

Winston Churchill Memorial Trust  
2007 Fellowship report

# **Supporting Positive Ageing: Government and Voluntary Sector Action**

New Zealand

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## Introduction

As a Policy Officer for a large voluntary sector umbrella body in Wales, my responsibilities for equalities issues and government relations has given me an insight into the interactions of voluntary organisations and lobby groups, and governmental activity across a range of issues. This concept of different parts of society working towards a common goal, but from different perspectives, has led to an interest in the effectiveness of government policy 'on the ground' and the extent to which voluntary organisations pursue their own priorities irrespective of government activity.

New Zealand was chosen as the focus of the Fellowship because of its many parallels to Wales in terms of similar demographics and population size; significant rural / urban contrasts; and a distinct cultural and linguistic heritage. The existence of New Zealand's over-arching Positive Ageing strategy was a strong indicator that this was an issue that has achieved political recognition. Similarly, at the time of my application for the Fellowship, Wales was well on its way to appointing an Older Person's Commissioner the first of its kind in Europe, possibly the world.

The fellowship aimed to examine how national, regional and local government in New Zealand are working with other parts of civil society to confront the challenges of an ageing population, in particular through the commitments of the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy. By meeting a wide variety of stakeholders, and gathering information on the programmes and initiatives they run, I wanted to produce a dossier of case-studies and examples of transferable best practice which will be of value to UK communities. I also wanted to gain a sense of whether there was a real sense of partnership and common purpose between those working for positive ageing, and what lessons could be learnt in Wales and the UK.

Using the activities and organisations highlighted in the 2006 New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy Action Plan, a wide range of organisations were identified from across New Zealand. As far as possible, a balance was sought between government and voluntary sector groups in both urban and more rural settings. A full list of organisations that took part in the research is listed at Annex 1.

With an over-arching theme of government and voluntary sector collaboration and partnership, the Fellowship project focused on three main, but inter-related areas:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Citizenship and Participation
- Promoting positive attitudes to ageing and older people

Key findings in relation to these areas are outlined in the following chapters.

## The New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy

Launched in 2001, the Positive Ageing Strategy provides a framework for government policy affecting older people. It aims to improve opportunities for older people to participate in the community, and sets out 10 positive ageing goals:

1. Secure an adequate income for older people
2. Equitable, timely, affordable and accessible health services for older people
3. Affordable and appropriate housing options for older people
4. Affordable and accessible transport options for older people
5. Older people feel safe and can “age in place”
6. A range of culturally appropriate services allows choices for older people
7. Older people living in rural communities are not disadvantaged when accessing services
8. People of all ages have positive attitudes to ageing and older people
9. Elimination of ageism and the promotion of flexible work options
10. Increasing opportunities for personal growth and community participation

Coordinated by the Office for Senior Citizens, which has eight staff, officials work with central and local government to develop an annual positive ageing action plan, and track progress against the 10 goals through the publication of Annual Reports. Both the Action Plans and Annual Reports are signed off at Cabinet level.

In 2006/07 the projects and initiatives of 21 local government agencies and 29 government agencies were included in the national action plan, and efforts are continuing to increase these figures year on year. If necessary staff from the Senior Citizens Office can visit local councils to provide support and advice aimed at signing them up to be part of the strategy. Contributions to the plans are encouraged to be the innovative and new projects, not ‘business as usual’ items.

Central government departments are bound by a Cabinet Minute to have an action plan on promoting positive ageing and each department has to report annually to its own Minister. The Office for Senior Citizens monitors these action plans within government.

The New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing conducted an independent review of the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy Action Plans up to June 2005 and found that it had been successful in promoting positive ageing. However, some of the participants in this research had concerns at the gap between the goals and aspirations of the strategy and implementation, and that some of the longer term challenges were not being addressed. This included the lack of policies and legislation to deal with physical accessibility of housing, and a lack of clarity around what ‘ageing in place’ really means.

## Department of Work and Income

To gain a broader understanding of the issues affecting older people in New Zealand, this research included meetings with the Government Work and Income department which has responsibility for employment and pension services. New Zealand has a system of universal superannuation at 65, with pension rates linked to inflation, not average earnings. Eleven regional offices deliver superannuation services across New Zealand, with case managers supporting recipients according to their needs, and a free national multi-lingual helpline through which people can access information about supplementary benefits they may be entitled to. These may include disability allowances or one-off costs such as emergency dental care.

The ethos of the department is one of encouraging positive ageing through facilitating participation at a level appropriate to the client. At the time of my visit, the department was exploring the development of a surrogate grand-parent scheme, which would link generations and provide social contact for those older people who may not have family nearby. Staff in local service centres are also encouraged to link clients with opportunities that utilise their skills, particularly through volunteering opportunities and referrals to organisations such as their local Age Concern. The department planned to make brochures available at their centres that promote mentoring and volunteering opportunities.

The department undertakes outreach work, raising awareness through community centres, libraries and working with the management of retirement villages to try to ensure that people are aware of their entitlements and are accessing all appropriate help. They also work with other agencies such as medical professionals, local councils and citizen's advice bureaux.

For offices in rural areas, such as Canterbury, this outreach work is particularly important and can also involve home visits, particularly for people recently released from hospital, as well as working through community groups and local papers. A 'Heartlands' service has been developed in the Canterbury region that recognises the inaccessibility of some areas, and connects people to information and services from across all government departments through one access point.

## Health and Wellbeing

Age Concern is one of the key voluntary sector providers of Health and Wellbeing services to older people in New Zealand. There is a comprehensive network of local and regional Age Concern organisations, federated to a national body, Age Concern New Zealand. While many services are universal, local need and innovations have led to the development of services that are tailored to particular local requirements.

### **Elder Abuse**

Some initiatives are supported by local or national government funding, but this did not appear consistent. For example, no funding had been made available for a service to tackle elder abuse in the Mid North region, despite evidence of need, while others including Age Concern Canterbury, Age Concern Auckland and Age Concern Hamilton were supported to provide a service involving access to registered nurses, advice, advocacy and support. However, funding restriction often meant staff could only be part-time, and a lack of appropriate protective legislation meant that certain issues can only be addressed from a social work perspective.

In such a fundamental area as protecting the rights and dignity of older people, the absence of a consistent approach to funding is perhaps one example where further action needs to be taken at a national level to ensure that access to help is not a postcode lottery. This need for a national strategic approach is being promoted by Age Concern New Zealand, backed up by their own research evaluation studies into service provision.

### **Accredited Visiting Service**

All the local Age Concern organisations visited for this fellowship ran an Accredited Visiting Service. This is one of the National services co-ordinated by Age Concern New Zealand and funded by a contract with central government. The service matches clients in need of companionship and support, with volunteer visitors who commit to giving at least one hour of their time per week. The service aims to decrease isolation and improve the wellbeing of older people in the community. Referrals to the service come from across the community and public services, including health professionals, government agencies, family and friends.

The visitors receive training and support, and after six months of participation, an Accreditation certificate that recognises their adherence to the standards and role of a visitor. In all areas visited, this service was a popular and successful initiative, with the visitors who were often older and isolated themselves, benefiting as much from the regular interaction as the clients.

The national co-ordination and central contracting of this service via Age Concern New Zealand appears to be beneficial as it enables best practice and learning to be shared via a central body, and in turn for any issues or

concerns to be fed back into the systems. It also allows for consistency in service standards, and the ability for trends and statistics to be monitored at a national level.

### **The Enliven Programme**

Presbyterian Support Northern (PSN) is a non-profit making organisation that provides a restorative care programme funded by the District Health Board in Waikato, with any shortfall being made up by PSN. The programme aims to keep people in their own house by working 'with and not for' older people, encouraging them to continue to do as much as they can for themselves. With a package of care based on the individuals needs, not on a prescribed number of hours support, Enliven has a goals-based ethos, working with the client to set a long term goal, and then a series of shorter term goals that work towards that aim. Participants have a paid helper that can assist with tasks including days out or shopping trips. They also have access to physiotherapists and nurses, and to a day-support programme that includes activities such as dancing, exercise and art classes. The programme is based on evidence that restorative care gives the best results with fewer case of depression, for example.

### **Taranaki Health Bus**

Another interesting initiative that benefits the health and wellbeing of older people is Taranaki's health bus. Funded by a pooling of resources from a group of local doctors, the bus brings nursing services into the community, and is equipped with private consulting areas and waiting facilities. Referrals from the local hospitals can bring the bus directly to people's homes making access to treatment easier for those in more remote areas or those with mobility problems. The services offered via the health bus include vaccinations, health checks and podiatry. The scheduled timetable is publicised through GP clinics, local media, public events and citizens advice centres, and its services are available to all.

This initiative, which puts the needs and convenience of the patient at its heart, offers a good example of the kind of citizen-focused service that is a current aspiration of public policy in the UK, and particularly in Wales through the 'Making the Connections' agenda for the reform of public services.

### **Falls prevention**

Falls prevention work was a key part of the activities at all of the Age Concerns that I visited, often funded through the Accident Compensation Corporation in recognition of the potential savings in ongoing medical costs associated with fall-related care.

For example Age Concern Auckland ran a 4-week programme called Step Ahead. Focusing on raising awareness of hazards in people's environment, on foot care and safe footwear, and exercises to develop strength and balance, the 10 hours course is facilitated by volunteers who themselves are

normally retired or semi-retired. Volunteers are recruited annually, undergoing three days of initial training with annual refresher courses and are subject to performance monitoring to ensure they are effective and suitable. Participants of the course are assessed before and afterwards to measure the improvement in their confidence levels. Having completed the course, older people are encouraged to take up Tai Chi classes with Age Concern.



*Picture: An older person's Tai Chi lesson*

## Citizenship and Participation

### **Volunteer Community Co-ordinators**

Across New Zealand there is evidence of a wide range of activities that encourage participation and positive citizenship among older people. One central government initiative, managed by the Office for Senior Citizens, is a network of 39 Volunteer Community Co-ordinators from across the country. These individuals are nominated by local communities or local organisations and act as consultative voices on issues put to them at the Minister's request. A small amount of funding is provided to enable the co-ordinators to organise local workshops and facilitated forums to seek the views of others and feedback information to the government. The co-ordinators come together annually for a national discussion forum and also work with local councils to get them signed up to the Positive Ageing Strategy.

The Office for Senior Citizens see these networks as a useful way to encourage participation in the issues facing government and a way to explore policy ideas or issues with a range of stakeholders. While this is undeniably one route for consultation, there are concerns in the voluntary sector that it is not always representative and it should not be used as a way to bypass the views and concerns of organisations and groups external to this process.

### **Positive Ageing Trust**

The Positive Ageing Trust is an innovation in New Plymouth, Taranaki, that brings together a number of key stakeholders, from the local district council, to campaigning organisations and service providers. In New Plymouth 15.5% of the population are over 65, and the Trust exists to facilitate closer working between all agencies, organisations and community groups to 'create a District where older people are able to live positive lives'. Part funded by the Council, the Trust organises quarterly public Positive Ageing forums, which bring together on average 150 members of the public and people working in relevant sectors. The Forums often hear from guest speakers and discuss important issues such as rest homes, transport and health. The work of the Trust also supports the Positive Ageing Volunteer co-ordinator who is the link back to the Office for Senior Citizens.

Through ongoing consultation, the Trust has identified the key local issues and works to develop action plans that can address these local needs. The Trust's goals have been adopted within New Plymouth District Council's Positive Ageing Policy and the Trust's vocal but discreet approach to advocating on behalf of older people and influencing the Council has proved successful in securing a high profile for positive ageing. The Trust also makes submissions to central government as appropriate.

### **Greypower**

Greypower is a campaigning and lobbying group which operates across New Zealand as a network of local, but federated organisations. As a non-political

membership organisation, Greypower seeks to be 'the appropriate voice for all older New Zealanders' and to present a strong united lobby to Parliament and statutory bodies in order to advance the welfare and wellbeing of older people. Greypower are often an important local force, taking up local concerns, with its own members undertaking the work themselves in a voluntary capacity.

Greypower Queenstown represents older people who find themselves living in a rural but increasingly desirable area, where wealthy incomers have driven up housing costs. The rural location means older people face difficulties in accessing services, particularly health services, which often mean drives of between 2 and a half to four hours, to centres such as Invercargill and Dunedin. Greypower have fought to save local hospital beds and have secured a number of key improvements through their lobbying work, including an arrangement whereby health specialists pay monthly visits to the area, obviating the need for some older patients to travel. Through negotiations with local politicians Greypower Queenstown also secured a \$500 rates rebate for older people, in recognition of their high living costs in an area where utilities alone can cost \$2500 per year (£1000).

Greypower also works to offer its members other benefits. In Greymouth, on the west coast of South Island, the local Greypower has a monthly prize draw for members. In partnership with a local supermarket, Greypower members can enter their till receipts into a prize draw to win free groceries.



*Picture: A Greypower entry box offering members the chance to win free groceries*

## **Transport**

There are also numerous initiatives aimed at enabling older people to remain mobile so they can actively participate in all facets of community life. One of these is subsidised taxi schemes, where up to 50% of the cost of a fare is met

through local the Age Concern. Again, the levels of support varied with such initiatives – in some areas the service was only available to those with a disability, and in others only certain journeys were covered, such as trips to health-related appointments. Age Concern Mid North's taxi scheme was available to anyone over 60 and journeys could be for any reason with the ethos that keeping people involved in social and wellbeing related activities as equally important for their quality of life.

Age Concern across New Zealand, in partnership with Land Transport New Zealand, offer a *Safe with Age* refresher course for older drivers. This free, informal course is designed to inform participants and highlight driving hazards, and in addition to the class-based element is supported by the opportunity to take a subsidised coaching and assessment drive with an approved driving instructor.

### **SeniorNet**

New Zealand has a strong network of non-profit making SeniorNet organisations, which offer computer training to people over the age of 55. The training is provided on a voluntary basis by other members, and for a modest charge courses and workshops are offered that enable older people to keep up with technology and learn new skills. There are over 100 such SeniorNet centres across New Zealand. They are a valuable resource for many older people, many of whom have learnt how to stay in touch with friends and relatives over the internet via email or webcams, as well as skills such as family history research and using digital cameras. The peer-group nature of the centres make them perhaps less daunting than more public spaces such as libraries.

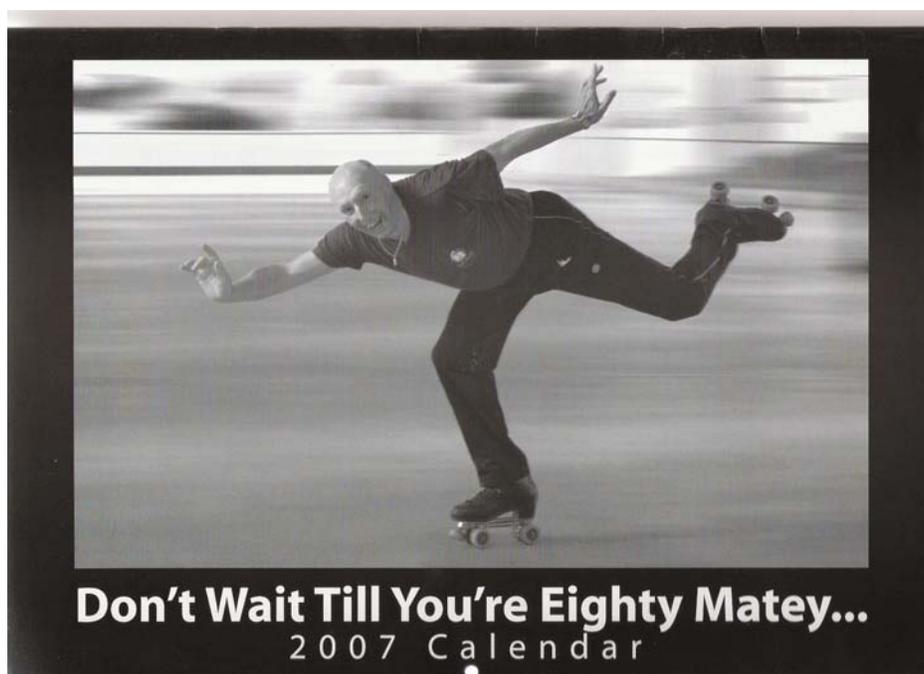
SeniorNet Canterbury has 1200 members and is now fully self funded from subscriptions and course fees, having originally been supported and set up 12 years ago with machines from New Zealand Telecom. Run by a volunteer committee of members, the Canterbury SeniorNet rents space in a local community centre and organises social get-togethers every month with guest speakers on a wide range of subjects.

## Promoting positive attitudes to ageing and older people

One of Age Concern's flagship programmes is the *Ageing is Living* national health promotion on positive ageing. This project aims to encourage people to take an active approach to ageing, to challenge some of the common myths around ageing, and to encourage people to think ahead to identify coping strategies for a positive life. The information is provided through a freely available booklet *Guide to positive ageing* or a workbook for self-learning or group work. The *Ageing is Living* programme is designed to be used as a tool for professionals and organisations who may wish to explore ageing issues with clients or employees.

### **'Don't Wait Till You're Eighty, Matey...'**

Individual Age Concern organisations have developed different initiatives to promote positive attitudes locally. One of the most successful example of this that I encountered was Age Concern Hamilton's 'Don't Wait Till You're Eighty Matey...' training package. This is a resource for organisations and community groups which through a programme of seasonal workshops, explores the social, spiritual, mental, and physical aspects of ageing. The programme is designed to 'stimulate thinking, provoke action and promote planning' and advocates the view that older age is an exhilarating adventure. From this successful initiative came the idea of producing a calendar illustrated by photographs of local older people engaging in activities and hobbies that challenge stereotypes and reinforce the wide ranging interests of the older population. The calendar has grown in popularity and is sold across the region, as well as being given to members.



*Picture: Age Concern Hamilton's annual calendar*

### **Treasured relationships**

New Plymouth District Council held a Treasured Relationships competition and photo exhibition in 2006. The competition invited people to write a story on what was special about their treasured older person, and the prize was a portrait shoot with their loved one taken by a leading photographer. The winner's photographs and stories were published in the newspaper and exhibited locally. The District Council also hold annual Citizens awards which celebrate and acknowledge a person's long term contribution to the social, cultural or sporting fabric of the community.

### **Through the eyes of younger people**

Age Concern Wellington held an intergenerational photograph competition focused on young people aged 13 and over. The competition was sponsored by the Office for Senior Citizens and was promoted through secondary schools. The categories included: Linking Generations; the Fun of Ageing; and Ageing is Living. The winning photographs were displayed in museums, department stores and in local newspapers.

### **Radio**

Another initiative of Age Concern Wellington, designed to inspire older people themselves, is a community radio programme. Through its regular broadcasts it provides relevant information and conducts interviews with older people who can be role models of the benefits of positive ageing.

## Partnership working

### **Celebrating Ageing Centre - Hamilton**

The Celebrating Ageing Centre in Hamilton is an excellent example of the local government working with the voluntary sector to support the interests of older people. The Centre is centrally located in Hamilton and accessible by public transport. It brings together under one roof the Hamilton Senior Citizens' Association, who provide social opportunities and entertainment; Hamilton Grey Power, a campaigning and lobbying organisation 'for people with a social conscience'; Age Concern Hamilton, who work to promote quality of life through a number of key services and initiatives; and Hamilton Senior Net, which provides senior citizens with opportunities of computer awareness.

The purpose-built centre houses a café, a large hall where exercise classes or functions can take place, computer and meeting facilities and a range of information sources for older people. The centre is a very visible, tangible commitment to the wellbeing and needs of older people in Hamilton and illustrates the benefits of a co-ordinated approach for the service users who can access so much from one point. This concept is arguably one which should be replicated in towns and cities across New Zealand, and indeed the UK.



*Picture: Hamilton's Celebrating Age Centre*

### **Wellington Senior Centre**

Wellington also has a Senior's Centre based within the City's main library. The centre is funded by a combination of Lottery and other grants with the local council providing the room and some day to day running expenses. The centre offers a low cost café with a meeting and activities space, playing host

to exercise classes, computer classes, organised speakers, concerts and access to free legal advice by appointment. Its location in the city library makes it visible and convenient for those wishing to combine social activities with a trip to pick up reading material.



*Picture: Wellington's Senior Centre*

### **Government and Voluntary Sector relations**

At a strategic level, the relationship between the National Government and the Voluntary and Community sector in New Zealand is in a period of evolution and change. The Government has a Statement of Intentions for an Improved Community – Government Relationship which dates back to 2001. However this is not binding on its actions, and does not necessarily give the sector the rights and entitlements it would like, including the ability to hold the government to account if its actions contradict its stated commitments.

During my visit, efforts were underway to prepare for an inaugural National Forum with the sector and the responsible Minister. This Forum was intended to bring together the voices of the sector and to seek consensus around key issues. The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector funds a Community Sector Taskforce, which had been charged with organising the Forum. However, there were concerns on both sides that the process was struggling to be entirely representative. With a recent Ministerial intervention transferring some of the Taskforce duties to a government led group, including selection of who should attend, the sector had concerns that the balance of power was uneven.

The resultant tensions highlight the difficulties of joint working and also the importance of a strong and binding commitment from government to a true spirit of partnership. One noticeable omission from the Government Statement of Intentions is recognition of the community and voluntary sector's right to self determination in situations such as representation at meetings or forums. Government intervention in such situations, whether actual or perceived, can have a negative impact on any partnership, and this must be borne in mind by all levels of government seeking to build effective relationships with the voluntary sector.

The Government officials and voluntary sector groups I spoke to were very interested in the approach to government and voluntary sector relations taken in Wales. I was able to share details of the Welsh Assembly government's statutory Scheme to promote the interest of the voluntary sector which has clarified and formalised some of the issues that are currently problematic in New Zealand. Groups were also very interested to hear of Welsh initiatives such as free swimming for the over 60's, free bus passes and free prescriptions. Hopefully this sharing of experience can inform the ongoing debate in New Zealand.

At an individual organisational level however, Age Concern felt they have a very good relationship and level of access to Government Ministers, with regular monthly and adhoc meetings as necessary.

## Conclusion

There are many good examples across New Zealand of initiatives and actions to promote positive ageing. The issues affecting older people are recognised at the highest levels of government and policies and strategies are in place to tackle them. The Positive Ageing Strategy gives offers a focal point and an ethos for others to align themselves with, and the regular production of action plans, the annual monitoring reports, and continued efforts to engage other stakeholders make it a living document - not one that is just left on the shelf. As with all strategies, there needs to be a continued focus on improving delivery and implementation from all partners, and increasing the number of organisation and local councils that are signed up. This will be an ongoing challenge as New Zealand's population ages.

Government and voluntary sector organisation are working together on many recognised areas of need, but in addition there was clear evidence of the voluntary sector continuing to develop projects and schemes which are locally relevant and stem from the ability of the voluntary sector to respond to local needs. Such initiatives sit alongside the nationally supported services that recognise the common needs of communities and individuals across New Zealand. However, as in most countries, it is a lack of resources that frustrate many of those working in the field who are trying to respond to the scale of the need. Inconsistencies in funding for some services across the country result in inequality of access, and this is a cause of concern for many organisations. This is particularly true in areas such as Elder Abuse.

Overall, Older persons issues in New Zealand have been recognised and are being addressed. As in all ageing populations the challenge of maximising the benefits that can be achieved from the available resources is huge, and New Zealand has a vibrant voluntary and government sector that is working together in many areas to face those challenges. Continued dialogue and research, through institutions such as the New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing, will be crucial if current and future needs are to be met. This is a state of affairs which is just as relevant to the UK, and so by sharing experiences and knowledge of each other's approaches, both countries have much to gain. It is hoped that some of the information in this report goes some way to contributing to that aim.

## Appendix 1 – Itinerary

### North Island

11 April – 7 May
Kerikeri, Northland Auckland Hamilton, Waikato New Plymouth, Taranaki Wellington
Age Concern Mid North Work and Income, Auckland Auckland City Council Age Concern, Auckland Auckland University School of Population Studies Presbyterian Support North Age Concern Hamilton New Plymouth District Council Age Concern Taranaki Office for Community and Voluntary Sector, NZ government Association of Non-governmental organisations of Aotearoa Age Concern Wellington Age Concern New Zealand Office for Senior Citizens, NZ government

### South Island

8 May – 16 May
Christchurch Arrowtown
Greypower Queenstown Age Concern Canterbury Seniornet Canterbury Work and Income Southern NZ Institute for Research on Ageing

## Useful Contacts

### **Government**

Office for Senior Citizens (for Positive Ageing Strategy)

[www.osc.govt.nz](http://www.osc.govt.nz)

Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector

[www.ocvs.govt.nz](http://www.ocvs.govt.nz)

Work and Income Department

[www.workandincome.govt.nz](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz)

Auckland City Council

[www.aucklandcity.govt.nz](http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz)

Hamilton City Council

[www.hamilton.co.nz](http://www.hamilton.co.nz)

New Plymouth District Council

[www.newplymouthnz.com](http://www.newplymouthnz.com)

### **Voluntary Sector**

Age Concern New Zealand (with links to local Age Concern websites)

[www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)

Greypower

[www.greypower.co.nz](http://www.greypower.co.nz)

SeniorNet

[www.seniornet.org.nz](http://www.seniornet.org.nz)

Association of Non-governmental organisations of Aotearoa

[www.angoa.org.nz](http://www.angoa.org.nz)

### **Academic**

New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing

[www.victoria.ac.nz/nzira](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/nzira)

Auckland University

[www.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.auckland.ac.nz)