

Is Anyone Helping?

By James Smith

It seems an almost daily occurrence in our neighbourhoods. Someone is either bashed, beaten, attacked, assaulted, raped, robbed, stabbed, shot or killed. Often the driving force is drugs or alcohol, and it is worse if expressed from behind the wheel of a lethal modified racer. Road rage is a name that has taken the media's fancy. Neighbours argue and hassle over minor issues so that we have "Neighbours from Hell" on our TV screens. Was life ever so complicated?

Families are under threat. The government seems confused over what a family is... what was that about Arthur and Martha? Sometimes one is inclined to wonder whatever happened to marriage (between a man and a woman). The internet is ready to invade innocent unsupervised brain space with brain dulling games and pornography. Schools are pressured to hand out condoms to teens prior to the end of the school ball. Why do parents (even solo parents or caregivers) not know where their children are so much of the time? Families are pressured by advertising, into unmanageable debt.

Work takes an increasing slice of our time. It is no longer 9.00 am to 5.00 pm — when you add in travel time, it is often 7.30 am to 6.00 pm, ten and a half hours of work every day, if not more.

Some churches even seem confused about right and wrong.

In this article I want to pay tribute to individuals and organisations who are trying to make a difference for good in our New Zealand communities. It will not be an exclusive list so please do not feel bad if your friend or organisation is not mentioned.

Ian and Mary Grant have been running *Parents Inc* (formerly *Parenting with Confidence*) for some years. Their work includes holding seminars for struggling parents with information about bringing up girls and boys successfully. They also speak to High Schools about the evils of drugs, pre-marital sex, and encourage a positive attitude to life. Reading material is produced to back up what they say. The whole focus of their work tends to counteract the evils described at the beginning of this article. In addition they do answer people's questions. Ian has written a book on

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A helping hand: Teams of trained Drug-Arm staff go out into the city streets of NZ's largest cities until the small hours of the morning in street vans, offering whatever care or practical help they can.

teens, *The White Water Rafting Years*, and they appeared on *Close Up* with Susan Wood last year. They often speak on *Radio Rhema* and are quoted in other media outlets.

The *Churches Education Commission* sounds like an edifice of an organisation, but it works away in the background helping in two major areas of children's lives. The first is training and placing volunteer teachers in schools to impart values and ethics to our primary school children -- a programme known as *Bible in Schools*. The second involves training and placing chaplains in schools, who will listen to children's problems and help them figure out what they should do. In a world where it seems nobody has time to spend with children this service is a great benefit. It is also available to everyone in the school community.

Another non-profit organisation doing its bit for the community is *Children's Bible Ministries*. CBM provides training and equipping for helpers working with children, and runs fun camps for youth at its Raglan site, where values are taught as well as the provision of eye-opening activities.

Drug-Arm is a voluntary organisation that works on our city streets, doing all it can to help individuals and the community deal with problems caused by drug and alcohol abuse. These diligent and compassion-

ate volunteers provide community based educational programmes and support for the families of those caught up with drug and alcohol abuse. Teams of trained Drug-Arm staff go out into the city streets until the small hours of the morning in street vans, offering whatever care or practical help they can. It may be as simple as a hot cup of coffee or it might involve an ambulance alert. The vans are stocked with food, drinks, clothes, blankets, first aid and mobile phones.

Prison Fellowship contributes to a better world by reaching the spiritual needs of prisoners and their families and helping prisoners determine not to re-offend on release.

The Salvation Army is well known for its contribution to social service needs in the community. Other Church organisations have

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government contracts to provide specific needs in their communities.

Stepping Stone Trust, a mental health services provider run by the Spreydon Baptist Church has doubled its staff to 120 in the past year, and the number of client beds has risen by 60% in just 12 months! Spreydon Baptist Church is now one of the largest non-government providers of social services in Christchurch.

Budgeting services under various



Happy Family: A family rejoices outside their brand new home in Clendon, Auckland, one of five homes built during a 7-day "blitz build" by 200 Habitat for Humanity volunteers in March 2005. Habitat for Humanity has built 261 houses for needy NZ families in the past 12 years. Photo by John Cowan.

names offer help to people who find their income does not meet their expenditure. How often this happens! And how often the pressures of advertising, and the offers of 'easy' credit make it easier to get into financial trouble! With the help of trained voluntary budgeting counsellors, people are able to find hope, and a balanced budget.

Focus on the Family provides much information and help for families. *Habitat for Humanity* partners with families to house them decently. And who has not heard of *World Vision*? One final mention for Michael Jones who helps youth find purpose in New Lynn, in West Auckland.

These organisations are Christian or heavily staffed by Christians. There's just no way of measuring how much good Christians have contributed and continue to contribute daily to our society!

Maybe it seems like all the bases are covered, but the newspapers tell us every day that there is lots to do.

Is anyone helping? Yes, never forget all the people making a difference in these and other organisations. But when there is so much bad news every day there is always a need for more helpers.

What could you do?

If you would like more information on volunteering in your area, visit www.volunteernow.org.nz.

James Smith lives in West Auckland with his wife Jennie and 2 sons Jonathan (17) and Robert (14). He helps at Auckland Central Budgeting, Bible in Schools, and has worked with Drug Arm. He is qualified in banking and accounting, and can



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