

# Second census for rough sleepers

by Emma Page

In May there was a census. No one knocked on your door because the census team weren't counting people with doors – they were counting rough sleepers.

Rough sleepers are people living on the streets or dossing down in places not designed for sleeping.

The May 15 census, run by the Rough Sleepers Initiative, is the only one of its kind in New Zealand and this year's street count was the second of what the initiative hopes will be an annual occurrence.

Last year's count found 68 people sleeping rough in downtown Auckland and early indications from this year's results suggest numbers may be much higher – despite heavy rain on

the night of the census.

Wilf Holt, Crisis Care team leader at The Auckland City Mission, stresses that the census counts rough sleepers found on a given day and that anecdotal evidence indicates between 120 to 150 people may sleep rough in the city.

"There are as many if not more people in accommodation now as there were before – and yet we found more people on the streets," he says.

Results from the census will be used to highlight the issue of homelessness in Auckland and to help charitable agencies improve their services.

Peter Dobson, team co-ordinator of the Homeless Team, says as an objective measure, the results provide numbers to

hang a discussion off and help dispel some of the myths surrounding homelessness.

"The public's perception of homeless people is that they must be dangerous, inadequate, gamblers and alcoholics; that they smell and they've destroyed their lives. Actually the reverse is true. They're actually quite nice people and are very vulnerable."

Holt says rough sleepers are some of the most marginalised members of society and while he acknowledges some people choose the lifestyle, most end up in it through traumatic events or psychological disturbance.

Recognition of rough sleepers' individuality and culture were highlighted by the way the census was conducted.

Volunteers were told to explain to rough sleepers what they were doing, not to wake people if they were sleeping and to respect their space. For a lot of rough sleepers, their space, or possie, is their home.

While the situation is complex and there are no simple solutions, both Holt and Dobson agree long term support is the key to getting rough sleepers into accommodation and finding ways of supporting themselves.

"Planning a house is the easiest part. Building up people to live there and stay in that house is the challenge," says Dobson.

Long-term support involves helping people learn how to live in a house, pay their bills and deal with living in society – a process Holt estimates takes

three years to a lifetime.

One successful programme was the Interwork Scheme, run with Taskforce Green. Of the seven people in the scheme, five were rough sleepers. Five now have jobs, one is hopefully heading to university and one is unemployed.

Holt says he would like to see a greater commitment from society toward homeless people and that more funding from the city would be welcome.

Services for rough sleepers are offered by the Auckland City Mission, Salvation Army, Methodist, Baptist and other community-based groups, none of which receives funding from the Auckland City Council.

**It's rough living in the city – Page 20**

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**SLEEPING ROUGH:** Up to 150 people could be sleeping rough in Auckland.

## Free classes aim to get more licensed drivers on the road

by Tyler Jane Mitchel

Otara Health is holding free classes to help adults get their learners' licences.

The Government community-based health service, owned and run by Aucklanders, is this month continuing with its long-term scheme to increase the number of licensed drivers on the road.

Organiser Nita Ropata-Riki says while the courses are open to anyone over 16, young Maori and Pacific Island mothers are a particular target for the scheme.

She says the idea for the licensing course came to the 25-member team while they were hiring out baby seats to local mothers.

"We would ask people for



**LEARNER:** Helping mothers get their licence.

their licenses for identification purposes, and found a lot of

women didn't have them.

In particular we discovered a niche of Maori and Pacific Island mothers between 24 and 35 who had never even sat their learners' licenses. Then there were the many that had their learners' but had been sitting on them for years."

Ropata-Riki is concerned that women with small children are endangering them by driving without knowing the road rules.

She is also concerned that those driving around for years on their learners' are cheating themselves of employment opportunities as well as risking substantial fines from the law.

For registration or enquiries, call Carol or Nita at Otara Health on (09) 274 8355.

## So said the ed...

by editor Brigid Lynch

Make your editorial snappy, witty, not too wordy. Make it fit. Make it two hundred and ten words, to be precise.

It's the MC's spiel, the Oscar winner's rant and the golden handshake speech rolled into one.

First the welcome.

*Te Waha Nui* – "Big Mouth" – is the newspaper produced by AUT's third year and graduate diploma journalism students.

This is the first edition for 2005, pooling our stories, assignments and photos.

At times it felt like we were tackling an ambitious sewing project where all you can see is a bolt of fabric and nobody knows how the sewing machine works.

Notwithstanding, we hope you like what you see and come back for more later in the year.

Now for the part where I thank everyone, right down to the lovely barman who's going to be pouring the editorial team's

celebratory drinks when this baby has finally gone to bed.

Thanks to our classmates – keep those stories coming – and all the editing and design students who've put in the hard yards with red pens and furrowed brows.

Special thanks to our AUT tutors Allan, David and Deborah, proofreader Denise and David the photo maestro.

Enjoy – and keep an eye out for future editions of *Te Waha Nui*. We'll be shouting.