Mainstreet Australia Awards
The Strand Arcade
Melbourne, September 2025

Mainstreet Australia Awards

18 September 2025

Winner for the Strand Arcade
Best Main Street Place Activation – Consultant or Supplier
TrustMe Ltd in partnership with Auckland Council – "Good News for You"
Finalist for the Strand Arcade
in Best Main Street Place Activation – Council Led (under $100K)

Good News For You : September 2023 – June 2025
The project was initiated by Auckland Council's Barbara Holloway (Principal - City Centre Experience, Auckland Urban Development Office) who had identified the building as a candidate for meaningful support in her role in the city centre's rejuvenation. Previously the GM of the Onehunga and Karangahape Road Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Barbara innately understood the challenges inherent to turning around retail hubs in a depressed economic environment.

The Strand's Body Corp/owners with their new property manager worked with Auckland Council and Heart of the City on the trial artwork. This led to a programme of activations to inject life into the building with hopes of uplifting the space and its environs, addressing security issues and attracting new tenants. Project lead, Ross Liew is an artist and curator with a background in accessible art outcomes. An activation strategy was developed placing art and artists at the centre.

The building owners offered free access to spaces and Council provided support for the development of some infrastructure, exhibitions, creative practice, collegial networking, public workshops, performances and fledgling commercial enterprises. it was anticipated that the creative communities of Auckland would lead the way with the rejuvenation in the Arcade and the wider midtown area. With three vacant retail spaces, the Good News For You programme started in September 2023 focussing on fringe, emerging and independent art practitioners. The project grew to include nine spaces.

Ross Liew, winner best Mainstreet Activation.

Strand Arcade

Good News For You

Strand Arcade

September 2023 – June 2025

Three Key Outcomes

1 - Support and platform young, fringe and independent creatives with a focus on a diverse representation. Artists and community arts organisations have been driven out of the city centre by rising rents, while events and presentation of creative outcomes is common in the city. it is divorced from the physical spaces where artists work. This was addressed through:

- Free spaces to use for exhibition, residency, workshops and performances.
- Allowing autonomy and experimentation through one simple 'ask' of users "occupy the space and leave the lights ON when you aren't there".
- Providing micro grants up to $500 per activation for production costs.
- Covering power and signage costs for each space.
- Employing a simple and accessible EOI process for potential users.
- Working with the property manager to open up more vacant shops for use by artists.
- Hosting small NGO arts organizations such as Auckland Fringe Festival, Tempo Dance Festival, Africa Month and the Auckland Festival of Photography.
- Providing free mentoring services from senior practitioners to users to support sustainable practice/career development.

Across a 21-month period the project supported 483 artists who delivered over 100 activations that attracted over 5,000 attendees.

Good News For You

2. Transformation of the perception of the Arcade. In recent history the Arcade has had compliance problems, earthquake strengthening requirements, internal issues, graffiti and public urination and the flow-on effect of Covid. This was addressed through:

- Cultivating a collaborative, trust-based relationship with the Property Manager that afforded permissiveness and discretion to the programme and users.
- Active programming that delivered a regular turnover of public facing activations.
- Community building; hosting artists led to the development and re-establishment of relationships between the city's creatives and the city centre.
- Partnering with another Auckland Council initiative, Midtown Street Parties
- Improving the common areas: installing banners, reconnecting power, public art, decorations and lighting.
- Triggered renewed investment from the building owners leading to restoration of painted facades (internal and external), reinstatement of water damaged spaces and cleaning.
- Owners applied for assistance, advice and received grants from Heritage New Zealand.
- Collaborating with festivals and organisations to promote to their wider audiences.
- Attracting high profile media coverage (such as Breakfast TV features)

3. Increase in retail tenancy in the building. The arcade had 6 tenants only out of 21 ground floor retail spaces at the start of the project. By project's end this had increased to 18 tenants with only 3 vacancies which continue to host artists . This was addressed through:
Harnessing the energy and enterprise of the creative community and their intuitive ability to create spaces of interest and excitement.

- Including arts-adjacent businesses in the programming to deliver them free pop-up retail opportunities to test commercial viability.
- Proactive recruitment of potential tenants whose businesses align with the programming audience (responsible for three current tenancies).
- Adopting an iterative approach to the project. Persistence with the programme over time, it was only in the last iteration that the majority of new tenancies were achieved

Before store in The Strand Arcade

Before - the facade of The Strand Arcade

Good News For You

Challenges

The primary barrier to the project was the multi ownership dynamic, with long standing disagreements resulting in frozen investment in the building and a lack of tenant recruitment. Many shops had been vacant for 2-7 years with one empty for 15. Getting owner response to any proposed activity proved difficult until the appointment of a new Property Manager, Matthew Brown who brought energy and vision with him and over the course of several strategic discussions gave the go-ahead for the initial three-month iteration. Growing trust led to increasing levels of discretion and autonomy and Matthew became a strong advocate for the project, opening up additional vacant spaces to host the art programming.

A concern was focusing Council spend on one privately owned location. Ever aware of public scrutiny there was an initial instinct to deliver just one or two iterations of the programme and move the focus to other similarly challenged buildings the city centre. It is clear now that the transformative impact this project has had on the Arcade would not have been realised within the first two iterations (9 months) and it was only at the completion of the fourth and last iteration, 21 months after starting, that the main gains have been realised

The Arcade moved from a tenancy rate of 28% to 85%.
Public urination and graffiti ceased.

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Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries of the project:

- The creative community with a particular focus on young and fringe practitioners - short term platforming and long-term capacity building.
- Young business owners and social entrepreneurs - viability testing via pop-ups leading to some new tenancies.
- Existing business owners within the arcade – neighbours increased safety and collegiality, increase in foot traffic and patronage.
- The building body corp - a big public perception shift and increased tenancy.
- BIPOC and LGBTQI+ community - the programme opened spaces to showcase, explore, platform and develop ideas and conversations of identity.
- Diverse community, environmental and cultural organizations, NGO's and other community groups exposing their initiatives supported by Auckland Council marketing and PR.
- Surrounding retail and hospitality businesses - benefited through increased foot traffic and directly partnering with the programme, hosting performances and artwork .
- Inner city workers, students and residents the midtown precinct.

Artists' talk

The Strand Arcade cleaned up and decoated

Good News For You

Measuring Benefits

Measurement of the benefits using the following metrics:

- Auckland Council media coverage acquisition and social media marketing outcomes
- Participating and NON - Participating business surveys and attendee intercept surveys.
- Pedestrian camera counts and event attendance count
- Artist/Performer feedback and event manager feedback
- Number of vacant stores tenanted

Sample out-takes from the collected measures:

Pedestrian Camera Counts, 6pm at 8 Darby Street. **Up 92% over previous 4 days.** March 20, 2025

Pedestrian Camera Counts 5-8pm at 8 Darby St. **Up 35% over 4 previous days.** Nov 21, 2024

Opera in the Strand, 9 April 2025 - Stories across print, web and TV. including Seven Sharp and Breakfast TV spots. 30 media items achieved. Potential audience reach 3,921,200 over 60 days.

30 media items achieved
Potential audience reach 3,921,200 over 60 days

Businesses Attracted

2024-2025

Addis Ethiopian Cafe
Authentic food homemade onsite with traditional tea and coffee
Slow Koi
Slowkoi presents masterclass in the blending of fine coffee and the Japanese art of tea drinking.
Sign Painting
Louie Brooks – one of the city's last hand painted sign masters.
Hi Toastie
The place to be for coffee and toastie lovers with a craving for an Asian twist!
Episode
Vincentimenta, eponymous designs and designer vintage garments and accessories.
Doll Shop
Contemporary dolls
Secondhand Shop
Clothing and accessories
Taikin
Offering an exciting blend of Teppanyaki and Takoyaki in a setting that's both casual and interactive.
Ohmo
A dessert store serving Japanese buns with creative fillings and salted egg cookies.

Vincent and Rachel of Vincentimenta, Episode, Strand Arcade

Free opera in the Strand

Tribute to Reina Sutton the Strand

Taurima, enhancing outside the Strand

Acknowledgements

Background

Tania Loveridge, Heart of the City, engaged with the Strand's Arcade's new Property Manager, Matthew Brown, to install heritage images of the building, its retailers and its customers from 1910 to the 1980s. The project was delivered by Layla Tweedie-Cullen who was managing the Vacant Store Programme in the city centre. The programme is a partnership between Auckland Council and Heart of The City. Barbara Holloway, Auckland Council, commissioned Ross Liew to create an urban renewal through the arts project to revitalise the Strand. The goal was to develop an arts and events hub to bring focus on the Midtown precinct and showcase how retail and hospitality entrepreneurs could function in the spaces. Thus 'Good News for You' was born. Anya Vitali managed events and Angus Muir lightworks to complement and support the project and the wider precinct.

Heart of the City - Tania Loveridge

The Strand Arcade Body Corporate Chair – Kevin To and other owners

The Strand Arcade Building Manager - Matthew Brown

Split Fountain – Layla Tweedie-Cullen

Trust Me Limited - Ross Liew

Creative Services - Anya Vitali

Angus Muir Design – Angus Muir

City Centre Experiences Team - Auckland Council

Auckland Council and city centre targeted rate