

# Habitat brings Joy to local family

## Owning their own home is life changing

“This is our house mum.” These were the words spoken to Joy Hemopo by her 12 year old daughter Ngahuaia as they looked at a miracle – their very own home in Pukekohe, built with love by Habitat for Humanity, assisted by scores of willing volunteers. For Joy, Ngahuaia and 14 year old Johnnie, to be given the keys to their own house in 2004 was a miracle – “It was life changing. It was hope, followed by gratitude when we heard we met the requirements, and to see our own home being built. It was more than Christmas. Sometimes I thought ‘Lord, I know I said something to you and hoped that I would get it, and now my prayers are answered, I am so grateful. I want to show my gratitude by helping anyone I can.’ It showed my children that it is achievable to own your own home and gave them a good start.”

Joy was born and bred in Pukekohe, returning from six years living in Papakura to help her family set up an arts and crafts enterprise. The concept of people building for the people was totally natural to Joy and her parents – her father Timi Hemopo was chairman of the Nga Hau E Wha Marae, which was built by the Maori community. Sadly, Timi passed away before Joy’s house was completed, but he was right there with her mother Ngahuaia to help Joy as she worked to fulfil the 500 hours labour required for recipients of Habitat homes. Their time spent looking after the children counted toward the total labour hours.

Joy helped to build her neighbour’s Habitat house before work started on her own and is looking forward to helping out when the new Habitat housing project starts next year in Tuakau. “I was there most of the time my house was being built. From day one, I was involved, digging, painting, making cups of tea – hands on anywhere to help the process. It was fun and the people were all so nice. It was wonderful to be involved. Habitat had the plans ready and I had to pick the colours. Just getting the colours I wanted was awesome.”

Many lives have been changed by people working to build their own homes. One of Habitat’s staunchest supporters Robert Kohi was introduced to Habitat projects while doing community work and went on to play a major role as a volunteer for Habitat. The enthusiasm he felt for the concept and the skills he learnt turned his life around. Other stories like Robert’s show that Habitat for Humanity is so much more than house builders. Joy was so inspired by her experience, she went ‘back to school’ and trained as a massage therapist.

Over 100 people assisted in building Joy’s home, from visiting groups of young people to local corporate teams and individual volunteers.

“It’s been a journey – moving from one rented house to another. There were no Housing Corporation houses available and every time we moved into a rented house, I was nervous. I thought ‘this is not our house, it belongs to someone else.’ When we got our own, we were rapt.”

The gang – Joy with brother Steven, sister Hine, site supervisor Brian Stewart and volunteers



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