



# Sally Cargill

For twenty five years, Sally's work as community coordinator at the Bays Community Centre in Browns Bay, has focused on building a sense of community through organising activities and events that appeal to every sector of the East Coast Bays community. Sally knows that *you can find fabulous community development in the most impoverished community, and facilities and wealth mean little when people are looking out for each other and feel like they belong to a community. That's all you need.* Networking with other organisations has been an integral part of her success.

The eldest of three children, Sally grew up in Whangarei, attending Whangarei Girls' High School before going to Victoria University in Wellington to study languages and linguistics. Graduating in 1972 with a Bachelor of Arts, Sally then began work with her boyfriend in the food industry in Wellington, catering for hotels as well as for weddings and events, and running a coffee bar and a licensed restaurant.

In 1976, the couple married and they then moved to Auckland in 1980; Sally was newly pregnant. The couple had two children. In 1983, when her daughter was a week old, the family moved to Browns Bay on the North Shore. While she loved the area and living by the beach, she was isolated at home. Her Plunket nurse advised her to find some other young mothers to talk to. That was when Sally found Playcentre. *I wandered into Mairangi Bay Playcentre and the people there welcomed me, and that became my second home. I got terribly involved in Playcentre, and was there pretty much five days a week.*

However, her self-confidence then received a blow with the breakdown of her marriage.

Sally enrolled in a number of parent education courses and, as a volunteer committee member at the Mairangi Bay Playcentre, she also became a member of the National Playcentre Federation executive committee. She came into her own. At the time, Sally recognised that in smaller communities with few tangible resources, such as playgrounds, 'natural community development' happened *because we all know each other. But in bigger places it takes more effort.* Playcentre also provided her with a community of friends who were very loyal at this time when she needed support.

Sally then represented Playcentre at network meetings organised by North Shore Council of Social Services (NSCSS). She got to know Catherine McClintock very well and, on the direction of the executive committee, the pair worked together on a number of campaigns. One that Sally particularly remembers



*Sally Cargill, 1991 (Auckland Council Archives Reference: AUC 2012 290)*

was against the expectation that community work should be done by volunteers. *There was an ad in the North Shore Times for a manager for the Birkdale Beach Haven Community Project which said: Paid hours 20 hours a week and 20 voluntary hours a week. I rang Catherine. We had been talking a lot about valuing people working in community organisations, and that was the first time Catherine and I went on the offensive.* They called meetings and publicised the issue in newsletters and newspapers because they felt that community work did not register as *worthwhile work*. The pair also ran workshops, held a family violence summit, and a parents' rights forum, in the 1990s.

*Catherine and I worked really well together. We thought along the same lines.* Sally became an executive member of NSCSS in 1994. Being on the executive committee meant attending monthly meetings and contributing to submissions at North Shore City Council's annual plan hearings.

During her time on the NSCSS executive committee, Sally was a member of the working party that set up the North Shore Resource Centre, which is still operating in Wairau Road. The centre recycles donated resources to community groups. She was also on the committee when NSCSS produced the *Far From Fixed* reports demonstrating the effects of the 1990 Government economic package on North Shore communities. *The reports were a really good resource and it really kicked some people's butts and gave a lot of credibility to our submissions.*

The same year she became involved with NSCSS, Sally also began to look for paid work. She saw an advertisement for the position of community coordinator for East Coast Bays. The job description explained that the coordinator would set up a community house in Browns Bay, ascertain the needs of the people of the East Coast Bays, and provide services to meet those needs; they would also work with youth. *I just couldn't believe there was a job written for me; it was perfect and it was part-time.*



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Sally started in February 1991 working 30 hours a week, which meant that she was able to fit it in with her children's school hours. She still appreciates the flexibility of her hours of work. From the moment she was employed in this role, she began creating scrapbooks documenting the centre's activities. *Whenever I see anything about East Coast Bays in a newspaper I cut it out. I've got several volumes now.*

The establishment of the East Coast Bays community house began when Ann Hartley was mayor of North Shore City. Ann encouraged communities to set up community houses across the Shore. The Community Board, the public nurse, the local police constable, and others had already formed a steering committee in the East Coast Bays area. After Sally's appointment as community coordinator, she was asked to find a venue for the house. In 1992, space became available in the former East Coast Bays council building in Glen Road, Browns Bay, and the house was established there. The house later changed to being called a 'community centre'; similarly, Sally was originally called the 'community worker' but changed her title to community coordinator, which better reflected her work as an organiser and facilitator.

When Sally began, she said that the only thing in her job description which was *out of my comfort zone* was working with youth. At the time there had been a series of parties held by young people in the Bays that had got out of hand; the police had been called and arrests made. Sally instituted a survey, undertaken by a Massey University graduate, to find out what local youth wanted. They said they were bored and wanted a youth centre where they could 'hang out'.

Sally then approached North Shore City Council for support and funding, and applied for other sources of philanthropic funding for a youth centre. *But the kids hadn't told the researcher that they wanted a youth centre, but they*

wanted no adult supervision. They wanted to be able to drink and smoke, play loud music and party, and what we were providing wasn't what they had wanted. So we had two years of hell with the youth centre trying to make it work. At that point I thought, 'Why are we putting all this money and resources into these kids who are not getting any benefit?' Sally was blamed by the community for any bad behaviour by young people in Browns Bay. I got sick of constantly having to justify things, and in the end I thought, 'It's all too hard!' They were abusing our good will, so we started putting more energy into doing things like babysitting courses for teenagers, defensive driving courses, and supporting other groups like the churches that were doing fantastic youth programmes. The centre has since run school holiday programmes, after-school care, and has preschool events on weekday mornings.

On another occasion, a group of former South Africans living on the North Shore, who were not always made to feel welcome because of their former country's earlier apartheid regime, approached Sally and said that they would like to showcase their culture to New Zealanders. An annual 'Cairo to Cape Town' festival was then created, with the first being held in March 2003. In recent years around 20,000 people have come to eat African food, listen to African music, buy African crafts, and watch dancers from all over Africa. *And that all happened because people from South Africa wanted to show their culture in a positive light. It's just been fantastic, so when people come to me with these ideas, generally, we'll give it a go.*

There have always been English classes at the community centre. Sally recalls that initially these were for Chinese and Korean immigrants. The tutor, Louise Dudding, soon realised that, as well as English language, people wanted to learn about New Zealand culture, so she began cooking classes. The classes were very popular

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and, as a result, the centre started the 'International Friendship Club' in 1993. It still meets every week for morning tea, and attracts a mixture of immigrants and New Zealanders.

The East Coast Bays Community Project has always approached community development *by bringing the community together. Community development happens when people meet and interact with each other*, says Sally. As a result, the organised events build *fantastic community cohesion, making people feel good about where they live, making people feel as if they belong, and making people able to say, 'I live in East Coast Bays and it's a fabulous place to live.'*

The area that the community centre services stretches from Okura to Campbells Bay, but activities tend to be focused in Browns Bay because that is where the centre is physically located. It is also home to the Citizens Advice Bureau, Plunket and the Auckland Council service centre. It is a busy place. In one week, around three thousand people will use the space for various activities. Next door is the leisure centre and the library, with a senior citizens meeting space and a crèche. *We're all around this village green and it's just the most amazing setting for community development to happen. When we're having our teddy bears picnic, the librarian comes over and reads stories to the kids.* Sally reports to the Hibiscus and Bays Local Board, which provides most of the funding to run the community centre and also has its meetings in the same building.

Sally now lives in Silverdale, which has some advantages over living in the area where she works. She says that, formerly, she'd be in a queue at the bank, or getting mail from her letterbox, and passers-by would always have an issue to discuss. Now she has a bit of space and can switch off when she goes home each night. She still loves her work and hopes to continue it *as long as the funds keep coming, and as long as my legs keep walking.*

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