



A numbers game: the search for a place to call home in Queenstown Lakes

By Poppie Johnson

Queenstown is a stunning place to live, but that doesn't mean it's an easy place to call home. In a nation where housing solutions are spiralling out of control pretty much everywhere, the Queenstown Lakes district holds the dubious honour of being the hardest place to get a foot on the ladder. It's also the birthplace of the most innovative, effective, and far-sighted solutions to the housing problem.

Meet the Queenstown Lakes Community Housing Trust.

Working with national and local government, the Trust has put 265 households into secure housing over the last 16 years and has the ambitious target of 1000 more households by 2038. They're thinking big. And they have to. This is a crisis that isn't going away.

With tourists flooding back into the country and post-Covid rampant growth evident across the district, the Trust's annual report paints a picture of contrasts. On one hand, there's a 30% increase in the waiting list, representing over 1000 households--that's about 3000 people or 6% of the district's population. Each one of those people is a resident who qualifies, a family needing to house their children, seniors who have lived here their entire lives, and long-term workers who do not have stable housing. Teachers, nurses, builders, managers; the people who keep the town ticking over are all in need of somewhere to rest their heads for the night. The increase is attributed to various external factors, including policy changes and the rise in short-term lets, which have severely impacted the region's housing availability.

Yet conversely, QLCHT has never been more successful. The last financial year shows evident growth with a 35% increase in net assets to \$45.7m and over 100 homes currently under construction. "That couldn't be achieved without the support of QLDC, our funding partners, and developers who have contributed land and cash through the inclusionary housing process," says Board Chair Richard Thomas. It marks a notable shift by the trust towards large-scale construction projects and maximising different housing funding stream opportunities.

Thomas put his hand up to lead the board on both practical and idealistic reasons. "It's about helping to solve the problem," he says. "The opportunity to give back by getting involved at a governance level in a community housing initiative is one I couldn't overlook." As a businessman he understands the need for

a stable workforce, and as long-term resident he couldn't overlook the factors driving home ownership out of reach for families who want to call the district home.

Julie Scott, Chief Executive of the Trust, has been at the management helm for 16 years and is a regular face in the media, explaining the challenges faced by the district, the law of unintended consequences, and why the problem just keeps getting bigger. Thomas believes that's an important component of the work; consistent leadership, strong governance, and management that has adapted and grown with the district to create real change and influence the way that the country looks at community housing. Without stable housing, there is no community.

That message is getting through.

Looking to a future of significant growth and expansion, QLCHT is transparent about all aspects of their journey - a process that Thomas believes has been a key part of their success.

"QLCHT is recognised nationally as a leader within the community housing provider space....and the team are regularly invited to present at industry forums and conferences. Being open in sharing the journey, what worked well and what hasn't, has helped us to build real credibility in the sector, with our partners and stakeholders. The more intellectual property and stories of success we can share nationally with other community housing providers and stakeholders, the better the outcomes for all New Zealand communities struggling with housing affordability."

Groundbreaking projects like the Tewa Banks development in Arrowtown, and partnerships outlined in the Joint Housing Action Plan and with Te Matapihi (peak body for Māori housing) exemplify the Trust's commitment to sustainable and community-centric housing solutions. They're inventive. They're agile. And they're leading the way across the country.

None of this success is by chance. Thomas leads a board with a diverse skill set who are committed to making lasting change, yet he is well aware of the challenges; "Property development and construction can be high risk, so it's about having the right skillset around the table to minimise and mitigate that, and achieve great outcomes for the community. Building and construction, property law, financing, partnerships and a deep level of understanding community needs are all critical components."

For Thomas and Scott, their greatest fear is that the housing crisis will become normalised and that the community will become less outspoken. They are constantly focused on seizing opportunities, on growing, and on adapting to the constantly changing landscape.

With long-serving trustee Jo Conroy stepping down this year, QLCHT is on the lookout for a new Board member with finance-specific skills and a desire to help make a difference in their community.

"Project financing, investment, cashflow forecasting, debt management, traditional funding, and alternative funding, all have significance. To deliver on our goal of assisting 1000 households into secure housing by 2038, we're going to need to canvas all options. We'll need to be as creative and innovative as possible. So, if you're up for that challenge, and have some of those skills and experience, give us a call."

QLCHT is successful precisely because it is about more than just building houses; it's about creating communities, fostering stability, and nurturing a sense of belonging among those who call the region home.

QLCHTs Annual Report can be found on their [website](#).