

OUR COMMUNITY, OUR CHOICE?

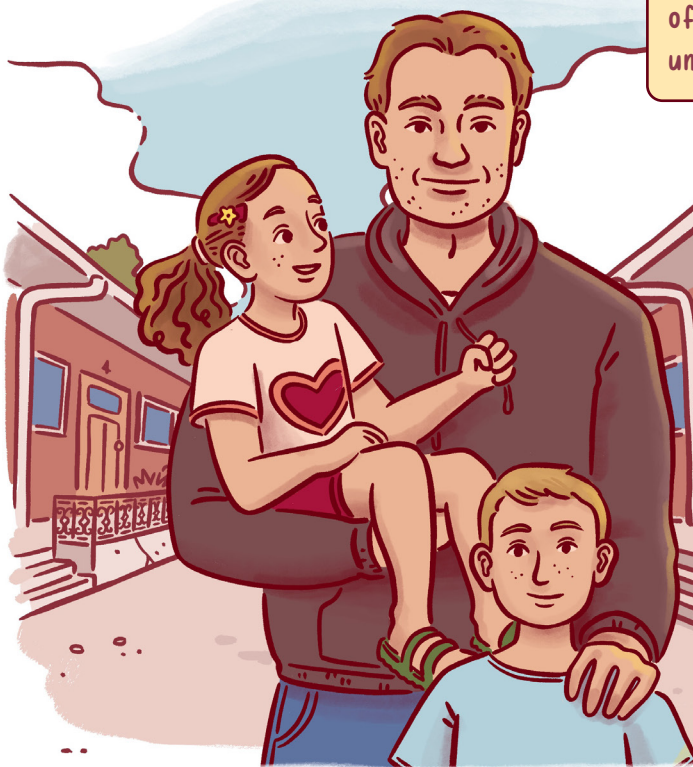
Based on research conducted by Massey University's SHORE & Whāriki Research Centre from 2018 - 2021 into Neighbourhood impacts of alcohol and alcohol licence decisions

Here's a neighbourhood, it's not rich, but new businesses are opening, and the park has been improved. The community has been working on making it a nicer place to live.



One thing holding them back is the impact of alcohol on the area. There's a big cheap bottle store at the shops that draws in a lot of drinkers.

Meet Quentin, a father of two, who lives in the units over the road.



Last night he was kept up by the noise of drunk people walking down the middle of the street.

He's sick of cleaning up broken glass in his driveway and is growing worried for his kids' safety.

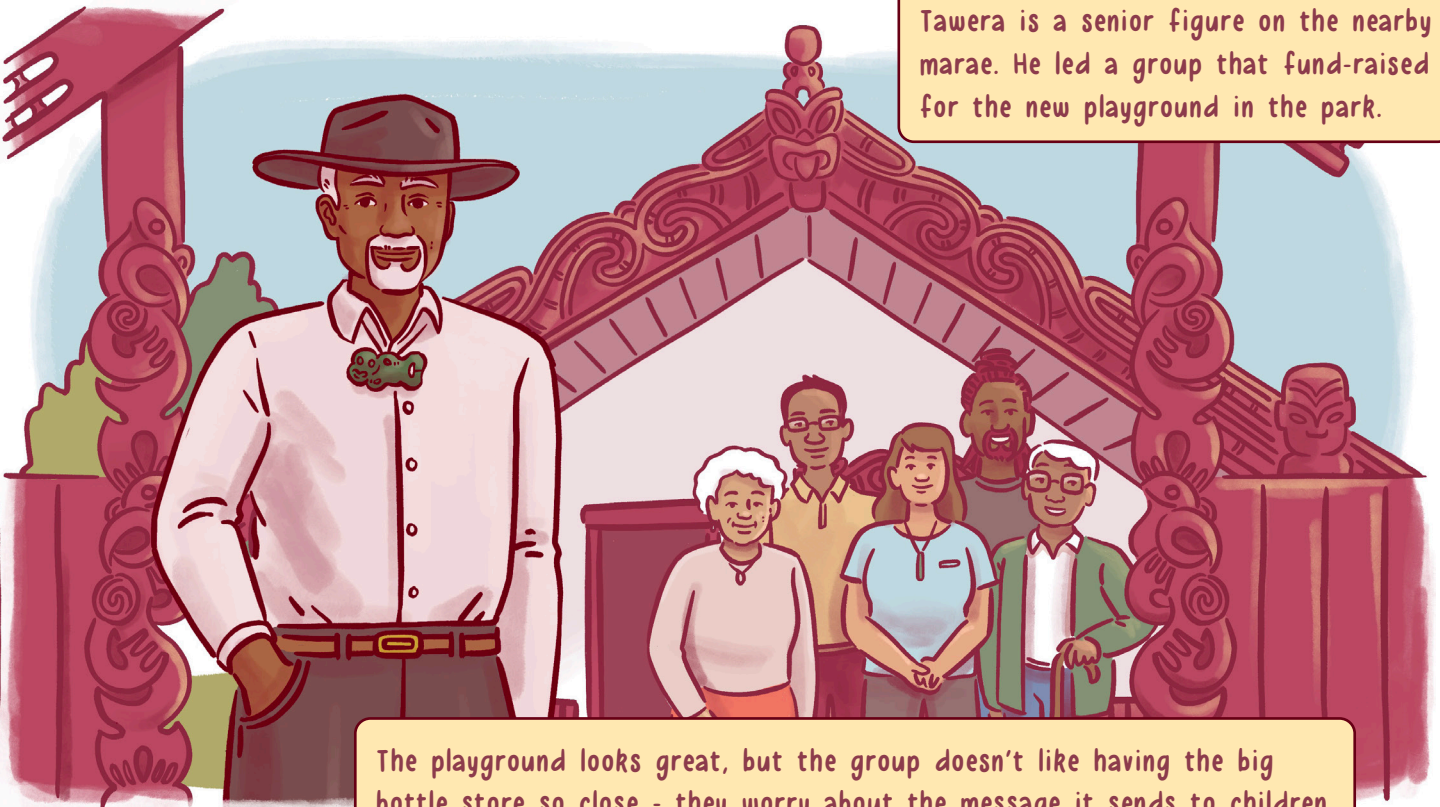
Jamie is a year 5 teacher at the local school.

Most of her students used to walk home through the park that links the school to the shops, but now there's often people drinking there in the afternoons.



She's noticed that her students don't walk home that way anymore. They've had some uncomfortable encounters and their parents don't think it's safe either.

Tawera is a senior figure on the nearby marae. He led a group that fund-raised for the new playground in the park.



The playground looks great, but the group doesn't like having the big bottle store so close - they worry about the message it sends to children.

Maia runs the hairdressers, just across the road from the bottle store.



She feels like it changes the mood of the street and makes a mess.

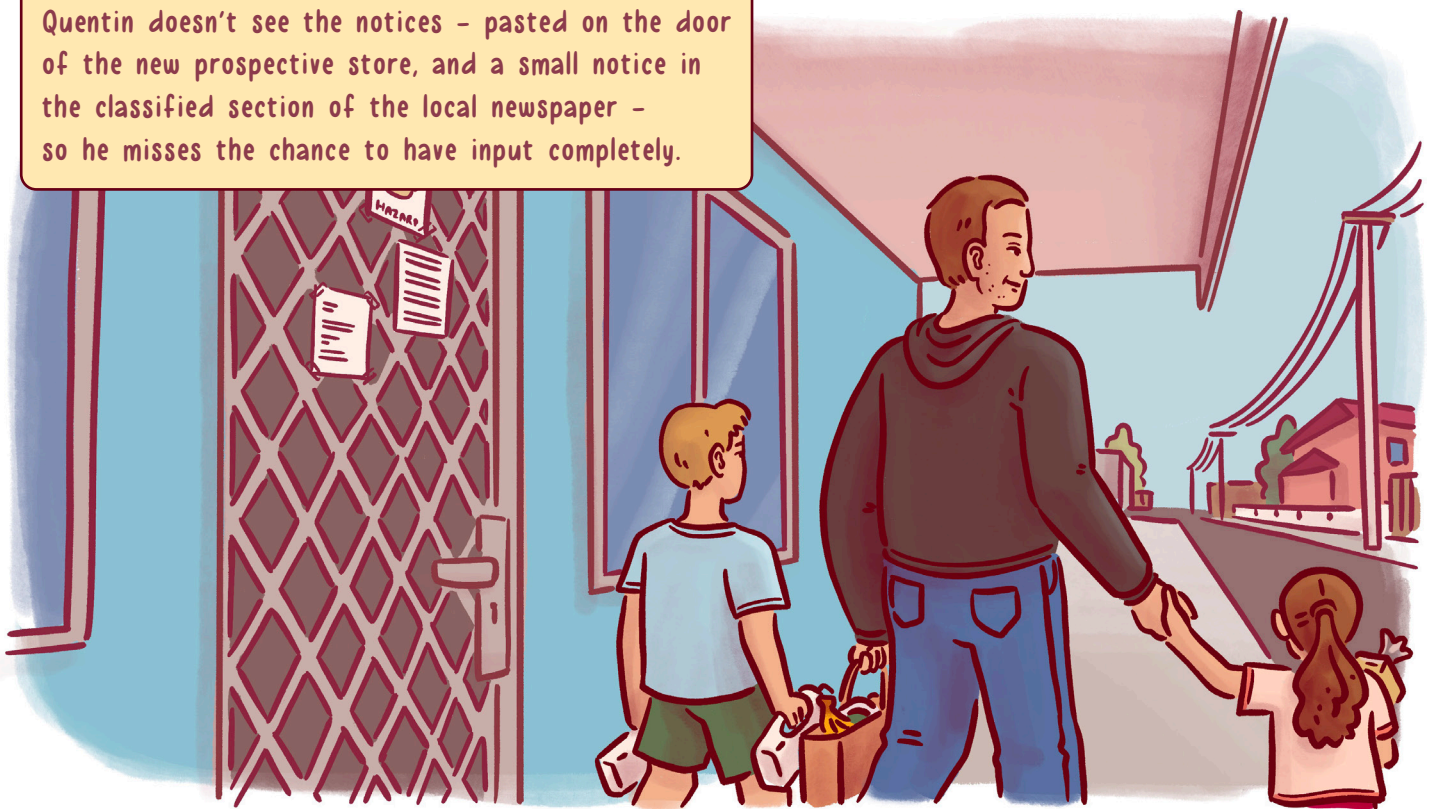
She sees people avoiding the shops, and less foot traffic on the street has meant business has slowed down.

Now there's another bottle store about to open at the end of the street.



Many people have worries about the impact of more alcohol on the block, but most aren't even aware there is a system to express those concerns. And even for those that do know, the process is complex and hard to influence.

Quentin doesn't see the notices - pasted on the door of the new prospective store, and a small notice in the classified section of the local newspaper - so he misses the chance to have input completely.



Jamie the teacher does see the notice and files an objection to appeal the licence - but the hearing is being held during working hours. She's teaching in the classroom and can't go.



Tawera does make it.

He's there to speak on behalf of mana whenua, but the process doesn't make allowances for Te Tiriti or te ao Māori, so his authority to speak on behalf of his community isn't recognised.



He's frustrated he can't make his point, and leaves.

Maia attempts to voice her concerns for the street and her business, but it's her against a team of lawyers representing the applicant.



She finds the legal language confusing and inaccessible. She's cross examined about other potential reasons for loss of foot traffic, and criticised for not providing quantifiable evidence of the numbers of lost customers.

And so, without sufficient evidence or community input, the decision-makers seem to have no choice but to approve the application.

Will the new store make the neighbourhood a better place?

Probably not.

Were Quentin, Jamie, Tawera and Maia able to voice their concerns about that?

Not easily, no.

Research shows that there are more alcohol outlets in poorer areas, which are often the areas where alcohol has a bigger impact.

So why can't our licensing system do a better job of including and respecting the voices of the people most affected by these decisions?