

Helping South Auckland subbies keep it in the family

Papakura's Fale Lemalu and her husband Asoafa have been painting houses in Auckland for more than two decades – most of them Housing New Zealand properties.

It's work the family pride themselves on doing well to earn a living for their large family.

"We've got ten children so painting is what feeds my family," says Fale, whose business, JR Painters, also employs two of her sons, two of her nephews and several other family members.

But Fale says while they've always worked hard, being a small operator has made it tough to get ahead and grow.

This year that's changed, with Housing New Zealand head maintenance contractor Spencer Henshaw Ltd leading a joint effort to give JR Painters and others like them a hand up.

Chairman Neal Murphy says family-run, two- to five-person businesses make up the bulk of Spencer Henshaw's exterior painting workforce.

"More than 90 per cent of our exterior painting sub-contractors are based in south Auckland and they're often small company structures with small balance sheets and not a lot of commercial sophistication," says Mr Murphy.

"They can also be quite dependent on Housing New Zealand work so when that supply fluctuates they can become quite vulnerable."

But securing a five-year Performance Based Maintenance Contract (PBMC) with Housing New Zealand last year created greater certainty and new opportunities both for Spencer Henshaw and the subbies it engages.

As a result, the company has been fostering these small family businesses by taking practical steps to help them operate in a more robust way.

"We've sat down and asked them what they can afford to pay us back, then we've set them up with vans, scaffolding, first aid boxes – everything they need to function safely and efficiently," Neal Murphy explains.

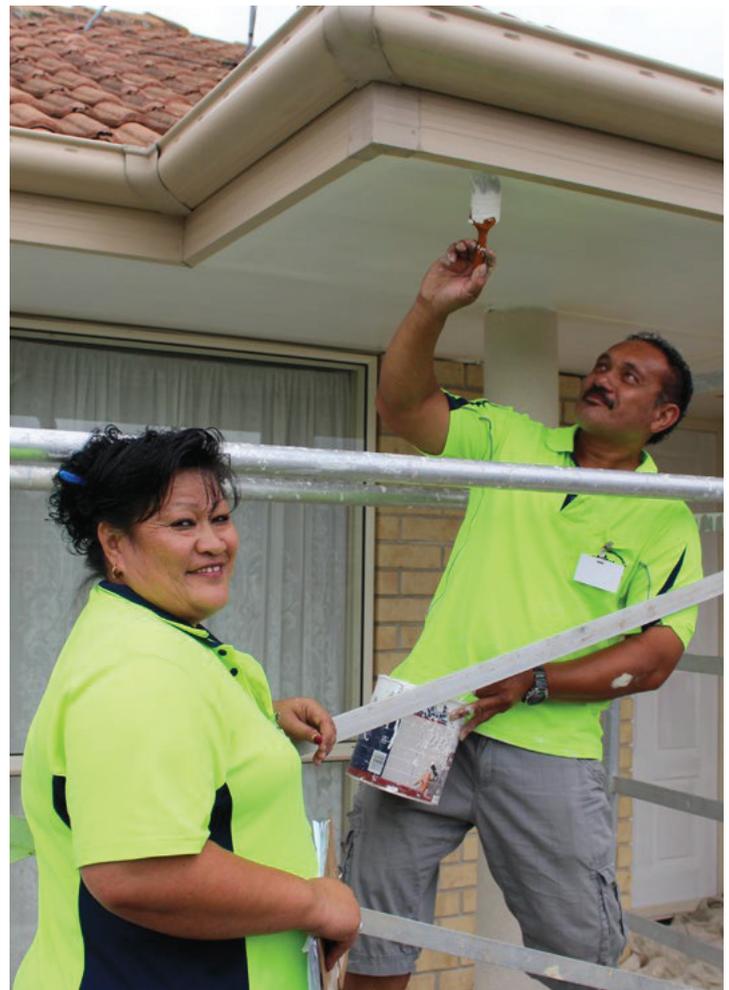
For Fale Lemalu and her husband, getting a second van has made a huge difference.

"Before we just had the one van and it was breaking down regularly. Now that we have two vans I can split out my boys and do more work," says Fale, whose team paints around four houses a month depending on the size of the properties.

And the mobile scaffolding they've been supplied means they can meet crucial health and safety requirements.

To date Spencer Henshaw has spent around \$93,000 on scaffolding and more than \$59,500 on vans. It's been no small

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PAINTING A BRIGHTER FUTURE: A steady supply of Housing New Zealand work, and help with equipment from Spencer Henshaw Ltd has helped Fale and Asoafa paint a brighter future for their family business.

undertaking but it's also an investment that will help shore up their painting workforce.

"We've financed them into these things but they now belong to them so they'll need to look after them and will be paying us back over time out of every house they paint," Neal says of the arrangement which, in a nutshell, represents an interest free loan.

And Spencer Henshaw's exterior painting project manager Alfreda Williams, herself a former contract painter, says she can already see the positive impact of the approach on businesses like Fale and Asoafa's.

"I can see they've upped their crew and their whole attitude has changed because someone has had faith in them and been prepared to invest in them. The extra help has really given them courage and boosted their confidence."

