

Family keen for a cosy home

By KRIS DANDO

Eunice Patu can't wait for the day her family can sleep in bedrooms that are warm and dry.

Her family have lived in the same three-bedroom Housing New Zealand home in Somerset Place, Porirua, since 2007.

It is cold and draughty, the windows run with condensation, and the lounge is the only room that can be heated satisfactorily.

Patu shares her bed with her two sons, aged 6 and 8, to keep warm, and her husband sleeps in the lounge. No-one sleeps in the downstairs bedroom.

"It's like sleeping in a chilly bin down there," Patu said.

Sustainability Trust is coming to the Patu family's rescue.

The organisation is involved in several projects in Porirua aimed at making homes and families healthier, including Warm Fuzzies, Porirua Heating Project and Well Homes.

The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development, Regional Public Health and Housing NZ are various partners in the different programmes.

Miranda Struthers, co-ordinator for Warm Fuzzies, said the project has been running for four years.

Families are referred by their GP or another health professional concerned that people are getting sick in damp and mouldy homes.

Sustainability Trust assessors then carry out an exhaustive review of the home, looking at



Clockwise from top left, Naomi Finau, Eunice Patu, Kathy Furfie (Housing New Zealand), Miranda Struthers (Sustainability Trust) and Vanessa Cameron (Regional Public Health) at the Patu home in Cannons Creek.

ventilation, heating, insulation and the "energy behaviour" of the family.

That process was carried out on Eunice Patu's home recently.

Struthers said a report was then sent to the landlords to address issues.

About 100 families are assisted in that way each year – more than half are in state houses – and the programme is going so well the trust is struggling to meet demand.

"We really look at what can be done to make the home a healthier

place and we can offer another voice to the landlord, who sometimes may not hear what the tenants are saying," Struthers said.

"What this comes down to is empowerment for families."

Dealing with private landlords could be difficult because they might not live in the area, or owned several properties and could be unenthusiastic about maintenance.

In the Patu's case, one of her sons having a bad cough and enlarged lymph nodes was enough

Fighting rheumatic fever

The scourge that is rheumatic fever is being tackled in Porirua from several angles, including by Sustainability Trust.

The trust, which has been active in the Porirua community through the Warm Fuzzies home assessment programme and Curtain Bank, has kicked off Porirua Heating Project and Well Homes.

The two programmes will engage 850 households in Porirua and Wellington.

The Porirua Heating Project aims to assist 150 local families to improve their living conditions, and reduce their risk of contracting rheumatic fever.

The project is a collaboration between Sustainability Trust, Otago University's He Kaianga Oranga Research Programme, the Social Sector Trial, and Regional Public Health.

Well Homes is a Ministry of Health and Regional Public Health contract.

to get a referral.

Patu had nothing bad to say about Housing New Zealand, but just wished for a warmer home.

"We try and do our best for our children, but it is not helped by the home we live in. We've got new carpet and curtains from Curtain Bank, but we don't have enough wood for the fire and this place is just cold."

Struthers, Vanessa Cameron from Regional Public Health and Kathy Furfie and Naomi Finau from Housing New Zealand visited Patu last week.

They gave her a kit to help keep windows dry and mould at bay, doorstops, a new heater, and news that other improvements were on the way.

Patu said it was a good feeling

knowing efforts were being made on behalf of her family.

Furfie said the relationship with Sustainability Trust was a positive one, and Housing New Zealand took on board the trust's home assessments.

"We have a programme of bringing our housing stock up to standard, but it is a huge job in front of us."

"Relationships with people like Miranda are very important to achieve things."

Furfie said the most common timeframe for getting improvements done was a month from receiving the Sustainability Trust's report.

Struthers said the sooner a warrant of fitness was created for New Zealand homes, the better.