



THE FRONTLINE

Insights from the rough sleeping community:
Experiences of Auckland Council frontline
Council staff and amenities.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei

Seek the treasure you value most dearly: if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain

First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge those that have shared their stories with us. We acknowledge your courage, honesty, and your pain.

“Kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui”

Secondly, an acknowledgement to Auckland Council for their willingness to learn, understand, and hear the voices of this community.

“Ngā mihi nui kia koutou”

To those who have passed away, we acknowledge your contribution to the community.

“Haere, haere, haere, haere atu ra”

To the wider whanau...

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.



RESEARCH FOCUS

Background

In 2019, the Affordable Housing Policy Team wanted to understand how Auckland Council might improve the experience of people experiencing homelessness, when interacting with Council's community facing staff. At the same time, the City Centre Amenity Project wanted to consult with the community on what they need in terms of amenities and what is currently being used.

A findings report was requested to identify gaps in the Council workforce capability and opportunities, examples of good practice. And resources that are currently available, as well as understanding the needs of people experiencing homelessness in relation to interactions with Auckland Council staff.

Lifewise was approached to explore the experiences of the rough sleeping community as it champions lived experience and peer led services. Lifewise staff and volunteers have co-design research experience and strong relationships with the community.

This summary report provides insights from the rough sleeping community on their experience of Auckland Council frontline staff and amenities.

PROJECT TEAM

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Thank you to Shadow for the contribution of his photos
(patterns, statue, city scape and graffiti art).



WHAT WE DID

We first looked at previous research including:

- An Insight into the Experience of Rough Sleeping in Central Auckland, Housing First Design Talkbook, Inside the Cup
- Mana Wahine (www.lifewise.org.nz)
- Auckland Council research, A case for public amenities as critical social and cultural infrastructure

This was to ensure that we were not doing any unnecessary research and building on the learnings. We have taken some of the research insights and recommendations into this report.

It is important to acknowledge the different groups within the rough sleeping community, so we interviewed people new to the street, those that had been part of it for a long time, and those newly housed. The largest group of rough sleeping community is in the inner city, and we acknowledge the diversity of the city and surrounding areas.

In August 2019, we conducted 12 in-depth empathy interviews with people who have experience of rough sleeping who mainly live in the inner City, but have had experience in other areas of Auckland Council. We also hosted a small focus group out in West Auckland through VisionWest.

As two of the researchers have strong connections with the street whānau, they engaged informally with others in the community over four weeks of interviewing, and also bought their own lived experience.

Research /
Mana Wahine: Mana Wahine seeks to understand the particular needs and experiences of women (including those from the Rainbow community) experiencing homelessness in the Auckland City Centre. (July 2018, PDF)
Inside The Cup: Bringing the street voice to the decision makers (December 2017, PDF)
An Insight into the Experience of Rough Sleeping in Central Auckland (January 2015, PDF)
A case for public amenities as critical social and cultural infrastructure (Auckland Council)

WHAT THE OTHER RESEARCH SAID

Relevant insights that came through the *Inside the Cup*, and the *Housing First research*, included:

- People often feel like frontline staff are not listening
- People need reassurance that asking for help and support is ok
- People need to connect with their new neighborhood, they need to feel like they are part of the community
- There are street rules and guides that can help moderate behavior and mediate
- 60% of the rough sleeping community are Māori
- Many are dealing with trauma, colonisation, and slipping through the net of support

Similar themes surfaced from the research around Auckland Council frontline staff.



KEY INSIGHTS



Elders are valued

Staff diversity matters

A smile makes a difference

Aroha versus judgement

Rules / Kawa use them for greater effect

More public amenities for safer streets



ELDERS ARE VALUED

The rough sleeping community have a hierarchy and elders who they listen to. Elders can help form connections, communicate, and can diffuse things. Elders pass on knowledge about the street, rules, and where to go and are valued on how they hold themselves or their Mana. Elders who work on the frontline of Council services are also valued.

"They taught me to keep my area clean... if we have role models, it can get better."

"We should make them a cup of tea, and get them to sit down and tell us their stories."

"They are older, we look at them as uncles, there is there is a fella on K Road that cleans the street..... we know them and we respect them, That is a cultural thing for us."

How might we promote and use elders to form relationships and prevent undesirable behavior?



STAFF DIVERSITY MATTERS

People notice and value having people from their own culture and gender on the frontline of services like libraries and security.

People responded well to places, approaches, and rules that respect and reflect their cultural practices and needs - like greeting people, welcoming them in, and offering kai.

Female security guards and having ethnic diversity was appreciated by the community. People talked about the one female security guard engaging with women or the one Maori Council frontline staff member.

"I think we need more Maori, in there, us Maori feel more comfortable."

"Be like us, the staff."

"There was that one Maori women, I went back, and it was good to see her still there."

How might we encourage and value Maori culture in the inner city and ensure there is diversity among the staff in the communities they serve?

A SMILE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Communications was a recurring theme from body language and dress, to how people spoke and interacted with them.

"Security uniform looks like gangster...its all blacked out." "They walked around as if they are guarding Fort Knox when they first arrived, but now they are a bit more calm."

"There is no communication..... need to be more friendly."

"The security guards..... Sometimes just their presence is all that is needed."

People talked about a specific person who took time to smile at them, who knew their name and was considerate of their needs. The overall theme was about being helpful and the small ways that this was done. People responded well to those that took the time to build relationships with them, from the street cleaner to the manager on the front desk.

"Please and thank you, will be much better than stand over us."

"Being helpful is a good quality..... being helpful is being polite and a smile."

"The cleaner, she talks to us..... When they don't talk to us.. They are uptight."

How might we be more approachable to the rough sleeping community?

AROHA VERSUS JUDGEMENT

When we asked about their experience of Council staff, often the negative situation talked about was how they felt judged or not respected. This caused most of the tension or escalated into them being asked to leave the premises. On the flip side, people appreciated those staff that were calm and easy to approach for help.

"I approached him about his attitude, and he just said Ur homeless..... they are arrogant".....You will always get someone who will abuse the badge of power." "If we have a bad experience, we wont go back."

"Often they are approachable, they are pretty good, the Council staff." "They are all helpful, ... they just doing it to keep the calm."

"It is so easy to get wound up, there is some much going on in our lives."

Respect goes both ways, the street whānau respected those who had helped them in the past or saw the effort they put into making things right for others.

"I looked at the people who were doing the mahi, where things were tough, I saw that they had to keep on top of things, and the repercussions if they don't. That encouraged me to do better."

My experience is good, they help me, I help them.....They helped my whānau get jobs so I have a lot of respect for them."

"If you give respect, you get respect.... If you do this, then the relationship between us and them would improve."

How might we communicate in a way that shows our aroha and respect for each other?

As highlighted in the other research, people also have to deal with having no place to sleep, mental health issues or addictions. A lot of the community have experienced family violence, grief, emotional abuse and neglect. Past trauma and the cumulative weight of multiples stresses can impact on one's mental health but also impact on how one deals with daily interactions. This needs to be considered in any future training requirements.



RULES / KAWA USE THEM FOR GREATER EFFECT

The rough sleeping community have their own set of rules that are respected and adhered to. They know that they are necessary to create a sense of order. The community have to daily navigate the spoken rules, the written rules, and the rules made up on the spot by staff in places they call their home. Routine is an important feature of street life, people like to know where they can go and what is allowed.

"New Council staff coming in and changing the rules."

"There was one fella who took great joy in waking people up in the library, I said you didn't tell me, you need it up on the wall."

"We get mixed messages, one person will allow us to do one thing... There is one women, she goes out of her way to wake you up, seems counter productive... it's a confused message, people are not sure."

"You need a bit of leniency.....but you have to also do what you are told, that is street life."

How might we formally use the street rules and guides to moderate behavior and mediate?

How might we communicate clearly and consistent with street whānau?

MORE PUBLIC AMENITIES FOR SAFER STREETS

We were also requested to ask the community about their usage of inner city amenities. This was to check if anything had changed since the Auckland Council research conducted in 2018 (A case for public amenities as critical social and cultural infrastructure). Through our interviews, we asked the inner city street whānau about their usage and experience of amenities like toilets, showers etc.

THEMES

People often use retail or fast food places for toilets and to freshen up. They have to walk long distances to access any public toilets.

"The toilets are not open up, no wonder people piss on the street."..... The city is awake 24 hours, and so should some of the facilities, otherwise it ends up on the street."

Cleanliness is important to everyone, the state of the toilets was mentioned at every interview.

"The library ones are clean all the time..... other places don't have a number you can ring so they stay that way for a day.... I know our whānau don't help but they need cleaned up."

There are very few places to shower, and Orange Sky mobile shower unit is appreciated by the inner city community.

"We need more facilities,..... spend a penny." We just need something basic."

People feel that the current Council facilities are not being used effectively and this impacts on them. They talk about the pools being closed during winter, which could be used as a place to shower.

Lockers, lockers, lockers.

This was frequently talked about. Over time people lose their belongings, and this creates additional stress and tension for them.

"Even if we had to pay a small fee, it would help keep the street clean, it's an eye sore,... if we had them, we would have cleaner streets."

Having a place to store ones' belongings can help reduce frustration, cost and stress for those that cannot access or sustain housing.

"We hate them taking our shit, we have as little as it is, we only have a bag. It's really hard when you have nothing, and they take it."

Council libraries are more than a library, they are a community lounge especially to the rough sleeper community.

"It is so many things, if we didn't have the library we would go insane." People value the places that are clean, calm and makes them feel welcome.

How might we provide more clean amenities that serve mobile communities?

How might we learn from those delivering good customer service and environments?



HOW MIGHT WE...

The main purpose of this report is to inform future Council staff training and approaches when working with the rough sleeping community.

The insights from this research raise the following questions and are a starting point for discussion.

How might we promote and use elders to form relationships and prevent undesirable behavior?

How might we formally use the street rules and guides to moderate behavior and mediate?

How might we communicate clearly and consistent with street whānau?

How might we encourage and value Māori culture in the inner city and ensure there is diversity among the staff in the communities they serve?

How might we be more approachable to the rough sleeper community?

How might we communicate in a way that shows our aroha and respect for each other?

How might we provide more clean amenities that serve mobile communities?

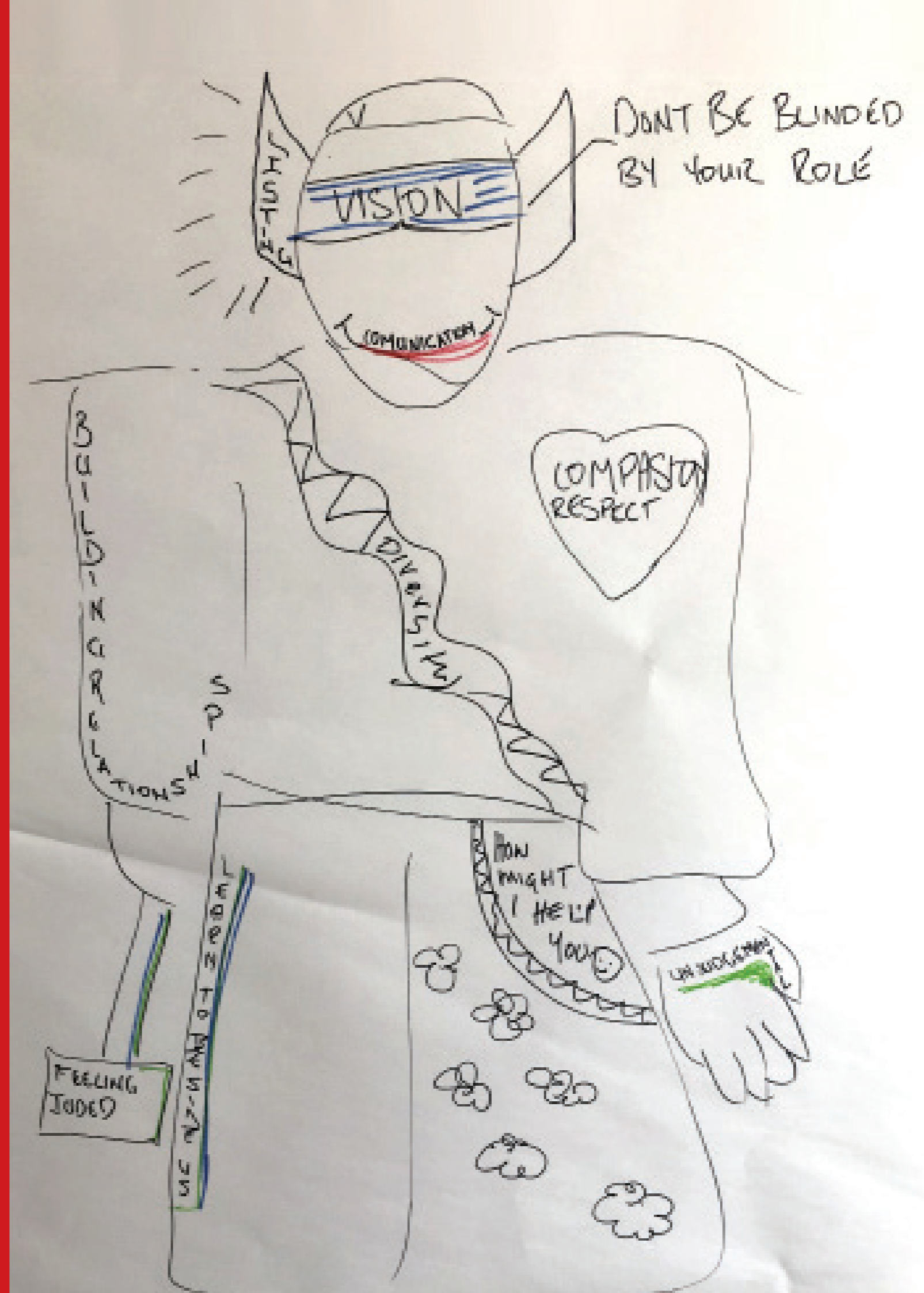
How might we learn from those delivering good customer service and environments?

FRONTLINE SUPER HERO

As part of our empathy research, we asked one of the whānau to draw up a "frontline super hero" to capture what would be the perfect frontline staff experience for him. This was a fun exercise to check in and find if we had missed anything relevant.

What it also acknowledges is that working on the frontline requires staff to have a kete of skills and knowledge. We all have something that makes us be our very best, especially when it comes to interacting with people.

What frontline
super hero power
do you have



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