

Media release

PINK FEET LEADING THE WAY TO HEALTH IN BELL BLOCK

Thursday 3 July 2008

The 'Pink Feet' healthy lifestyle programme in the Taranaki community of Bell Block has resulted in almost 30 percent of shoppers changing their food buying habits.

The Public Health Association conference in Waitangi was today told that this innovative three-year community action programme has expanded from a nutrition-only message, to include messages about smoking and physical activity.

Jill Nicholls, a public health dietitian and Anita Waugh, a public health nutritionist from the Taranaki District Health Board, told delegates that an evaluation of the programme found that almost 70 percent of the Bell Block residents interviewed were aware of the key messages of the Pink Feet project.

"We are very encouraged by the results," Ms Nicholls told the conference. "The Pink Feet are only down during the first school term of each year so to actually change people's behaviour in such a short time, in such a non-intrusive way, is very satisfying."

The Pink Feet programme began in 2006 with hundreds of small laminated pink feet stuck to the floor of a local supermarket. These guided shoppers to shelves where nutritious choices for school lunches were stacked.

"We now have pink feet everywhere," said Miss Waugh. "Small pink feet are used in both supermarkets to promote healthy food choices. The medical centre has a foot that reads, 'Want to quit (smoking)? Ask us how'; the foot outside the local bakery guides shoppers to 'choose filled rolls and sandwiches'; a foot outside the local fruit and vegetable market promotes the '5-plus a day message' and a foot outside the local café promotes the healthy choices on the menu, identified with a tick.

"We have Push Play messages at the local swimming pool and walkway, and the Team Up message 'Get involved in your kids' learning' at the two primary schools". The two local schools and kindergarten have also participated with walk to school days and major changes in their tuck shops.

"We have had a great response from the organisations we approached to take part," Ms Nicholls said. "All the retailers support the initiative and want to continue to be involved."

"There were a number of people who told us they were already buying healthy food, so together with those who changed their buying habits as a result of the Pink Feet project, well over half of Bell Block residents interviewed said they are choosing healthier food options.

"We are giving people the information they need to make an informed choice and judging by the success of our programme, it appears people are actually making the healthier choice," Miss Waugh said.

Note: Background on the Bell Block Community

Bell Block is a suburb of New Plymouth, in the Taranaki region. It has approximately 4,000 residents. Maori are overrepresented in the Community, compared to the national average (17.5% and 14.6% respectively). Deprivation score of the community is 6 (1 is lowest deprivation, 10 highest) and a medium income of \$16,000pa. The community has a higher percentage of families with school aged children, compared to New Plymouth.

For more information contact conference media liaison Liz Price on 0276 957 744