



I have been privileged to have had the opportunity to live not one but many lives. Each with its own challenge, each with its own rewards.

# Ewen Derrick

Ewen believed in seeking justice for the oppressed by walking alongside those in need and working for positive change in solidarity with the marginalised. He didn't hold back when it came to confronting the structures and ideologies that maintain wealth and power over others. His learned wisdom about the practice of community development, and his passion for social justice influenced generations of social work students.

Northcote Borough Council employed Ewen as their first community advisor in 1981. He was, in fact, the first community advisor on the North Shore, and became well-known and well-respected for his level-headedness and commitment to social justice. Across his entire career in community development, Ewen served on 19 community group executives or governing boards, and chaired seven of these. He built many networks with community workers and services and held an important role in the growth of community development practice on the North Shore. His experiences and reflections were published in a book, *Community Development & Social Change*.

Ewen was born on the North Shore in 1929, the third of six children. His family lived in Shakespeare Road, Milford and briefly in Devonport, and he attended Sacred Heart College before entering a Catholic seminary in Mosgiel (Southland) in the late 1940s. During the 1960s he worked as a parish priest in New Zealand, with Corpus Christi in ministry overseas, and as

a religious tutor in the United Kingdom. On his return to New Zealand, Ewen was appointed Director of Religious Education for the Catholic Diocese of Auckland and established two education centres, one in Auckland and one in Hamilton. It was while doing this work that he met Rita. In 1976 he left the ministry, and in 1978 Rita and Ewen were married. Ewen was officially 'defrocked' (laicisation) the same year and no longer able to give ministry through the Catholic Church.

*I imagine it would be very difficult for people to understand what a frightening and isolating step it was to leave aside the official priesthood. Forty-eight years old and without any marketable professional skills, little money and no home. Entering into the new and very close relationship of marriage. Those priests whom you considered your friends, the priests with whom you had lived as a student for over seven years and had later shared an active ministry with, never called by to see me in our flat.*

Only two priests stayed in contact and remained good friends: Fathers Terry Dibble, and Con Kiernan. The local priest in Milford never visited the couple, and Ewen took the view that some in the church must have thought he was *'beyond saving'*.

*As a priest I was my mother's pride and joy. There was no greater gift that an Irish mother could make to God than the gift of a son to the church as a priest. In telling her of my decision to leave the priesthood and to marry I learnt a truly valuable lesson of the depths of true love and an understanding heart. Her initial response was, 'Ewen, on the day of my judgement I wanted to be able to stand before the Lord and say, "I had a son who was a priest."' The only reply I could offer was to say that maybe the Lord would be even more pleased if she could stand before him and say she had a son who at least tried to be honest.*

In 1976 Terry Dibble pointed Ewen in the direction of the Ponsonby Work Cooperative where unemployed men were working on community improvement schemes, in contract to local councils. One such contract was with the Takapuna City Council to revamp the beachside park area and construct a beach front stone wall. The scheme involved about 15 men. Ewen took on the roles of supervisor, foreman, negotiator and mediator. The group formed a small charitable trust called Totara Trust to assist the workers to develop their own strengths, skills and leadership. *It was vital I did not create another dependency by seeing, or using, them as subjects to be acted upon or 'helped', rather than subjects in their own right, and eventually in control of their own lives and situations.* Ewen, too, was learning what it meant to be unemployed and to take control because, even though he was working with this team, he wasn't paid and it took a while for him to sign on for the unemployment benefit. In the meantime, the workers held a whip round to raise some funds for him.

Ewen's involvement with the Ponsonby Work Cooperative led to a very close relationship with various community organisations

within the inner city which provided a supportive home, and continuing care, for at-risk and disadvantaged young people. He was approached by Bill Buxton from the Department of Internal Affairs and asked if he would accept a role as fieldworker in the wider Auckland area for the growing number of work cooperatives and trusts that were emerging at that time.

*I saw this as a good opportunity. It would be a new challenge and would allow me to work with the unemployed on a broader front. The time had also arrived when it was important that I moved away from the Totara Trust.*

One exciting aspect of the new job was that there were no *'strings attached'*. He was encouraged to write his own job description. Yet again, it was an unpaid position unless he could find another agency in the community which would administer a grant from Internal Affairs to pay him. The directors of the Inter-Church Trade and Industrial Mission (ITIM), under the leadership of Rev. Richard Randerson and John Pasley, did just this.

A good deal of his time was spent working with gangs, such as Black Power, Headhunters, Stormtroopers, the Mongrel Mob, and the King Cobras. *They were the main unemployed and keen to set up work cooperatives for themselves. Ewen recognised that to counter widely held negative attitudes there was a need for closer mediation between the community and government departments, local councils and business. This was vital to create a wider community understanding of the lived experiences and aspirations of those in gangs.*

Through this work he developed a close association with detached youth workers across Auckland, who were funded by the Department of Internal Affairs. They were called *'detached'* as they worked with at-risk young people from gangs, as well as street kids and young people who didn't particularly belong to any accepted

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group or organisation. *At this time, it began to be acknowledged that it was important for Māori social workers to work with Māori youth and, similarly, that perhaps young women would prefer to work with a female social worker. They requested me to assist them in ongoing training and supervision. It was also important for them to have a person who had the time and skills to mediate on their behalf with government departments and community groups, local councils who also acted as their employers.* In 1983, Ewen resigned from this role so that Māori youth workers could become involved.

In 1982, while still active in youth work, Ewen had also been involved with establishing the Church and Community Coalition, the aim of which was to support work at the coalface in the community, particularly work that did not meet funding criteria set by government or local councils. The coalition was comprised of the National Commission on Evangelisation, the National Council of Churches, the Church and Society Commission, the Ecumenical Secretariat on Development, and the Justice and Development Commission. It gave out a few grants but mostly guided groups working with marginalised people in the community towards opportunities for working in collaboration on cooperative projects, in areas of alternative employment, housing and education.

After his time with the detached youth workers, Ewen felt that he needed to move on from working at the frontline. A part-time position (ten hours a week) for a lecturer in youth and community work was advertised by the Social Work Unit at the Auckland College of Education. *Here was an opportunity to share my experience and assist in the development of workers who wished to broaden their horizons and develop their skills in social and community work.*

The council encouraged my endeavours to work with and alongside those in the community who were disadvantaged.

Ewen found that most of the theory was based on English or American models of social work delivery. *There was very little reference to any Aotearoa models of effort to develop endemic approaches. The students themselves were aware of the gap between theory and practice.*

The College recognised this concern and Ewen was asked to carry out a survey among community groups as to the effectiveness of the course and what changes were necessary. The result was the establishment of both Māori and Pacific units within the course for the specific purpose of seeking culturally appropriate responses to the needs and aspirations of Māori and Pacific peoples.

Ewen felt that, for his own credibility, it was important to keep in touch with the grassroots, or *'the community of need'*, while lecturing at the College and also at Corpus Christi College. *I was fortunate enough to be able to do this by undertaking a part-time position as community advisor for the Northcote Borough Council.*

He was particularly interested in this position because, when working with the detached youth workers, he had been staggered by the number of at-risk youth who came from a large state house area hidden away behind the Northcote shopping centre. He wanted to put his energies into bringing the community, business and local government sectors closer together, to work cooperatively for the betterment of their community. A support group was established at Onepoto Primary School because Ewen felt that school principal Merle Donnell was forward looking and supportive of the initiative. The working group eventually became an incorporated society known as Onepoto Awhina. One of the society's main objectives was to assist members to identify their own needs and interests, and to recognise that they had resources to meet these needs.





*Ewen receiving Civic Award from Mayor George Wood and Deputy Mayor, Dianne Hale, North Shore City Council, 2001*

The Awhina employed a community worker and a youth worker. A community house was established with a crèche, an after-school programme, adult education programmes, and a drop-in centre. There were cultural groups, and classes in tikanga Māori. All the programmes grew out of the needs identified by the community. *The Awhina was an attempt to implement a model of community development searching out answers with the people themselves as to their social, educational, employment and health needs.*

Ewen remembered the Northcote Borough Council being very supportive of this approach. *The Council encouraged my endeavours to work with and alongside those in the community who were disadvantaged.*

The Council offered Ewen the full-time position of community advisor, and at about the same time, he was also offered a senior lecturing post at the College of Education. He chose to work with the Council and resigned from the College. In 1990, after a protracted debate, North Shore City Council voted to establish a separate department concerned with community development. Ewen was appointed manager. *I was thrilled at the opportunity offered me, at sixty years of age when most people at the time would have been either 'downsized' or asked to retire.*

There were five community advisors in the new department: one each for arts and culture, housing for the elderly, community halls, community houses, and youth unemployment. Ewen worked hard to establish a central team for the entirety of the North Shore. He wanted to avoid sectional or parochial interests or *'the demands of local community boards.'* The team worked on developing policies across all five areas of concern. Each advisor took responsibility for a geographical area which came under the local community boards, and was able to provide some Council-budgeted resources to the community.

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that make life worth living  
and the struggle worthwhile.

*I found this new challenge exciting yet very demanding. To prepare and administer a multi-million dollar budget and master the bureaucratic and political processes in order that [the] outcomes of our department would benefit the less privileged in the community, called on all my skills and initiative. Without good teamwork, the progress [that] was made would not have been possible.*

The team developed the necessary policies in less than 24 months. Community achievements included: greater support for preschools and te kohanga reo, upgrading of community houses and crèche facilities, the establishment of the Employment Resource Centre, a Restart programme for the unemployed, a Disability Advisory Group, and contributions to the 'Healthy City'

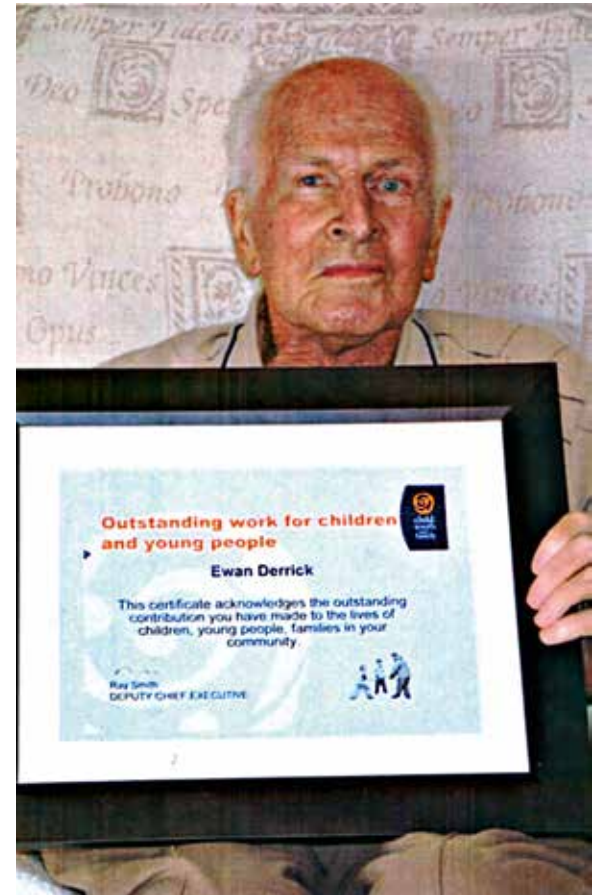
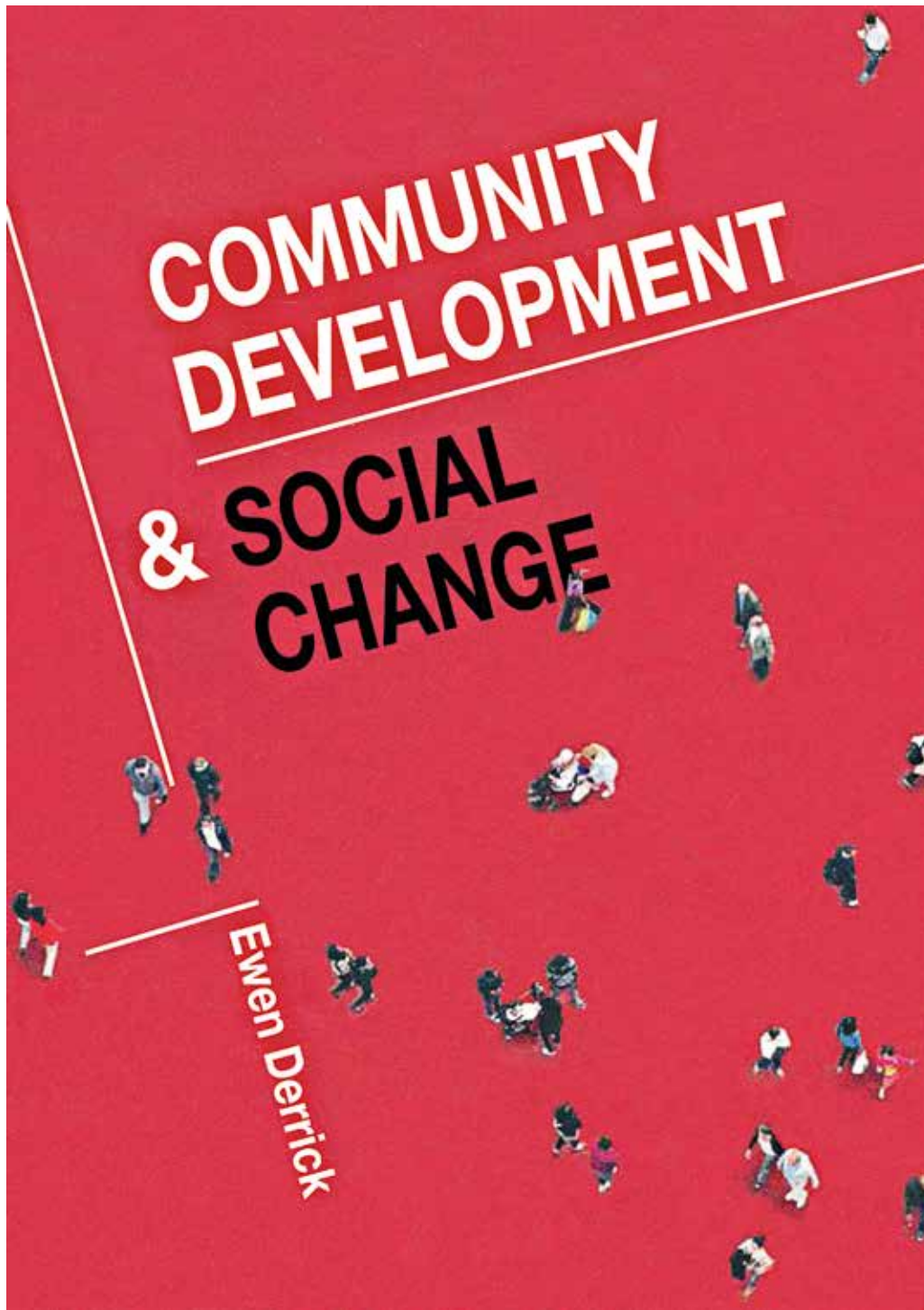
strategy. Close working relationships were also being developed with Te Ropu Arahi, Te Runanga O Te Raki Pae Whenua, and Awataha Marae.

*The progress we made in the department was hard to believe. The future looked promising, when suddenly things began to change. The politicians were being accused of overspending by some vociferous ratepayers. In order to keep down rates the administration began to look at ways of cutting back on spending. As so often happens, the first step was to cut back on staffing levels.*

Councillors Jack Hinton and Jan O'Connor were vocal at the time, opposing these cutbacks. Ewen recalled at the time Jan O'Connor saying, 'I'm really upset because I believe we are playing with people's lives.' Ewen refused to promote the Council justification of why his team had to be downsized. As a consequence he was, in his own words, 'sacked'.

*When I was sacked from Council I was given a Bartman button by my team [featuring the cartoon character Bart Simpson]. Enshrined on the button was the phrase 'Avenger of Evil'. I was not very successful but I tried, and that must always be more than half the battle. It is those small recognitions that make life worth living and*





ABOVE: *Ewen in 2006, with his award acknowledging his outstanding contributions with children, young people and families in the community*

LEFT: *Ewen's memoirs: Community Development and Social Change (often referred to as The Awakening). The book is a reflection on his own personal experiences of community development work, and became prescribed reading for students studying social work at Massey University, AUT and Auckland College of Education*

*the struggle worthwhile.* Ewen was the only manager to be sacked at the time.

In his enforced retirement he continued to be involved in community activities, including the Kauri Trust (supporting disadvantaged youth), North Harbour Employment Resource Centre, North Shore Mental Health Accommodation Society, North Shore Community and Social Services (life member), North Shore Age Concern, National Board of Age Concern NZ, Awataha Marae, Auckland District Council of Social Services (ADCOSS), North Shore COGS committee, Te Waka Kainga (youth accommodation), Auckland Māori Community Centre, Arohanui Inc., Citizens' Mutual Aid, Ngati Arohanui, Onepoto Awhina, Raeburn House, and the Disability Information Service and Advisory Committee (DISAC).

Ewen's work in the community has been acknowledged with several awards. In 2001 he received a Civic Award from North Shore City Council, presented by Mayor George Wood. In 2002, he received the Queen's Service Order, (QSO) for services to the community, the Age Concern Senior Achievers Regional Award, silver recipient, and a lifetime certificate from Age Concern in recognition of his many years of valued service at the local and national level. In 2006, he received a certificate from Child, Youth and Family acknowledging an outstanding contribution made to the lives of children, young people and their families in the community.

In partnership with Terry Gosset, Ewen compiled and wrote a procedural training resource for community organisations which ADCOSS published. Any profit made from the sale of the resources was to go to supporting unemployed youth.

*If there is any cancer in our society then I believe that cancer to be unemployment. Employment gives people an opportunity for personal growth as well as remuneration. If a young person has no work, they have no real direction. I have been privileged to have had the opportunity to live not one but many lives. Each with its own*

*challenge, each with its own rewards. I am humbled that I have been so privileged and thankful. It is this realisation, together with a need for self-fulfilment, that has driven me to continue to work in small ways to open up a world of possibilities to others less fortunate. These same insights demand that I continue to oppose and challenge those systems and structures that make economics a priority, and which crush and dehumanise people.*

In May 2003, Ewen was diagnosed with multiple myeloma (bone cancer). He decided then to write his memoirs and *Community Development & Social Change* (often referred to as *The Awakening*). The latter is a reflection on his own personal experiences of community development work, and became prescribed reading for students studying social work at Massey University, AUT and Auckland College of Education.

Ewen died in February 2008.

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