

Plunket puts future ahead of past

By SARAH FOY
sarah.foy@dailynews.co.nz

A new purpose-built centre for Plunket Taranaki is under way, confirming the organisation has severed its ties with its former historic home.

It hopes to move to new premises on the corner of Weymouth and Devon St West in August where more space will exist for a range of services.

A building on the site was pulled down in December with builders Cook and Street now preparing to lay the floors, says area manager Jo Malcolm-Black.

Deciding to sell Plunket's existing Courtenay St building – erected as a memorial in 1950 – was not easy.

"We knew the history of this building and we did think long and hard about whether we wanted to do something that might result in the building being demolished.

"But what it came down to was

what are we here for."

She says the existing 62-year-old building is dilapidated and doesn't meet the needs of families. Interior space is limited and on some days it's "jam-packed with staff, babies and families."

The public has been supportive of Plunket's desire to create a purpose-built facility, expected to cost \$1.1 million.

Other than questions from journalists there has not been any negative feedback, she says.

Plunket committee members, many of them long-standing volunteers, retained old records and photos that would be transferred to the new building, she says.

The new 500sqm centre will be two-storied with ground level space for playgroups, Well Child clinics, a waiting room and a dedicated car seat area. Meeting rooms and offices will occupy the second level.

The future of Plunket Taranaki's other suburban clinics was



Moving home: Plunket area manager Joe Malcolm-Black at the agency's new location under construction on the corner of Weymouth and Devon St West, New Plymouth.

Photo: SARAH FOY / FAIRFAX NZ

also up for discussion. No services would change at the Waitara clinic – refurbished last year – but other Plunket rooms existed in

Motorua, Bell Block and Tarahua St, off Carrington Rd.

"Is it useful to still keep services out in those areas or more useful

to bring them into the main building?" she says.

New Plymouth was a different society 60 years ago when satellite clinics were established around the city. Fewer people had cars, incomes were lower and the expectation of services closer to home was high. These days Plunket's services were different and more varied.

"It's those services we can wrap around a family to make sure they can raise a family. It's about making sure they have access to information about parenting, about moving around in a vehicle [with children] and about keeping their homes child safe."

Money for the new building is being provided but local fundraising is needed to fit it out with furniture, equipment and extras such as landscaping.

"We are not an organisation that has to have ostentatious new stuff but from the start we want it to be welcoming for families so we will be spending money."

Rooms haven't been given heritage status

By SARAH FOY
sarah.foy@dailynews.co.nz

The last New Plymouth district-wide survey of heritage buildings undertaken 12 years ago named 800 to 900 historic buildings but failed to include the Plunket Rooms.

Colin Coomber, New Plymouth District Council spokesman, says the consultant's report in 1995 canvassed buildings street by street.

From there the hundreds of listings were whittled down to three categories, A, B and C with those in category A regarded as the best of the best, he says.

"In terms of Plunket it didn't make the first cut. It didn't catch the eye of the heritage consultants doing the work at the time."

Only buildings in category A are listed in the District Plan, which means alterations require resource consent. But the Plunket Rooms don't rate a mention in either category B or C.

"That's not to say that the building or its use didn't have some importance to the community because obviously there will be some people in the community that have a particular association with it ... but that doesn't qualify it as a heritage building."

However, it would be likely to tick a criteria for the cultural value in which it's regarded today, he says.

"As time goes on the issues around rarity mean these things become more important for some types of buildings."

"It could be that we will have to resurvey the district at some point in the future because as time goes on it's a matter of fact that buildings which we didn't register as significant 20 or 30 years ago might become more important and fall into heritage considerations."

He says another survey could happen as part of the District Plan, which is reviewed every 10 years with a full review due in 2015.