

KOHITĀTEA / JANUARY & HUI-TANGURU / FEBRUARY 2026

NEWTOWN NEWS

TŌ KOUTOU MAKAHINI HAPORI: MŌ
NEWTOWN, NĀ NGĀ TĀNGATA O NEWTOWN
YOUR COMMUNITY ZINE: FOR NEWTOWN, BY NEWTOWNERS



NĀ TE WHARE HAPORI O NGĀ PUNA WAIORA
BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE NEWTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

KIA ORA NEWTOWN

Ngā mihi o te tau hou Pākehā! Happy New Year!

Hope you've all been able to get some restful downtime or go on some exciting adventures (whichever is your preference) this summer. We here at Te Whare Hapori o ngā Puna Waiora / Newtown Community Centre are back and ready to hit the ground running for 2026. We're kicking the year off with a very special Newtown News here.

Our theme this issue is 'Sharing Our Stories' to acknowledge the importance of storytelling in sharing memories with one another and celebrating the vast varied lives in our communities. Everyone has a story to tell and our stories all weave together to form a community tapestry so much bigger than ourselves. Newtown is so rich with stories and here we have a small taste of all the stories out there.

Our Notorious Newtowner for this issue is our own Jane Patterson, if you would like to learn a little bit about our green-fingered Chair of the Board. Jude Douglas and Billy Murray reminisce on their memories of Newtown. Faiza Abukar shares a beautiful poem about what makes Newtown so special. Chris Rabey recalls some fascinating history about Newtown's old theatres. We see through the eyes of a silverbeet sapling growing in Kaicycle's māra. Francie from Free Fares updates us with what's on the agenda for 2026. And on the back page, our friendly neighborhood librarian recommends some local reads. Sprinkled throughout you'll find some photography of Newtown through the years that we found in the archives, thanks to {Suite} Gallery and Wellington City Libraries. And our striking front page photo of Colombo Street, taken by Kate Morris.

I hope these stories and memories inspire you to share your own and to seek out more. We can all do with reading, listening, learning and sharing more.

Aroha nui,
Edie Freeman

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SUPERGOOD

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Front cover image credit: photo of Colombo Street by Kate Morris

Notorious NEWBowner

Edie chats with Jane Patterson about her story, gardening & community

I'm sitting in the cozy front room of Jane's home with a delicious, homemade chocolate biscuit and a cup of coffee. Jane and her partner, Eileen, bought their whare back in 2004. She mentions that the original building plans date back to 1926. They live here with their elderly dog, Tess, and an even older cat, Dolly. Tess is out for a haircut but Dolly is curled up on the couch and I got a chance to bother her for some pats and chin scratches.



Jane was born and raised in Ōtepoti / Dunedin, her grandparents were born in Aotearoa and whānau hails originally from Scotland. She moved here to the big smoke after finishing university. She describes a very full and varied mix of jobs over the years. She has worked for the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation for 10 years and was also the manager for Democratic Services in Wellington City Council in the 90's while Fran Wilde was Mayor of Wellington. While working for the (now disestablished) Department of Trade & Industry, she took an opportunity to work a stint in Los Angeles as a trade diplomat.

After she moved back to Aotearoa in the 80's, she took up work as a self-employed gardener. Gardening is a passion of Jane's. When she's not walking the dog along the Newtown Town Belt, she can be found working in her māra. Their old lemon tree provides many lemons to Newtown Community Centre's community fridge. *"I love producing as much as I can out of a small area."*

Jane retired as soon as she could afford to and kept busy volunteering with many different community groups. She helped out in the gardens producing kai for the old Owhiro Bay soup kitchen, was a driver and a board member with the Cancer Society, volunteered with Newtown Budgeting and Advocacy Service and was the treasurer of Newtown Residents' Association. Jane took a shine to community mahi after retiring and getting involved. She's really appreciated getting to know people in her local community. This is what drew her to Te Whare Hapori o ngā Puna Waiora - Newtown Community Centre, where she decided to get involved and is now Chair of the Board.

"The one thing about people who live in Newtown is that they actively choose to live here and actively support its kaupapa. Once you've bedded down, you can't imagine living anywhere else."

MEMORIES OF NEWTOWN

JUDE DOUGLAS

I remember vividly coming to Newtown as a young child in the 1960s to visit my grandmother who lived in Constable St. We lived in Tauranga and my parents would load the car up with citrus fruit from our garden and bring it south for family but also to sell at the fruit shop which is now Jimmy's. This helped pay for the petrol down.



Wellington Zoo (1964)

Photo by Ans Westra. Courtesy of {Suite} Gallery

We'd leave before dawn – I remember my Dad cranking the engine of the old Morris Minor and filling hot water bottles to warm the motor so that it would start easier. We'd drive all day and arrive after dark – It was a 12 hour trip.

I was entranced with the women in saris which I'd never seen before, I remember my mother telling me to stop staring. I also recall going on a tram, you could sit on the outside seats and hold on to a leather strap. This would definitely not pass health and safety regs now. We went to the zoo where an ostrich poked its head through the fence and gobbled a large button off my mother's coat, watched the chimps' tea parties and climbed onto the howdah to ride the elephant Kamala. She knelt on the ground while we kids climbed on and then staggered to her feet and walked around. It felt quite high up and was quite a thrill.

Newtown was a buzzy, exciting place to visit in the 1960s but it's good that some things have changed! I'd love to bring back the trams though!

BILLY MURRAY

I can honestly say growing up in Newtown has had a significant impact on my life. Growing up in Hanson St flats as a kid I often wandered the streets of Hanson St and surrounds. One day I wandered into Wellington Indoor Sports Centre and it then became my second, maybe some might say, my first home. I got completely hooked on the place. I used to hang out there hoping teams would be short and they would ask me to fill in for them.

Billy the Kid they would call me. I spent almost all of my spare time (and some of my not so spare time) at this indoor cricket centre (no internet, no social media) just wanting & hoping I'd get to play indoor cricket. From the many thousands of hours spent hanging out there, I was fortunate enough to meet many amazing people that hold special places in my heart. I met my wife because of growing up in that indoor cricket centre. I've seen and been to places I would never have got to because of growing up in that indoor cricket centre. Almost all of my closest friends have come about as a result of time spent with them in that little indoor cricket centre in Newtown!



Hanson Court Flats (1980)

Photo by Charles Fearnley. Courtesy of Wellington City Libraries. Ref: 50003-1490

One of the truly amazing things we used to do as kids was spending sunny afternoons grass sledding down the hill at Macalister Park. Thinking back to those days, really does make me miss much simpler times. I really hope youngsters are still doing this.

Having gone to Berhampore Kindy, Berhampore primary and then SWIS, Newtown really does hold a special place in my heart. I consider myself Newtown born and bred (I was born in Wellington Hospital!). Now having the opportunity to do some work in Newtown which has allowed me to meet incredibly passionate members of the community is just so bucket filling.

I am so grateful to all of those in the community that work tirelessly to keep Newtown the wonderfully diverse and character filled place that it is!

KOHITĀTEA / JANUARY



Happening at

Te Whare Hapori o Ngā Puna Waiora
Newtown Community Centre cnr of Colombo & Rintoul St

Tai Chi for Beginners

Fri 16 Jan, 10am - 11.30am

Weekly every Friday. Keen to practice or learn more about tai chi? It's got heaps of health benefits for all ages. Learn the basic at these classes! Advanced classes on Tuesdays. Recommended donation of \$5

Newtown Tool Library

Sat 17 11am-1pm & Wed 21 Jan 5-7pm

Open every Saturday & Wednesday! Drop into the Newtown Tool Library to join up, borrow or return tools. For more info see bit.ly/newtowntoolibrary or contact them: newtown.tool.library@gmail.com

Learn to Lindy Hop

Tues 20 Jan, 7.45pm - 8.45pm

Weekly every Tuesday. Learn foundational rhythms, shapes & lead/follow concepts to get you swingin' out on the dance floor!

Learn more at:

sugarfootstomp.co.nz/classes

Free Soup Friday - first back for 2026!

Fri 16 Jan, 1pm - 2pm

Weekly every Friday. Come down to the community centre to get to know others in your community over a bowl of FREE hot soup (vegetarian/vegan available).

All welcome - come say hi & grab some kai!

Steady As You Go

Tues 20 Jan, 12pm - 1pm

Weekly every Tuesday. Classes designed to help Seniors maintain and build strength and flexibility. \$3 per class

Contact Age Concern for more details: acwellington.org/nz / (04) 499 6646.

Toastmasters

Tues 27 Jan, 7.30pm - 9.30pm

Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday. Develop Public Speaking & Leadership skills in a friendly, supportive environment. Meetings are free to attend as a visitor. Learn more at:

newtown.toastmastersclubs.org

Around Newtown and beyond!

Capoeira

Newtown Hall - 71 Daniell Street

Sat 24 Jan, 4pm - 5.30pm

Weekly on Saturdays. Capoeira angola classes for all. Music and movement.

More info email: Urcapoeiranz@gmail.com

NZ Freestyle Martial Arts Karate

Newtown Hall - 71 Daniell Street

Mon 26 Jan, 6.30pm - 8.30pm

Weekly on Mondays. Your friendly local karate club. Beginners welcome.

More info email: ric.burrows@gmail.com

Moonday Quiz Nights

Moon Bar, 167 Riddiford Street, Newtown

Mon 26 Jan, 7pm

Come flex your brain at Moon with quizmaster Young Gho\$. \$2 to play. Find more details here: bit.ly/moondayquiz

Great Big Waterfront Clean-Up

Wellington Museum, 3 Jervois Quay

Thurs 29 Jan, 12pm - 2.30pm

Roll up your sleeves & join to help clean up our waterfront and keep trash out of our harbour. Register: bit.ly/greatbigcleanup

What's the Happs!

Sign up to our fortnightly e-newsletter!
bit.ly/kiaoranewtown

HUI-TANGURU / FEBRUARY



Happening at

Te Whare Hapori o Ngā Puna Waiora
Newtown Community Centre cnr of Colombo & Rintoul St

Contact Dance Jams

Wed 4 Feb, 7.30pm - 9.30pm

Monthly on a Wednesday. Contact improv/dance. We start with some skill exercises then move into a jam. Please arrive on time, particularly if it's your first time. All welcome! \$10

Mahi Toi - Open Art Group

Tues 3 Feb, 1.30pm to 3pm

Monthly the 1st Tuesday. A place to connect and create! Make art and/or craft in our fancy dedicated art room at the Centre. Some kai and materials provided, bring your own project if you have one. FREE.

Astrology meetup

Sun 22 Feb, 2pm - 5pm

Monthly on the last Sunday. A gathering for Astrologers, Enthusiasts and the Astro-Curious. All welcome. There's a different presentation each month. \$20 entry.

More info contact: erikaegrant@gmail.com

Free Social Drama for ages 65+

Thurs 5 Feb, 10.30am to 12pm

Weekly every Thursday. Fun group sessions full of play, laughter, & connection. Step gently out of your comfort zone with Improv theatre games & exercises. More info contact Austin: austinharrisontheatre@gmail.com

Gong Bathing with Erika

Sun 15 Feb, 7pm - 8pm

Monthly on the 3rd Sunday. A gong bath sound therapy experience with resonant vibrations of gongs, designed to induce deep states of relaxation and calm. Tickets \$20
More info contact: erikaegrant@gmail.com

Wellington Fringe Festival

Fri 13 Feb to Sat 7 March

Check out some amazing Fringe shows here: Airhorn Fringe Fantasia, Floozy, Here Comes the Fencing Act 1979, Kissing Booth, Out of a Dark Wood, The Rocking Rainbows & Zach Mandeville Storytellers. bit.ly/nccfringe2026

Around Newtown and beyond!

Georgina Beyer - Walking Tour

Outside St Peters Church, 211 Willis St

Sun 1 Feb, 1pm

Join this 90-minute walking tour paying tribute to Georgina Beyer - visit locations that shaped her journey. Register: walktours.nz/

Alien Comedy - Monthly Stand Up

Moon Bar, 167 Riddiford Street, Newtown

Thurs 5 Feb, 8pm - 9.45pm

Like watching stand-up comedy, while enjoying pizza and beverages? Then Alien Comedy is for you! bit.ly/aliencomedy

Koha Yoga with Kevin

Newtown Hall - 71 Daniell Street

Wed 4 Feb, 7pm - 8pm

Gentle yoga class focusing on breathing & relaxing for relaxation & healthy sleep.

All welcome. bit.ly/newtownkohayoga

Rice Queens Lunar New Year Celebration

Ivy Bar & Cabaret, 63 Cuba Street, Te Aro

Sat 21 Feb, 10pm

A dazzling drag celebration honoring the power, artistry, and traditions of Asian performers! Tickets: bit.ly/ricequeens26

NEWTOWN IS THE EARTH'S HEAVEN

BY FAIZA ABUKAR

Newtown is the earth's heaven,
where strangers sit side by side,
a bowl of soup becomes a prayer,
and stories flow like rivers wide.

The library is a second home,
a safe embrace, a gentle light,
where knowledge heals, where hearts belong,
where day feels softer than the night.

The gardens bloom on every street,
with hands that give, not ask for more,
a gift of fruit, a gift of hope,
left freely at a neighbour's door.

The music rises — piano keys,
a guitar strummed with quiet grace,
each note reminding weary souls
that love still has a sacred place.

Newtown is no “bad suburb,”
it is the pulse, the heart, the song,
a living proof of what can grow
when communities are strong.

So let the media tell its tales,
we know the truth, we see, we live:
Newtown is the earth's heaven,
because it knows the power to give.

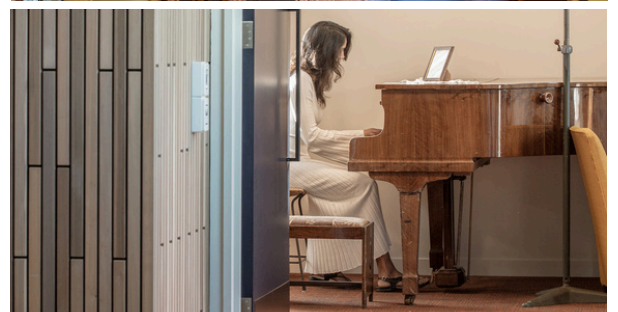


Photo credits: 1 & 2 - Kaibosh,
3 & 4 - Antonio Hernández & 5 - NCC

EARLY LOCAL THEATRES

BY CHRIS RABEY

The Ascot Theatre, still standing at the Constable / Riddiford corner, went into its opening week in December 1916, when it was called 'Our Theatre', converted from an L-shaped hotel when the suburb lost its liquor licence. There were 5pm and 7.45pm sessions, as well as daytime matinees. During one of the first, the film caught fire, so everybody got tickets for the next session.

The other Newtown theatre was the Rivoli, also on Riddiford Street opposite the Newtown School. This was first known as the 'Star', it showed the same films as the Kings Theatre on Dixon Street, the reels delivered by motorcycle between sessions.

St Thomas's Hall also showed films, the audience walking in behind the man cranking the handle to lift the curtain. Pictures then were about 20 minutes but all had that extra explosive potential.



Ascot Theatre (1974)

Photo by Ans Westra . Courtesy of {Suite} Gallery

Due to films catching fire, every cinema employed its own fireman, who could summon the brigade at a moment's notice. Admission charge for the theatres was ninepence for the dress circle and sixpence for the stalls. Children's prices were 6d & 3d. When the Ascot was still called Our Theatre, all films were silent, and six musicians provided the accompaniment. Sound films didn't arrive till 1930. While the conversion to sound took place, cinemagoers were able to view talking pictures at the Winter Show Buildings in John Street (now the Drama Centre).

The Rivoli continued to screen silent films till well after the Depression years, as people had little money, and the theatre offered very cheap seats. Due to the emergence of television in NZ; the Rivoli closed in 1965. The Ascot closed in 1976 with a short-lived reopening in 1981.

SILVERBEET'S STORY

Ko wai tēnei? I'm a silverbeet seedling growing at the Kaicycle Farm on Hospital Road. Last summer, my parent plant grew taller than all the others at the māra. I grew as a tiny seed from a flower, right at the top of my parent plant, and when I was pretty dry out at the end of summer, human hands carefully collected me, dried me in the sun and put me in a box, where I stayed dry & cosy over winter.

This October, I was brought out into the light by those same humans. I heard them talking about how seeds work, and how to plant me carefully at just the right depth - it's pretty bright out in the world, so it was a relief when I was gently placed into some soil in a growing tray and given a big drink of water. The conditions were perfect - the soil was so full of nutrients from local human food waste, it really spurred me on to get germinating!



By December, I burst up through the soil into the light and grew a few centimetres tall. Just as I was feeling a little constricted, more hands planted me out into the māra - what an amazing feeling. My roots reached down into the soil and felt the goodness and networks of fungi and microbes that had been building there for the last 10 years, thanks to the hard mahi of the humans above. I could feel my silverbeet siblings nearby, but also other plants, attracting bees and giving a mix of nutrients into the soil. I could feel the dampness of the awa - Ākau Tangi - which used to flow through this whenua and now is confined to a pipe, and the shade of Te Ranga a Hiwi above us, sheltering the māra. I could feel the old fertile soils of what was Hauwai - a Māori food growing area at the Basin Reserve, as well as the old, deep boggiess of Newtown, which used to be a swamp. Small hands pulled weeds out from around me, stopping them from hogging the goodness in the soil. I heard laughter and voices around me. I felt the sun, the wind, the rain and the hands and emotions of the people around me who are helping me to grow, who seem to get as much out of it as I do.

The next steps on my journey are to grow huge nutrient-filled leaves, and then be harvested and given to the humans at the Newtown Community Centre. They will use me to give nutrition to their community. Some of my siblings' seeds will be saved, and our story on this whenua will continue on and on. If you want to be a part of my story, check out kaicycle.org.nz/volunteer

2026, A BIG YEAR FOR FREE FARES



Kia ora Newtown, thanks for having me as the Activist in Residence at the Community Centre in 2025! It's been awesome to see folks at Friday soup, at Newtown Fest, at our May Film Screening of Bus Riders Union, at various local government election forums, at the centre and on the street.

Looking ahead to 2026, Free Fares are planning:

- to keep growing our Coalition - now over 100 organisations!
- a workshop at the wonderful Ōtaki Summer Camp. 16-19 Hānuere, otakisummercamp.com
- an open meeting for folks keen to get involved, 4:15pm Tues 27 January - email us for the link
- a Great Transport Forum
- a screenprinting working bee, 10:30am - 2pm, Tues 24 January, Newtown Hall, Daniel St. Nau mai haere mai, all good to learn on the day, please wear old clothes
- a stall at Newtown Fest
- an event as part of WCC's Climate Fest (late April - May)
- and more!

We call on central government to fund Free Fares on public transport for students, under 25s, Community Service Card holders and Total Mobility Card holders and their support people. We'd love for you to speak up for free fares, especially because 2026 is an election year. And please speak up for Total Mobility Cards as well - we want to see their funding expanded, great services for TMC holders across the country, and for them to guarantee free buses, ferries and trains everywhere, too.

Keep up to date with the Free Fares campaign on facebook.com/freefaresnz or instagram.com/freefares.nz. Or get in touch on freefaresnz@gmail.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Francie Mountier

Free Fares NZ National organising team member

2025 Activist in Residence, Newtown Community Centre

READING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: LOCAL AUTHORS & SETTINGS

BY LIZZIE YOUR LOCAL LIBRARIAN AT NEWTOWN LIBRARY

Newtown and its surrounding neighbourhoods are stacked with talented authors, many of whom are library regulars! We love being able to support our local authors and reading about our favourite neighbourhoods. Check out the list below featuring local authors, all of which can be found in Newtown Library!



- **I Am Not Esther by Fleur Beale** – A tried and true classic of New Zealand literature! A young girl's life is turned upside down when her mother leaves her with family members part of a strict religious group.
- **Terrier, Worrier: A Poem in Five Parts by Anna Jackson** – Weaving philosophy with the everyday happenings, this poetry book is a delight in language and thought.
- **Before Winter Ends by Khadro Mohamed** – the debut novel by our local poet (and beloved former Newtown Librarian), the novel follows Omar and his mother Asha, an exploration of grief and relationships.
- **Newtown Boy: A Young Chinese Boy's life in 1940s and 50s Wellington by Stan Chun** – One of 18 children, Stan recounts life as a migrant Chinese family living in Newtown with wit and humour.
- **Iris and Me by Phillipa Werry** – A poetic narrative of writer Iris Wilkinson and her global adventures.

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