordination around homelessness responses.

In some cases, participants also described intentions to advocate more actively for housing and homelessness responses within their own networks and spheres of influence. This included conversations about community

leadership, local responses, public narratives, funding, housing policy, and the role communities can play in supporting more compassionate and effective approaches to homelessness.

A significant learning from the workshops was that meaningful narrative change often occurs gradually through relationships, dialogue, trust, and repeated conversations over time.

Rather than seeking immediate consensus or dramatic shifts in opinion, the workshops demonstrated the value of creating spaces where communities could engage honestly with complexity, hear different perspectives, and remain connected through a shared desire to support better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

"This workshop reaffirms that community is supportive, compassionate and engaged. It is not a negative or critical voice but is looking for solutions. We are all in this together."

Jan Rutledge, QSM, De Paul House

"What encouraged me about these workshops was that, even though we were discussing an extremely tough and heartbreaking issue, the voices of those with lived experience were heard. People left with hope, knowing that homelessness is solvable in Aotearoa if we come together in solidarity and collectively action the changes needed to end homelessness."

Jeremy Nicholls, Visionwest



Key learnings and reflections

A number of important learnings emerged through the development and delivery of the workshops. While many of these reflected existing collective impact and community engagement principles, the workshops reinforced how important relationship-based, locally grounded, and human-centred approaches are when facilitating conversations about homelessness.

One of the strongest learnings was that communities do not necessarily need to agree on every issue in order to engage constructively. Some of the most meaningful conversations occurred in spaces where differing views, tensions, fears, and uncertainties were openly present. The workshops demonstrated that respectful dialogue and shared understanding can still emerge when conversations are held carefully, honestly, and with a focus on shared humanity and collective responsibility.

Another important learning was the value of grounding conversations in both evidence and lived experience. Data, systems insights, and public research helped participants understand the scale and complexity of homelessness, while lived experience voices and frontline expertise helped humanise the conversations and challenge stereotypes or assumptions. Together, these perspectives created more balanced and nuanced discussions than either approach could achieve alone.

The workshops also reinforced the importance of practical hope. Participants responded positively to conversations that acknowledged the seriousness and complexity of homelessness while also highlighting examples of collaboration, evidence-informed responses, and meaningful action already taking place across communities and organisations. Many participants reflected that understanding the work already underway reduced feelings of helplessness and created a stronger sense that homelessness is not inevitable and that communities can contribute positively to solutions.

“The workshop, in my view, is the best presentation I have encountered. It was insightful, educational and gave people a sense of hope, arming them with resources to be a cog in a needed network to abolish homelessness.”

Gregg Walden, Hibiscus & Bays Local Board; Chair, North Shore Neighbourhood Support; Community Patrol

Another important learning was the value of approaching homelessness through multiple lenses and values frameworks. The workshops intentionally balanced conversations about compassion, human dignity, and social wellbeing alongside discussions about economic impacts, systems pressures, public costs, and the wider benefits of effective housing and support responses. This helped create space for engagement across a wide range of perspectives and worldviews, recognising that people are often motivated by different experiences, values, and concerns. Rather than relying on a single narrative or moral argument, the workshops aimed to create broader understanding and shared ownership of the issue.

A further learning was the importance of trusted local relationships and community champions. Local board members, community leaders, faith groups, and frontline organisations all played important roles in helping create safe and trusted spaces for engagement. In many cases, local relationships and existing community trust were critical in enabling honest conversations to occur.

The workshops also highlighted that narrative change is relational and

gradual. Shifts in understanding did not occur through single messages or attempts to persuade people, but through ongoing dialogue, human connection, exposure to different perspectives, and the willingness to engage respectfully with complexity, tension, and differing experiences. This reinforced the importance of creating spaces where communities can continue to learn, reflect, and participate in conversations about homelessness over time.

Finally, the workshops reinforced the value of collective impact approaches to homelessness. Participants consistently responded positively to seeing multiple organisations, sectors, and perspectives working together. The visible collaboration between providers, community organisations, local leaders, and people with lived experience helped strengthen confidence that homelessness is not an issue any one organisation can solve alone, and that coordinated, relational, and community-wide responses are essential.

Reflections for the sector

The Auckland Community Homelessness Workshops reinforced the importance of creating spaces where communities can engage openly, honestly, and constructively with homelessness. While homelessness is often discussed through political debate, media narratives, or moments of crisis, the workshops highlighted the value of slower, relationship-based conversations grounded in evidence, lived experience, and practical solutions.

One of the clearest reflections from the project was that communities are capable of engaging with complexity when conversations are facilitated carefully and respectfully. Participants were willing to discuss difficult issues, sit with tension, and hear perspectives different from their own when conversations remained grounded in shared humanity and a collective desire to support better outcomes.

The workshops also reinforced that narrative change is not achieved through single campaigns or messages alone. Shifts in understanding often occurred gradually through dialogue, trust-building, repeated engagement, and opportunities for people to hear directly from those with lived and frontline experience. This highlighted the importance of relational approaches to community engagement rather than purely informational or transactional approaches.

Another important reflection was the role of trusted local relationships and conveners. Community leaders, local board representatives, frontline organisations, faith groups, and local champions all played an important role in helping create spaces where difficult conversations could occur safely and constructively. The workshops demonstrated that local context and trusted relationships matter deeply when engaging communities around homelessness.

The project also reinforced the importance of collective impact approaches. Participants consistently responded positively to seeing multiple organisations and sectors working together in visible and practical ways. The collaborative presence of providers, community organisations, local leaders, and people with lived experience helped build confidence that homelessness is a shared responsibility requiring coordinated responses across communities and systems.

Importantly, the workshops highlighted a strong community appetite not only to better understand homelessness, but also to explore how communities themselves can contribute positively to solutions. Participants consistently expressed a desire to understand where they fit and what practical actions they could take as part of a collective response to homelessness. This created opportunities to shift conversations away from fear, blame, or helplessness, and towards greater understanding, collective responsibility, and practical community action.

While the workshops were only one part of a broader conversation about homelessness across Tāmaki Makaurau, they demonstrated the value of creating spaces where evidence, relationships, lived experience, and practical hope can come together to support more informed and compassionate community responses.

“Manaaki Rangatahi was inspired to be part of a community activation that brought together local boards, community members, and people with lived experience to discuss homelessness in Tāmaki Makaurau. Hui and kōrero have always been part of the solution when addressing homelessness. We appreciate the leadership, aroha and manaaki that brought organisations together to work in kotahitanga.”

Bianca Johanson,, Manaaki Rangatahi

Summary

The Auckland Community Homelessness Workshops demonstrated the value of creating informed, human, and relationship-based conversations about homelessness within communities. Across the series, participants engaged with difficult questions, differing perspectives, and complex realities in ways that were respectful, constructive, and grounded in a shared desire to support better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

The workshops reinforced that communities are capable of engaging thoughtfully with homelessness when conversations are grounded in evidence, lived experience, practical solutions, and opportunities for genuine dialogue. They also highlighted the importance of creating spaces where people can move beyond fear, misinformation, or helplessness, and towards greater understanding, empathy, and collective responsibility.

A significant learning from the project was that meaningful change often begins through relationships, trust, and ongoing conversations rather than through single events or simple messages. In many cases, the workshops created opportunities for new relationships, deeper understanding, continued collaboration, and more constructive community dialogue about homelessness and housing insecurity.

The project also reinforced the importance of collective impact approaches and coordinated responses. The visible collaboration between providers, local leaders, community organisations, people with lived experience, and residents helped demonstrate that homelessness is not an issue any one organisation or sector can solve alone. Instead, it requires ongoing partnership, shared responsibility, and sustained community engagement.

While the workshops were only one contribution within a much wider homelessness response across Tāmaki Makaurau, they highlighted the value of

creating spaces where communities can engage honestly with complexity while remaining connected to practical hope and collective action.

Ultimately, the workshops demonstrated that communities want to be part of the solution. When people are given opportunities to engage with evidence, lived experience, and practical examples of what works, they are willing to move beyond fear and frustration towards understanding, collective responsibility, and meaningful community action.

The success of these workshops reflects the strength of partnership across communities, lived experience leaders, homelessness services, and Auckland Council. Through its role as a funder, convener, connector, and partner, Auckland Council has helped support collaboration and strengthen the wider homelessness and social housing ecosystem across Tāmaki Makaurau.



In many cases, the workshops created opportunities for new relationships, deeper understanding, continued collaboration, and more constructive community dialogue about homelessness and housing insecurity.



**housing
first
auckland**

Auckland Community Homelessness Workshops

**Reflections, learnings, and community conversations
across Tāmaki Makaurau**

June 2026