



Catherine McClintock

Catherine has never seen herself as someone who needed to look for a job. Each opportunity that has come her way has come at the right time and has led her to something where she has been able to advance her skills and make a difference in people's lives.

Catherine grew up in a rural community of 60 people in Tapanui, South Otago, and attended boarding school in Dunedin. Catherine's father worked in forestry. As a young woman, she didn't really know what she wanted to do after she left school.

In those days you went either into an office, the bank, or you became a teacher or a nurse.

Some people went to university, but not many.

Her first job was in a legal office. Catherine also attended night school for four years to gain a Commercial Teachers Diploma. She didn't become a school teacher but what she learnt came in handy in many situations. She continued with legal and court work as a verbatim reporter, and also had a stint at reporting on jockey disputes over race results.

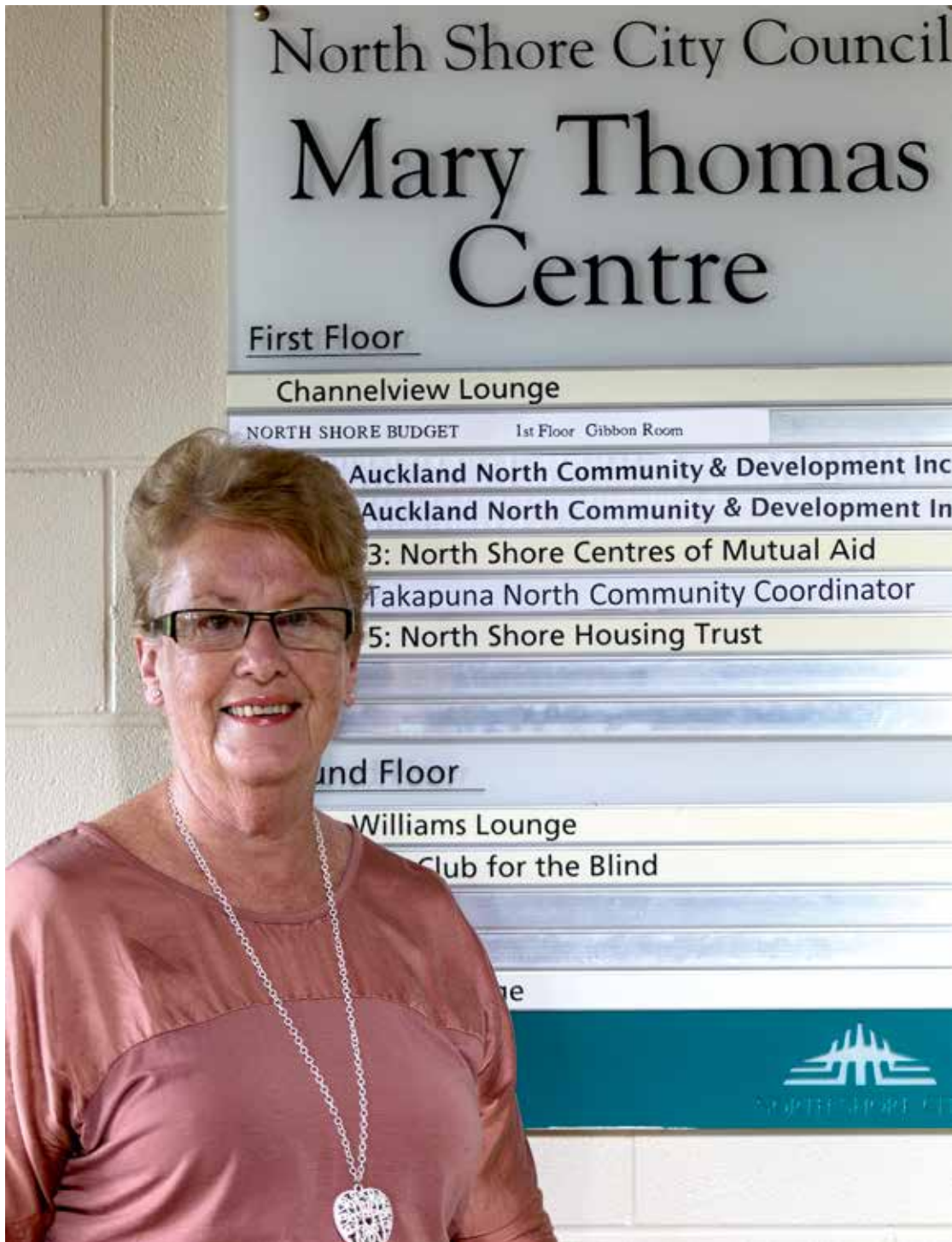
In 1968, newly married, she was living in Glenfield, which was a rural backwater on the Shore where housing was affordable

but there were no facilities, such as the Kaipatiki Park or the shopping mall. Catherine then moved to Torbay where she raised her family and lived for 32 years.

Knowing the community she is a part of has always been important to Catherine. She recognises that values of fairness were instilled in her at a very early age, as was a strong sense of independence and the ability to do whatever she

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turned her mind to. *Life in the country teaches you to just get on with it, just do it.* Her first experience with community work came when she taught employment skills at Northcote College's night school to women who were returning to the workforce. She had observed how unfairly women were treated in the legal system (particularly under the Matrimonial Property Act, which meant that women had no automatic right to property upon separation) and she could



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now also see how difficult it was for women with little experience to get back into employment.

Catherine has always had a strong sense of justice but had never had a job where it was the focus, and where she could articulate what that actually meant, until working for the North Shore Council of Social Services (NSCSS) in the 1990s provided her with this opportunity. *I hadn't been in the political realm before and there were so many wise people that I worked with who knew a whole lot and how we should prepare ourselves.*

In 1988, NSCSS was offered office space at the Mary Thomas Centre in Takapuna. Thirteen months later, after many years of lobbying for funding to employ someone, Catherine became its first paid employee when she was appointed as executive officer. Having functioned as an elected council since its incorporation in 1975, NSCSS later changed its name to North Shore Community and Social Services Incorporated in 1995 to avoid any name confusion with the City Council. For four years in the early 1990s Catherine also chaired the New Zealand Council of Social Services, the national network which is today known as Community Networks Aotearoa. The then Minister for Social Welfare, Jenny Shipley, regularly attended network meetings in Wellington. *She was amazing. She'd come in, sit down and say, OK, what are the issues?*

NSCSS held regular community network meetings which were highly popular and attended by community workers, as well as local and central government staff. These meetings became an important forum on the Shore for 'cross pollination' of information and provided an opportunity to meet with people who could influence change. Catherine was instrumental in the creation of the North Harbour Employment Resource Centre in Albany, which opened in 1991 and was later absorbed into Enterprise North Shore, a more business-oriented network that still exists today.

NSCSS began a study into the effects on the North Shore community of benefit cuts signalled in the Government's 1990 budget. There is an ideal quality of life that is associated with living on the North Shore, an ideal where there is no homelessness, poverty or unemployment—but Catherine knew that there is no escaping the fact that, for some, life on the Shore is a struggle.

I felt aggrieved that there was so much happening on the North Shore in terms of social policy but that the North Shore was perceived to be a place where there was no poverty; that there was no point in the Government putting funding into things here because it was not needed as much as in some other areas. Whereas, from our perspective, we weren't seeing that picture. We were seeing people struggling and there was a huge need.

Increasing concern among community organisations about the impact of the welfare cuts, led NSCSS to investigate issues of poverty on the Shore, where no comprehensive data had previously been collected. A Taskforce Green researcher was employed to research and write the six-monthly *Far From Fixed?* reports, with the first of these published in July 1992. The reports took the perspective of grassroots social services working with people who were often marginalised by the stigma of unemployment and poverty. NSCSS gathered statistics from government departments, and data and stories from social service agencies.¹ The stories that were included in the reports looked at the life experiences of people who felt shamed by circumstances that were often out of their control.

Over the period of a year, data reflecting trends in areas such as crime, unemployment and health, along with demographic statistics such as ethnic background and age, were relayed to NSCSS. Community groups hungered for each edition of *Far From Fixed?* and NSCSS received a lot of media attention over the findings.

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The final report was published in July 1995; there had been six in total. Here is the introduction from the first:

‘Our study shows the image of the North Shore, as being an affluent, problem-free area in which to live, is crumbling and needs to be re-assessed... Political statements about people having “a dependence mentality” or “bludging off the State” are both a misrepresentation of the cause of New Zealand’s economic plight and an unfair attack on people already personally bearing the cost of the recession’.

‘Employment: It is a cruel irony that the hundreds of thousands of both young and middle-aged destined to search fruitlessly for work in the 1990s were born into an age of unparalleled prosperity and optimism. Their birthright was to have been greater economic wealth and sounder social progress than that achieved by their parents. The highest rate of newly registered unemployed in the country is presently on the North Shore’.²

It grew like topsy in terms of the demand for it. You either hated it or loved it! It was an amazing piece of research, says Catherine. In 1995 the *New Zealand Herald* published an article in which Catherine was quoted: ‘Secret Life of Poor on the North Shore: Pockets of extreme poverty exist on the North Shore, hidden among the white-collar workforce, according to a community group spokesperson... The group has just released its final report in a three-year study analysing the Government’s 1990 economic package. The study began in 1992 and set out to discover whether the North Shore’s image as a comfortable white-collar paradise was true. It was commissioned to measure levels of poverty and to see whether claims of poverty were nothing more than mass hysteria. Mrs McClintock said that while the North Shore’s comfortable image was true up to a point, the claims of poverty was not hysteria. “There are pockets of extreme poverty. It’s a fairly hidden face in the North Shore because it is affluent.”’³

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We got our facts together.

Catherine received a telephone call from Bill Birch, then Minister of Finance, who had seen the piece. He asked where NSCSS got its funding from. *It was like Big Brother watching you. I felt totally intimidated but absolutely delighted that we weren’t using any Government funding. I wouldn’t go anywhere near something like that with Government money.*

In the 17 years that Catherine was executive officer, NSCSS grew in profile; however, relationships with North Shore City Council weren’t always smooth. *We were often challenging them and that was always a difficult road to walk.* Catherine now realises that NSCSS was a powerful voice for the community, but she didn’t realise quite how powerful until she left. The process of challenge was key. Catherine worked hard not to be confrontational, but to challenge with dignity and integrity. *We challenged quietly.*

We got our facts together. We didn’t go in half prepared. We didn’t do any yelling. We just built up respect and we got results.

In 1993 North Shore City released its draft annual plan. The plan proposed cutting \$1 million from the Council’s community grants budget. Catherine heard about this by chance at a meeting when someone asked what was she going to do about it. Her decision was to mobilise the community into protest, which became a significant moment in the history of NSCSS and for Catherine’s leadership.

With only five days’ warning, Catherine organised a petition asking the mayor for speaking rights at the next Council meeting. Fifteen hundred people signed, but the request was declined. Opponents of the budget cuts then descended on the council chambers, unannounced. The room was packed and more chairs had to be brought in. The protest was quiet, no one spoke and there were no banners. The item of community funding was number seven on the agenda but, as a result of the number of people gathered, it was brought forward to number one; within minutes the decision to cut funding had been overturned.

If that's not the power of community—then what is? We just had a presence. Things like that were very, very rewarding. But you don't get to that stage without the credibility and the hard work of the community behind you.

Sometimes it was felt that councillors didn't understand the role of NSCSS. Invitations to councillors to network meetings were often ignored until an election year. Catherine remembers one conversation with a councillor who remarked, 'Well, the reality is, Catherine, that it's much easier to talk about sport or art over a glass of wine than it is to talk about rape or homelessness.'

In 1992, with input from council advisors, NSCSS defined community development as: 'people working in partnership to create a community where people's needs are met and people can participate in making decisions to improve their lives.'

In the 17 years Catherine was with the organisation, the workload increased, as did the number of people employed. By the time she left in 2006, there were five employees. NSCSS was producing educational resources for community, running an annual community awards programme for not-for-profit groups, acting as an umbrella organisation for a number of community groups, organising regular monthly network meetings, running professional development training courses, and providing back office support for a few organisations.

During her time with NSCSS, Catherine gained a postgraduate diploma in Not-for-Profit Management through Unitec and studied organisational behaviour and marketing for the not-for-profit sector at Massey University. But after 17 years, she was weary of the 'political wranglings' and decided that she'd like to work with a single-issue organisation. She became executive officer for De Paul House, a service based in Northcote that provides emergency accommodation and support for homeless families on the Shore. She worked there for seven and a half years before retiring in 2014. Work with De Paul House involved more than one single issue, instead it was multi-focused: *Everything has its many facets.*

Rethink grant cuts, 1500 urge council

NSA 17-6-93



GRANT CUTS: Adrienne Wright, Sally Cargill and Catherine McClintock with the petition

By LISA TURNER

North Shore City's proposed \$1 million cut in community grants has sparked a 1500-signature petition.

Members of more than 150 Shore community groups have signed the petition, calling for council funding to stay the same for the 1993-4 year.

The council's draft annual plan proposes halving grants to community organisations from \$2.5 million to \$1.3 million.

Organised by the North Shore Council of Community and Social Services, an umbrella group for welfare organisations, the petition is part of a submission by the group on the draft plan.

The group's executive officer, Catherine McClintock, says the council currently spends \$389,820 a year on social service community groups — .007% of the proposed rate income for the city or about \$2.50 a head of population.

"It's a lot lower than other councils around the country of the same size."

In the submission, Mrs McClintock says cutting funding to community houses and community development is ignoring the reality of social problems such as health and unemployment.

"The gap between the haves and have-nots is probably wider now than at any other time, and continues to widen."

Submissions on the draft annual plan will be heard at the end of this month.

Presenting the petition protesting Council cuts from the community grants budget.

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A huge achievement during Catherine's time at De Paul House was the completion of a \$3 million re-build project that included a registered childcare centre, an education centre and three new housing units. Catherine was also chair of the Waitakere Community Law Centre from 2012 to 2014.

Catherine sees that the issues of poverty and homelessness in the 21st century have not gone away. The rising cost of buying property in Auckland, the escalating cost of renting properties, plus the issue of a warrant of fitness for rental accommodation and debates over social housing, all mean that the community sector continues to play a crucial role; a role where those at the grassroots still need to advocate for this basic human right to decent housing. Communities will continue to have to work with local government to safeguard the needs of those who face a housing crisis.

I think it will always be a problem for successive governments, because the Shore is somewhere where people want to live.

¹ *History of North Shore Community and Social Services Inc. 1974 – 2014*, Auckland, ANCAD, 2014

² *Far From Fixed?* North Shore Community and Social Services Inc., July, 1992

³ *New Zealand Herald*, 8 July, 1995

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