

New Plymouth Officially Declared a Safe Community

27/10/05

New Plymouth has been declared a 'Safe Community' by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Collaborating Centre on Community Safety Promotion, becoming just the 95th place in the world to gain such recognition.



The accreditation as a Safe Community is the culmination of years of work by many different organisations in the district that have developed injury prevention programmes to make the community as safe as possible.



The accreditation elevates New Plymouth into an international group of Safe Communities that includes communities from Australia, Europe, United States and Asia.



New Plymouth District has carried out pioneering work in many areas of injury prevention. Taranaki, for example, was the first place in the country to launch parent education sessions about child falls. Its programme has since been picked up in many other parts of New Zealand.

Spokesperson for New Plymouth injury Safe (NPiS), Dr Alan Parsons, says the international recognition has been made possible as a result of people working together to try to reduce the number of injuries. He says:



"The collaborative approach means we can draw on the skills of many individuals and agencies to provide information and programmes to many people identified as being at risk, such as children, the elderly in their own homes, people taking part in sports, pedestrians and drivers ... pretty much everyone in the community."



NPiS comprises representatives from the Taranaki District Health Board, Accident Compensation Corporation, New Plymouth District Council, Tui Ora, KidSafe Taranaki Trust and the police. More than 70 stakeholder groups are involved in promoting injury prevention activities in New Plymouth District.

The bid to gain accreditation started in 2001 with an ACC- funded assessment of community injuries in New Plymouth. The research and consultation work identified the types of injuries, the population groups and the locations that needed to be given priority in an injury prevention programme. Some existing work was extended and new programmes developed as a result of the assessment.

Programmes and campaigns that have helped build the safe community culture in New Plymouth include the Thinksmart Sports Club programme which challenges the link between youth alcohol consumption and sport; Horsing Around, an education programme directed at rider knowledge and skill; the Agricultural Team Challenge, a competition focusing on farm safety; Positive Ageing New Plymouth's Tai Chi classes and the Otago Exercise Programme to help build strength and reduce the number of falls experienced by older people; a 'Think Before you Buy Under 18s Drink' campaign; and some 2,500 home safety checks carried out by volunteer fire officers.

In the inaugural New Zealand Community Safety and Injury Prevention Awards this year, New Plymouth received four commendations.

New Plymouth District Mayor Peter Tennent says being identified as a Safe Community can bring benefits to the wider community. "If you have an independent, highly-regarded group such as the International Safe Communities Movement saying that New Plymouth District is actively working on reducing injuries, then you'll grab the interest of businesses who want a healthy workforce and families who want a safe environment," says the Mayor. "The council is proud to take an active part in New Plymouth injury Safe because we know it is bringing significant benefits to the wider community."



The Safe Community concept recognises safety as a universal concern and the responsibility for all. The WHO model was initiated in Sweden and is administered from the Karolinska Institute for Social Medicine in Stockholm. In 2004, the Safe Communities Foundation of New Zealand (SCFNZ) was established to support the development of injury prevention and safety promotion here. In August 2005 the Foundation was appointed as a Certifying Centre on behalf of the WHO Collaborating Centre on Community Safety Promotion, with the authority to designate.

New Plymouth is the third district in New Zealand to gain accreditation as a Safe Community. A designation ceremony was held on Thursday 27 October at 1.30pm at Puke Ariki. During the ceremony, 95 helium-filled balloons were released to symbolise the 95 Safe Communities in the world.



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