

Family centre to close

HEALTH WELFARE

Nurses vow

to fight

for service

By DELWYN MASTERS

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PLUNKET'S sole Karitane Family Centre in Taranaki is being forced to close because of a lack of money.

But the centre's nurses are vowing to fight to keep it open.

Plunket's four centres in the Midland Regional Health Authority area — New Plymouth, Hamilton, Tauranga and Gisborne — have a combined debt of \$250,000, with the New Zealand Plunket Society pointing the finger at the health funding system.

New Plymouth's centre will close at the end of next month. Plunket clinics around the region which provide core services, will remain open.

New Plymouth's Plunket room on Courtenay St was opened in 1948, while the centre had operated from there for at least 16 years.

When centre spokeswoman Ann Hatch was asked about her reaction to the closure, she said: "What can be printed? Total devastation and concern for the mothers of Taranaki."

"Mothers come here (for help) for breastfeeding problems, sleep behaviour, colicky babies, families under stress, post-natal depression, education and general mother-craft skills.

"And we have mothers who not only want to come in and feed, but need someone to talk to.

"There will be a mobile Karitane nurse but she won't be able to provide the same service. Plunket nurses are only in clinics for half-to-one day a week in each area."

Two mothers who visited the centre on Monday could not believe that a mainstay of women with babies visiting the central city would close. The supervised childcare and expert help would be sorely missed, they said.



KARITANE CLOSURE: Tracy King with Aisha (left), and Heather Regtien with Melanie, found the doors to the Karitane Family Centre in New Plymouth closed on Monday. The centre will close in a month.

Photo: DWAYNE SENIOR

"It's dreadful. What will we do?" asked Heather Regtien, from Stratford. "There's just so many people out there that would be so upset and so lost without this place."

Tracy King, from Inglewood, said the centre was a better place to breastfeed than in a car. "You don't have to panic about getting home in a hurry."

Mrs Hatch said the society's freephone service would not fill the gap as some problems, such as difficulty with breastfeeding, needed a nurse to sit down with the woman.

Three fulltime and two part-time nurses will lose their jobs when the

centre closes. The nurses' salaries were funded by the society and Midland RHA, while the building, assets and all other costs were met by New Plymouth Plunket volunteers, she said.

She said the volunteers at the centre would fight hard to have the closure reversed.

"We're not certain what we can do yet, but we feel if we can get the public behind us, this will stay open."

She hoped to find out at a board meeting in Tauranga today why the shortfall happened.

A New Zealand Plunket Society press

release said the Government's emphasis on sickness rather than wellness was short-changing families.

While Plunket's service reached more than 90% of babies in their early months, coverage then dropped to below 50% because Plunket lacked the resources to maintain the contact.

The Plunket statement said: "The Minister of Health, Jenny Shipley, was quoted recently as saying, 'Plunket is responsible for managing its own resources properly'. However, the Government also has a responsibility to resource providers so that they are able to deliver what has been promised."



CLOSED DOWN: End of an era . . . or is it? Plunket spokeswoman Margaret Betteridge pulls down a poster during yesterday's farewell afternoon tea. Photo: ADRIAN MALLOCH

Staff hope to re-open NP Plunket centre

By DELWYN MASTERS

THE DOORS to New Plymouth's Karitane Family Centre closed yesterday, in the face of a huge debt.

But staff and volunteers are working on a plan to re-open the centre again.

"We're attempting to find some community funding to reopen," said Taranaki Plunket spokeswoman Margaret Betteridge.

"We're working with a consultancy firm in town, attempting to contact local businesses and see what support there is there.

"We spent \$80,000 on wages this year. We would need some surety it (community funding) would be an on-going thing and

not stalling the closure for 12 months."

Staff and volunteers had a farewell afternoon tea at the centre before the doors closed at 4pm.

Family centres also closed in Hamilton, Tauranga and Gisborne yesterday, due to a combined debt of \$250,000 among the four areas.

Ms Betteridge is continuing to lobby the Midland Regional Health Authority for more funding, and a petition protesting the circumstances of the closure has been sent to Parliament.

A mobile service will be available in Taranaki from Monday, which Ms Betteridge said people could make an appointment for through their Plunket nurse.