

# Abbeyfield House model meets a growing need

Decreasing rates of home ownership and an aging population are highlighting the need for more affordable accommodation for retirees across New Zealand, a need Abbeyfield New Zealand is doing its best to meet.

Abbeyfield New Zealand Executive Officer Susan Jenkins says Abbeyfield's shared accommodation model provides residents with safety, security and companionship while allowing them to maintain a considerable level of independence.



*Lawn and garden at Hornby  
(Christchurch) Abbeyfield*

Since New Zealand's first Abbeyfield House opened in Nelson in 1994, another 13 have been established, and Abbeyfield New Zealand has plans for more – but funding in a post-Covid environment could prove a stumbling block, says Jenkins.

"Our Greymouth Society has been working on establishing a facility on the West Coast for 15 years. The District Council has made a suitable site available, but the project is effectively stalled for want of development capital," says Jenkins.

Jenkins says the lack of accommodation available for older Coasters means many are living in

caravans or sleepouts, or attempting to hang on in the family home when it is no longer safe or suitable for them to do so. Others have been forced to leave the district.

"Council-owned retirement units are full, with long waiting lists, and rest home accommodation is at a premium," says Jenkins.

Jenkins says government support for the Abbeyfield model makes financial sense, as well as providing social benefits.

"People who live in Abbeyfield Houses typically report improved physical and mental wellbeing –

they also reduce or delay the need for rest-home care and hospital treatment” she says.

The initial Abbeyfield House was set up in London in 1956 by Richard Carr-Gomm, a Guards officer turned community worker. Struck by the number of elderly people living in isolation, Carr-Gomm brought several of them together in a house he had bought for the purpose, with himself acting as housekeeper.

Today in New Zealand, the model remains much the same, says Jenkins, with facilities typically housing between 11 and 14 residents. Each has their own private studio apartment with ensuite, and shares a common lounge, dining area, and laundry. Meals are provided by a cook/housekeeper, who is the only staff member: other support is provided by local volunteer committees.

However, while social connection and personal safety remain two reasons people choose to live in an Abbeyfield House, financial considerations are becoming increasingly important for many.

“Superannuation is not designed for people who are paying rent or a mortgage,” says Jenkins.

“Abbeyfield Houses provide an affordable option for someone whose only income is superannuation – as well as a much-enhanced quality of life.”



*Local committee at Greymouth site for planned Abbeyfield project*