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Thu, 20 Nov. 2008

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Accessible Housing Trust chairwoman Suzanne Scanlen and Housing Minister Chris Carter. Picture/Chris Rusdale

Housing scheme for disabled wins high praise

21.09.2007
By Lindy Laird

A Whangarei scheme providing accessible, low-cost housing for disabled people has won high praise from Housing Minister Chris Carter.

The Whangarei Accessible Housing Trust this year earned a \$2 million Housing Corporation grant to buy and modify eight homes to enable people in wheelchairs to live independently.

A fleeting visit by the minister to Whangarei last Friday provided an opportunity for the trust to showcase its progress.

The trust, comprising disabled people's representatives, CSS Ability Action group and other community agency representatives, has bought four houses - one in Kamo, two in Tikipunga and one in Kensington.

Work is under way on the first home, a two-bedroom townhouse with a small garden in Tikipunga. The tenant, a 37-year-old man in a wheelchair, will move there in mid-October.

Modification includes lowering benches, widening doors, creating a wet-area bathroom, installing handrails and building access ramps and a deck. The trust is also putting in a raised vegetable bed for the tenant, who is a keen gardener.

CSS Disability Action housing co-ordinator Barry Moore said the aim was for disabled people to live normal lives in suitable homes. Some would house families, while others by single folk who might take in flatmates if they wanted. Buying criteria included the houses being in safe residential neighbourhoods, and close to amenities such as shops and doctors, Mr Moore said.

CSS project leader Auriole Ruka told Mr Carter the trust had responded to an obvious need in setting up the scheme.

"Disabled people have been saying it for a long, long time," Ms Ruka said. "A key message for the Government is that if new houses were built to be accessible, providing them would be much cheaper." The trust, which has also put \$400,000 into the scheme, will spend an average of \$15,000 on modifying each house.

Mr Carter said the Whangarei model might be used elsewhere in New Zealand: "My department has recognised this is a very successful trust and model."

The Housing Department was looking into the building code to ensure more new houses suited the needs of disabled people, he said.

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