

Manawatū Tenants' Union

Housing Today:

2021 Annual Report

Presented 25 June 2021



"He whare āhuru, he oranga tāngata, he oranga whānau."

"Comfortable housing, healthy people, healthy families."

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About MTU

MTU is a registered charity, incorporated society, and MSD Accredited Social Services Provider that has advocated for tenants in the Manawatū since the 1980's, based out of Palmerston North. We have a voluntary governance committee, and work to provide free tenant advice and advocacy, education, and advocate for improved tenant rights and outcomes alongside partners in the community.

Acknowledgements

We first acknowledge our staff and volunteers;

Committee:

Lawrence O'Halloran (Chair)

Izzy Pat (Secretary)

Leigh Basile (Treasurer)

Hai Trinh (Outgoing/resigned treasurer)

Jean Hera

Kathleen Stevens

Placement Students:

Katrina Fleming

Catharyn Kane

Naomi Ogg

Katrina Fleming

Staff and Volunteers:

Ben Schmidt (Coordinator)

Daniel Ryland (Administrator and Analyst)

Jeremy Parry (Data Entry)

Supervision:

Kerry Howe, RSW

We also acknowledge our members, allies, supporters over the year.

We also thank our funders, who support our work and enable us to operate:

COGS

Lotteries

MSD

MBIE

Thomas Macarthy

JR MacKenzie

Catholic Diocesan Office

Eastern and Central

PNCC Strategic Priority Grants

Small Grants

Private donation/s

We have also received support from:

- Inspirenet, for sponsoring free internet
- Public Services Association, for providing office space when needed

Introduction

Tēnā koutou,

Housing is more than an asset and a place to sleep; it is central to life and should be a fundamental human right as encapsulated in the following whakatauki:

Ko te whare e hanga te tangata, The whare (whare tangata) builds the people and
ko te tangata e hangaia e te whare. the people build the whare.

MTU continues to receive increasing tenant contacts as we see no strong indicators of the housing crisis improving. We have been encouraged by positive local government action on housing in Palmerston North, but this remains a national issue that requires dramatically more investment and priority from the government.

As tenants, we live in communities. MTU seeks to incorporate this into the way we work, and you will notice we talk more about “organising” and “communities” in this report than previously; engaging with diverse people and creating change requires organised people power that begins with deep and meaningful community relationships.

This annual report briefly discusses some of the achievements and challenges over the last 12 months, and acknowledges the individuals, communities, and funders who are crucial to our mahi.

Lastly, MTU needs you; if you want to be more involved in what we do, or you want to continue the kōrero that this report starts, we welcome the opportunity to speak further with you.

Ngā mihi nui,

The MTU Team

Internal

In late 2020, the Coordinator's hours were increased to 37.5 hours weekly, enabling a greater focus and capacity for operations. As Administrator and Analyst, Daniel has continued to play an invaluable role for the organisation. Jeremy Parry, Data Entry Volunteer, has become a key part of MTU and recently attended Volunteer Recognition Awards. Having two 200 Level Massey Social Work Students has been a valuable experience for MTU, with feedback comments from students including:

- "I wish I had known the information about tenancy rights I know now ... and can understand why it is so important to continue to keep creating awareness about MTU"
- "I would highly recommend future students consider placement with the MTU. I had the opportunity to learn a wide range of skills"
- "Housing is the thing that connects all people ... Housing is a right"

The Committee has brought in some new members, and continues to seek new members. In addition to business as usual, the Committee has worked through reviewing policies and a review of the Constitution.

With thanks to volunteers, we have continued to archive and digitise MTU historical documents.

We have also continued to work on making the office a more welcoming and tidy space.

Education

Due to COVID-19, education work with former refugees decreased but allowed for more time to reflect on the education that we deliver. MTU delivered 14 specific education events and seminars over FY 20/21.

Both social work students have assisted with developing education materials and resources for MTU staff/volunteers and former refugees.



MTU has also been active in developing the *Aratohu* Tenant Advocacy Online resource, and was contracted to write a section on the Tenancy Tribunal.

Education seminars have therefore decreased slightly, but this occurred alongside a shift towards an “organising approach” in our community work.

We have also tried some new approaches, such as a MUSA “drop-in” event, and are looking to repeat online rights education with our national partners.

Story: FIRST Union

Workers and youth are often disengaged from organisations and support services like MTU due to work and life pressures. As a part of MTU exploring an organising approach, we arranged a meeting with a FIRST Union Organiser leading to MTU speaking with Union members about tenant rights and issues, civic engagement, and organising in traditionally hard to reach communities. The Organiser wrote that *“the audience were well engaged by the content & presentation”*, and has continued to work with MTU.

Organising and Outreach

Local

MTU is a part of a wider community, and we seek to work that way with a range of community engagement and activities.

We continue to host our show “Flating Today” on Manawatū People’s Radio, and have had been quoted in the Manawatū Standard multiple times throughout the year.

In 2020 at All Saints Church, with the support of Manawatū People’s Radio, we hosted a very popular public “Renters Vote 2020: Candidate Q+A” event with local MP candidates featuring tenants sharing their experiences and challenging candidates on policy positions.

With support of funding from J R McKenie, we are exploring a community organising approach to our work, and are on track to complete 50 relational meetings with community leaders and people across faith, union, community and cultural, groups in the first half of 2021.

This has led to many positive outcomes and opportunities, such as speaking to the Interfaith Group, FIRST Union Delegates, PSA Māori Staff, working more with the Muslim Community, strengthening our relationship with the Rainbow community, andmore.

We were excited to see some strong wins for tenants from PNCC and MDC, which MTU was active in organising, submitting, and campaigning on. This has included:

- An increase in community funding for PNCC and MDC
- Preventing an increase in Council Social Housing Tenant Rents
- Increased funding for Council Social Housing

Story: Proposed PNCC Rent Increase

Following notice that PNCC was moving to increase rents for some social housing tenants, and that this was going to an uncertain vote, MTU worked with a social housing tenant to arrange media coverage of the issue, organised an open letter with community groups, lobbied councillors individually, and organised a small silent protest on the day of the vote in Council Chambers to oppose the increase. The motion passed unanimously, and the work of MTU was mentioned in Councillor discussion and statements on the issue.

To ensure this did not happen again, MTU worked with organisations to encourage submissions on the Long Term Plan recommending subsidised rents be no more than 25% of tenant income. This was proposed by Councillors as an amendment, and again passed unanimously.

A Councillor wrote to MTU that *“The value of an effective submission from an organisation such as MTU should not be underestimated. Thank you for your advocacy and enabling us to make changes for the better.”*



National

Nationally, MTU has been involved with the National Tenant's Advocate Network, campaigning for raising benefits, and been a crucial part of establishing the "Aotearoa Action on Renting and State Housing Group", which is a broad based coalition of faith, union, community and social service groups and organisations looking to organise around renting issues where we have common ground.

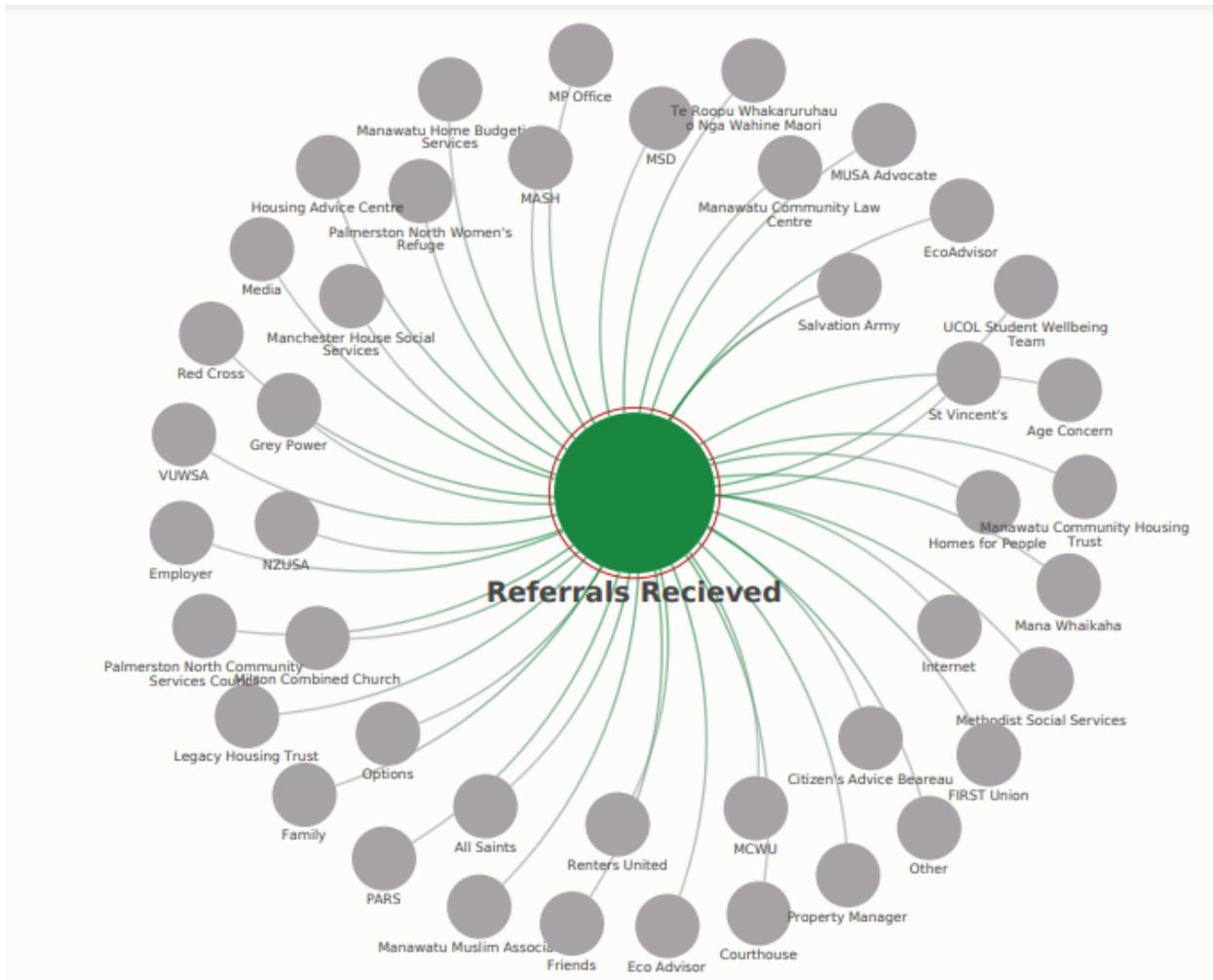
We have seen some increased national media coverage, including stuff and the Dominion Post, RNZ, publishing an Op-Ed in the Spinoff, interview on Breakfast Show, and interview on a Podcast.

MTU has also been active in lobbying and campaigning for improved renters rights, in particular getting family violence protections included in the Residential Tenancies Act.



Advocacy

Advocacy continues to be the majority of our work, and the following data report provides more information. Tenants continue to struggle, and we are concerned by the number of contacts involving rent increases in excess of \$100 per week, usually lawfully. The lack of housing, especially public housing, severely impacts tenants and options. We have MoU's with the Housing Advice Centre, Manawatū Home Budgeting Services, MAIN, and the National Tenants Advocate Network. We are excited to begin implementing a case management software system after receiving funding support from MSD. We receive referrals from a wide range of sources, although predominantly past experience and word of mouth, some of which are outlined in the following image:



We refer to and work closely with community organisations, whose work is invaluable. In particular, the Housing Advice Centre and PNCC Eco Advisor Service.

Below are some brief, highly anonymised stories showing some of the ways we successfully work with tenants.

Story: Relational meeting leading to advocacy engagement

Following a meeting with a community leader in Palmerston North as a part of exploring an organising approach, the leader referred someone in their community to MTU for support with a

tenancy issue. MTU has continued to work with the tenant and leader, and is looking to also conduct education work and further develop the relationship with this community.

Story: Tenancy tribunal support to prevent eviction

After their landlord had applied to the Tenancy Tribunal to terminate their tenancy, a tenant contacted MTU for help. Negotiation was unsuccessful, so MTU worked with the tenant to prepare for the Tribunal case, including familiarisation with the process, identifying witnesses and evidence. After supporting the tenant on the day at the hearing, the landlord's application was dismissed and the tenant remained in the property.

Story: working with whanau and other organisations

Following termination of their tenancy, a then homeless tenant's whanau member contacted MTU for help with regaining the bond and addressing issues during the tenancy. MTU identified that other support would be beneficial, and worked to refer the tenant to other support agencies, with public housing applications, and advocated with the landlord for return of the bond. The bond was largely returned, the tenant entered into secure housing, and following discussion with the tenant of options for Tribunal action did not take the matter further. The tenant has since contacted MTU about people they know experiencing housing issues.

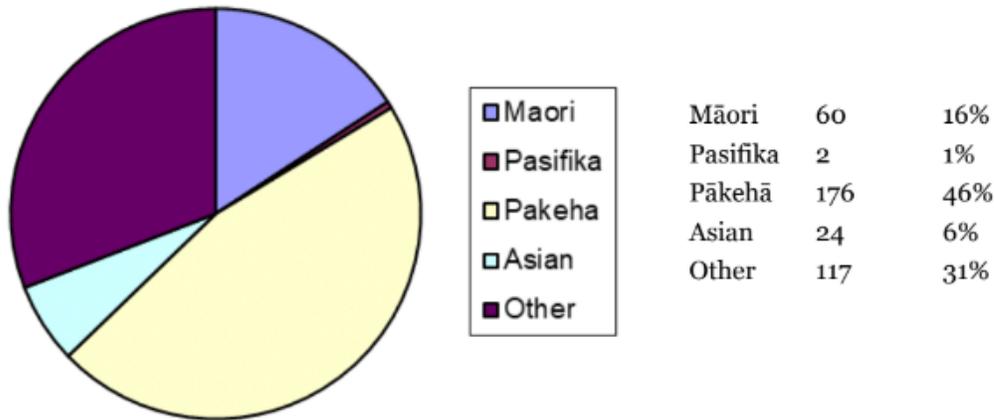
Data Report

Compilation and analysis by Daniel Ryland, Administrator and Analyst

1st July 2020 to 31st May 2021

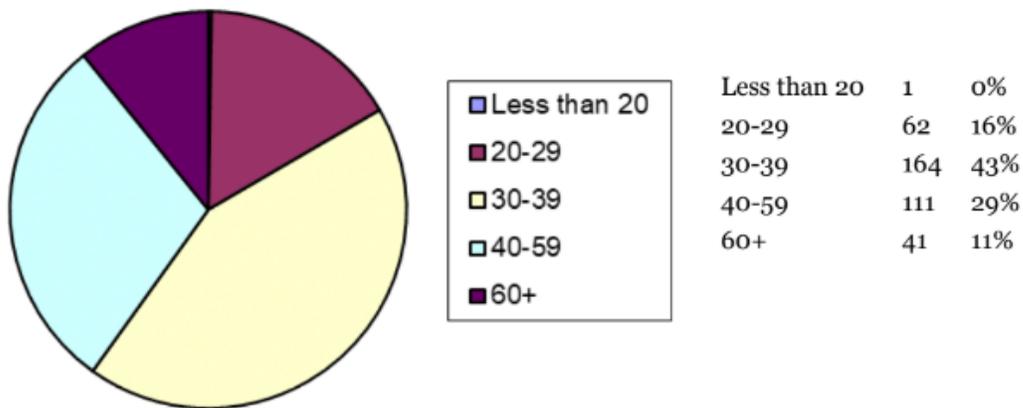
2310 contacts, with 379 recorded clients.

Ethnicity



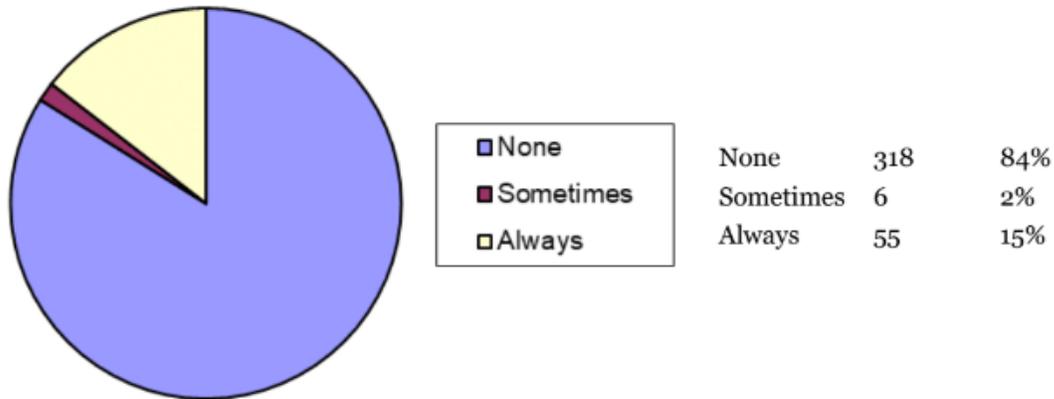
Ethnicities of those using our services continue to remain relatively stable. We have been seeing more tenants favouring 'Other,' which may be hiding some of the disproportionate impact on minorities.

Age



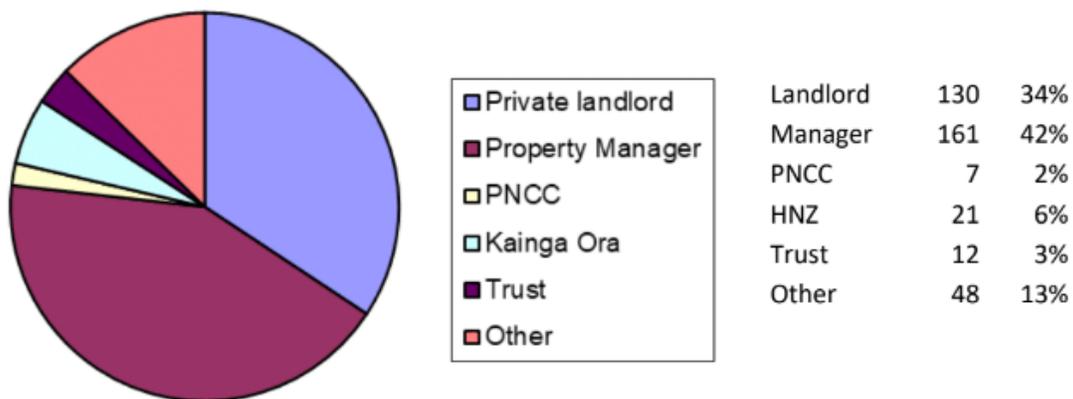
The age bands of tenants using our services remain similar to previous years of the housing crisis. This includes a higher proportion of older tenants experiencing impacts such as rising rents, quiet enjoyment, and tenancy terminations.

Children



We continue to see a decline in the number of tenants with children using our services. While it is likely to be an outcome of the older age range, but there is also likely to be underreporting.

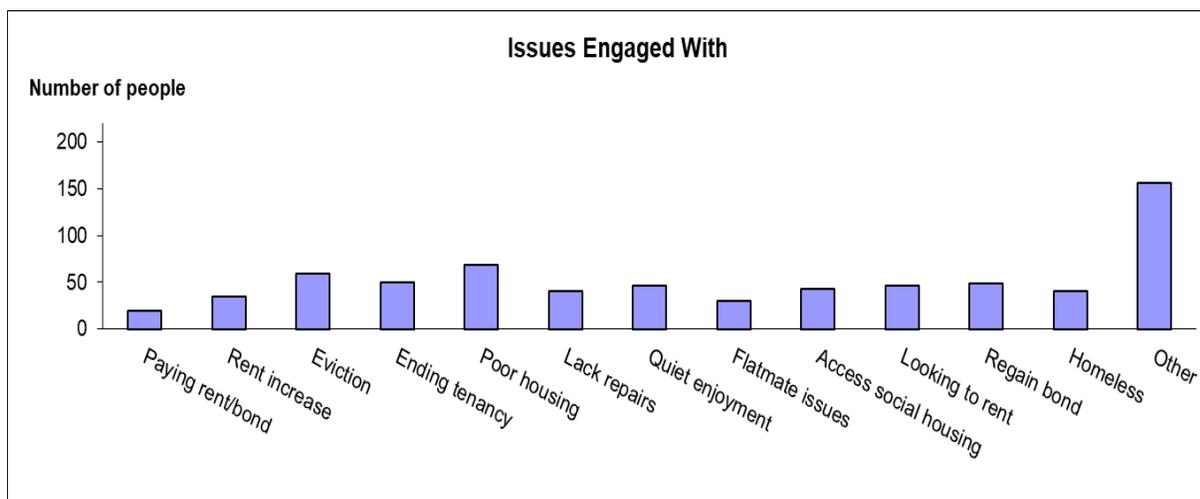
Ownership of Property



We still have a significant number of homeless using our services this year, although the numbers have declined. This is likely due to more flexibility and growth in social housing provision, in addition to less pressing on alternative services compared to last year. There has also been a substantial increase in the proportion of issues with property managers, likely due to the need for improving housing standards and tenancy legislation change.

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Issues



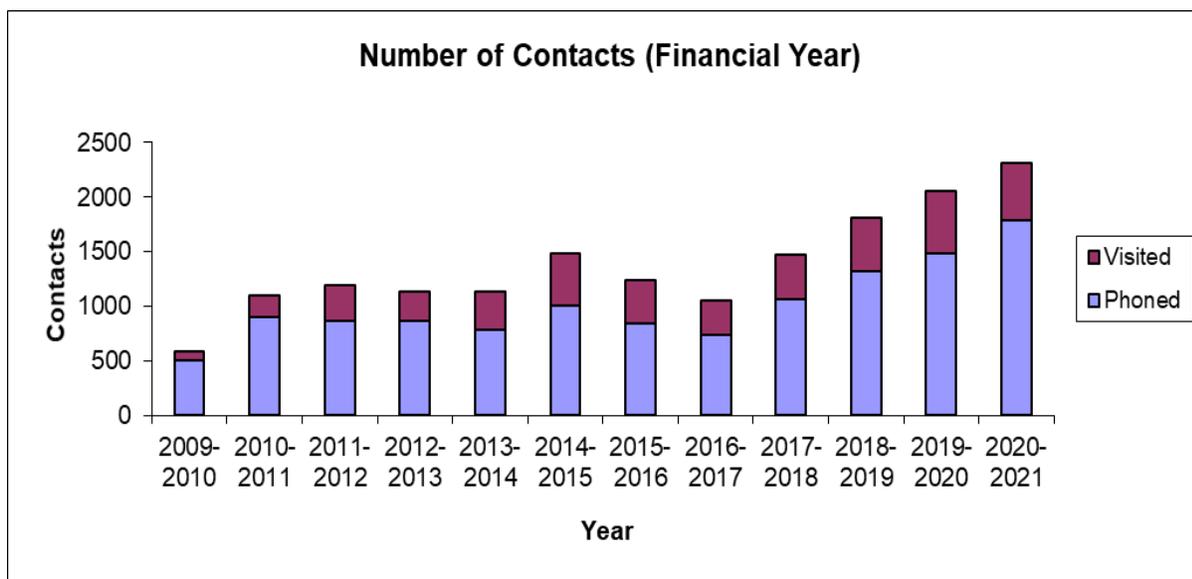
As with many of the recent years, the ongoing housing crisis continues to be a problem. The number of over all contacts has increased slightly, however the number of recorded tenants has reduced. This represents a greater intensity of engagement required in dealing with presented issues.

Tenants experiencing termination of tenancies remains consistently high. Some as landlords attempted to end tenancies before the new tenancy protections. We are thus unlikely to see improvements in security of tenure reflected in our data until next year. We have also seen a return of large rent increases as an issue. The number of tenants seeing us remain higher than traditionally, and these increases have often been over \$100 per week. Most of these remain within market rent, but rent has been increasing rapidly over the last few years. With the coming

implementation of the Healthy Homes Standards, greater attention has been spent on recognising the state of housing. This in turn has meant that more tenants have recognised these problems, and we have checked to ensure appropriate standards are in place.

For our service delivery, for completed cases we have been able to give relevant advice and information in 97% of cases, with 3% with tenancy issues that we are unable to help with. However, of provided feedback, a reported beneficial outcome has occurred in 90% of cases. The number of Tenancy Tribunal cases has remained lower than previous years at 17%. A portion of this is due to issues, such as rent increases, where there is no recourse to the Tribunal. All tenants who provide have provided feedback note that we have improved their capabilities and capacities to deal with tenancy issues.

Trends



We continue to see growth in the number of contacts each year. The complexity indicator of multiple issues has been steadily declining since 2019, as visible in the graph below. However, the issues that are present have involved more active and longer engagements. These have included supporting homelessness, negotiations between tenants and landlords, and in some cases site visits. The cost to tenants of these issues are significant, and can often drown out other concerns, or force acceptance due to fear of retaliation.

Get involved

If you want to be a member of MTU, or be involved in our mahi, contact

Ben Schmidt

MTU Coordinator

info@mtu.org.nz

027 5422 071

Find out more

You can also find out more and stay up to date with what we do by:

- Website: www.mtu.org.nz
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/manawatutenantsunion>
- Flatting Today MPR Show