

# Te Wāhi Āwhina

LEAD BUSINESS UNIT:  
CONNECTED COMMUNITIES,  
WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

FOCUS AREA:  
INCREASING COMMUNITY SPACES

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**Te Wāhi Āwhina is a community support base providing a safe, centrally located space where anyone can seek information, advice, and support to meet their needs.**

It is located on Manners Street, directly opposite Te Aro Park – a site of interest when thinking about safety in the city. In the past, the Te Aro area, notably the park, has been known to host some challenging behaviours.

Te Wāhi Āwhina was set up in this area to improve accessibility of key services for those in the community including residents, businesses, social support services, members of the street community, rough sleepers, tourists, and commuters.

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## Te Wāhi Āwhina Service Seekers

In the first year open, TWĀ has supported 1,404 service requests, the majority of which are requests for housing (35%) from individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Amongst the most requested support services are requests for housing, mental health and wellbeing, employment, physical health and fitness.

The space is staffed by two Kaiāwhina from the Wellington City Council (WCC) Connected Communities team and Te Wāhi Āwhina's partner agencies. Two staff members must be onsite when open to meet safety requirements.

Hosting and working in collaboration with other social agencies are key to meeting our outcomes. Work and Income (MSD) and Salvation Army Outreach are the two main partner agencies who have a presence at Te Wahi Awhina during the week to deliver services directly to those in need. Other partner agencies that we work with regularly include Downtown City Mission (DCM), Community Law, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Wellington City Mission, Women's Homelessness Trust Te Whare Nuku Noa, and The Needle Exchange.

Kaiāwhina and partners provide a safe and welcoming environment for people to be heard, to think through their options and to facilitate connection to relevant support agencies. The base also provides a capable guardian function for eyes on the park, connecting with the CCTV and Hāpai Āke teams as well NZ Police. The presence of the support base contributes to local businesses gaining confidence, experiencing fewer issues, and feeling more positive about the area.

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**Te Wāhi Āwhina can make meaningful change happen faster through its ability to create a welcoming space and collaborate across the social support sector.**

Multiple organisations often mobilise to bring a solution together for visiting service seekers. Many service seekers visit in a state of confusion, hopelessness, or frustration and are given the opportunity to work through us to access something they need, and feel would otherwise be out of reach.

Having partner agencies on site mean that they can provide in-demand services directly to service seekers.

For example, one of the most requested support services is for help to understand information from Work and Income or help to access Work and Income Services. Due to demand, it can take weeks to be seen by a case manager when you book in the main WINZ offices, and phone wait times are often over an hour – service seekers who might not be able to prioritise booking an appointment and stick to it, can instead visit Te Wāhi Āwhina on a Tuesday or Thursday to get advice directly from one of the case managers here. Both service seekers and case manager partners have commented on the difference this environment provides – a more laid back and inviting space where service seekers feel more supported to get the advice and recommendations they need.

Building and maintaining relationships with operational teams in surrounding support organisations means Te Wāhi Āwhina can accurately make service seeker referrals to suitable services with efficiency. This minimises risk of the client being passed around several agencies and service seekers before losing the energy or motivation to work through the systems in place to get the support they need. Systems are not always intuitive so having that information ready to encourage a service seeker to engage is vital. Part of this is understanding the processes of each support service as well as shared priorities to best collaborate, create buy-in and work with the willing and those with capacity.

Having a space that is not guarded by security personnel and is bright and inviting with comfortable seating gives an informal, community environment meaning people can be comfortable and not feel policed or pressured to have to present in an overly formal or reserved manner. This can help set up a positive and open interaction between the service seeker and staff.



Outside the inner-city community support base on Manners Street, opposite Te Aro Park

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**The main challenge at Te Wāhi Āwhina is the lack of first responder services for mental health and wellbeing needs of the community.**

In general, there is a lack of support services for those who are neurodiverse, those who experience some form of mental health challenge or those who may struggle to access services in systems that were created for people who are adept at social interactions. Although a large proportion of service seekers have lived experience with the above, the majority will choose not to identify with any such markers due to unhelpful treatment they've received from organisations in the past when disclosing that information. At TWĀ service seekers are encouraged to take an approach they are comfortable with and kaiāwhina will do their best to support it.

Staff are supported to receive health, safety, and wellbeing training for mental health first aid, de-escalation, and emergency needs assessment. There is the elevated probability in this space that one might experience frustrations, outward manifestations of mental health and/or addiction struggles and a variety of interactions that can trigger this. Receiving tools that help staff build capability to respond to several needs without judgement whilst identifying potential risks and maintaining safety of all involved, including themselves, has been key to the success of this operation.

However, boundaries are key for both the service seeker and staff member to have a safe interaction. At times this means identifying when the best thing is to step back and acknowledge not having the tools or mandate to support. We rely on other services to be able to refer to.