



# Kia Puawai

YOUTH HORIZONS NEWSLETTER | DECEMBER 2011 | ISSUE 11

## A Safe Haven



Youth Horizons was delighted and honoured to be selected to provide this service which officially

opened in March this year. Situated in park-like surrounds of neighbourly Onehunga, Ka Awatea Te Kainga, a home for teen parents, has been set up from the outset as a family home. Welcomed by house parents Rei and Raelene Paki, young parents enter into a peaceful, nurturing environment where they are offered non-judgmental support to learn parenting skills and to bond with their babies.

Kai Atawhai (personal advisors) work alongside the young parents to connect them with relevant services including healthcare, housing, education, training and employment. The ultimate goal is seeing them supported to live independently in the community and caring well for their babies

*“It’s all about providing stability and a safe environment where they can bond with their babies” says Raylene.*

after taking part in the programme.

The service is part of a \$14.9 million government initiative that is being rolled out over four years to support vulnerable teen parents and their children. New Zealand has the second highest teen birth rate amongst developed countries. In 2009 there were 4,670 children born to teenagers.

While many of these teen parents and their children do well, some have little family support and limited parenting capacity and skills.



Ka Awatea Te Kainga was officially opened on March 17 by senior Tainui Kaumatua and Youth Horizons staff with a blessing ceremony followed by speeches and morning tea. Many neighbours and members of the local Onehunga community attended to show support for the programme. In addition some have offered their time and donated items to the house.

We wanted the home to be owned by the local community. We needed it to be a service that they are deeply involved with and proud to have in their community as it helps young families pave their way in life," says Cath Handley, CEO/ Kaiwhakahaere of Youth Horizons. "We are nine months into the service, the house is full and the community have been fantastic."

Ka Awatea Te Kainga received generous support from two philanthropic organisations. Nieuwerkerke Trust, which owns the property, has invested significantly to upgrade both houses on the site. The Lion Foundation has also contributed generously toward new bedroom furnishings and bassinets for each of the private bedrooms.

House parents Rei and Raelene Paki were tirelessly involved in setting up the service. Friends and whanau helped them tidy up the grounds of the property and they supplemented the refurbished villa with their personal furniture and artwork to ensure it has a warm feel.

The Pakis have extensive experience in working with young people. Rei is a former police officer who led many community youth initiatives and Raelene worked as a primary school teacher for 10 years in addition to teaching music and running her own catering service. They have six daughters of their own ranging from 29 to 40 years of age, and nine grandchildren, so parenting and teenage girls are familiar territory for them.

"When we saw this job we thought it was great as it was something we could do together. We approached the job knowing we were able to provide stability



*House parents Rei and Raelene Paki*

and that we have a strong relationship that young people can learn from." says Raelene.

"Our own children are constant visitors to the house and also interact with the young people here. In this way the teenagers become part of our family." says Rei.

The first young woman stayed in the house for two months, and the baby's father was a frequent visitor. This was a valuable experience, bonding with baby, learning parenting skills and getting all the required health care in place. The father was successfully supported to seek work and they both received some

coaching around managing their own relationship as parents.

Another teenager staying in the house at present is preparing for the birth of her baby. Coming from an unstable and transient situation she is now taking time, in a calm and nurturing environment, to learn basic household and parenting skills before her due date.

"I've been teaching the young women basic skills like baking, keeping their rooms tidy, and living skills to be independent, which they may not have learnt already. It's all about providing stability and a safe environment where they can bond with their babies," says Raelene.

The programme looks forward to supporting teen mothers and fathers with the responsibility of parenthood. Many teenagers from challenging backgrounds talk about wanting to create a different future for their own children and Ka Awatea Te Kainga provides the model and individually tailored support to help them achieve that.