

Māngere East community action succeeds in on-licence objection

‘Nana Glenn’ McCutcheon is a lively, no-nonsense retired teacher-aide who has called Māngere East home for over 40 years.

Her neighbourhood, like many of South Auckland’s low-income areas, is inundated with liquor outlets, and its young, mainly Māori and Pacific community experiences high levels of alcohol-related harm.

After a bottle shop opened right outside the local high school, Glenn decided enough was enough. She joined forces with lawyer Grant Hewison and a handful of locals to push back against liquor licence applications in the area.

Grant remembers hearing about ‘Grace’s Place’, the ‘horrible pokie den’, at one of their earliest meetings. Glenn volunteered to object when the time came. Meanwhile, Grant began investigating the rules governing taverns.

What Grant discovered proved pivotal as, according to the law, “taverns primarily must be selling alcohol and food, not running pokie machines”. It was local knowledge that Grace’s Place made their money through people playing the pokie machines.

To confirm their suspicions, they went to Grace’s Place to have a look.

“I can still see it in my mind: walking in there and thinking ‘O.M.G. What a dive’,” says Glenn. “Your shoes actually stuck to the floor. It was disgusting. Oh, and the people... I felt sad for them. They’d been there all day by the look of it; that was their life. Gambling on pokies and horses”.

During their visit, they counted the number of people using the pokies and TAB, as well as the number drinking. Within ten minutes, Glenn knew their objection was worth a shot.

When the renewal notice finally popped up in August 2016, Grant made sure Glenn’s objection highlighted what she’d seen, and included a reference to relevant case law.

Due to Glenn’s sole objection the Alcohol Licensing Inspector went back to the venue for an additional visit. In the next two months the Inspector made another four trips to the venue and requested the company accounts. Her investigation uncovered ample evidence that gambling was the main source of income for Grace’s Place. As a result, she recommended that the renewal application be declined.

The Auckland District Licensing Committee (DLC) looked at all this evidence and they refused to grant the licence. The owner appealed the DLC decision, but it was upheld by the Alcohol Regulatory and Licensing Authority (ARLA). Glenn, Grant and the team had a reason to celebrate!

But then ... “I came over the bridge one day, and I saw a sign for ‘Hi Sport Bar’,” says Glenn. “I got on the phone to our team as soon as I walked in the door. I said: ‘She’s changed the

name!' And, of course, we went to the official records and found it... So we started the procedure all over again." [\[Image of Hi Sport Bar\]](#)

Facing another hearing was daunting, but this time there were seven other public objections. Very soon it became apparent that almost nothing except the name of the tavern had changed! This no doubt motivated the Police, the Medical Officer of Health and the Alcohol Licensing Inspector to oppose the new application.

"To get their licence, [the owners] knew they had to change. And they knew what they had to change, and they hadn't. They were still carrying on the way they were." says Glenn. [\[Images of DLC hearing\]](#).

The DLC wasn't impressed when presented with the 'former Grace's Place Māngere in disguise'. The new application was declined, another appeal to ARLA by the applicant failed and, when Grace's Place was reborn for a third time, it was as a \$2 shop. "At least if people are spending money there now, they might be buying something for their kids," Glenn says.

Glenn's top tips for others learnt from this experience:

Go to a hearing: "Take a friend. Even if you only go till lunch time. Go and have a listen." says Glenn.

Get legal advice: The DLC hearing is a court of law. The applicant will have lawyers acting for them. Glenn recommends starting with your local Community Law Centre.

Be Prepared: [ActionPoint](#) has a step-by-step guide to help you.

Work together: Through this experience Glenn and other locals eventually formed a group called Communities Against Alcohol Harm (CAAH). There are lots of groups and organisations around the country that are working together to enable people to engage with this process. Objections are more likely to succeed with "different people with different skills, throwing themselves into the mix" says Glenn. Read more on how to mobilise others [here](#).

Don't give up! Glenn and the team are still pushing back and working to reduce alcohol harm.

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