

New project seeks to solve housing woes

A NEW project is being launched in Whangarei to help disabled people get suitable, affordable housing.

Currently in Whangarei there are no houses on the market which are totally accessible for disabled people.

John Povey, who is confined to a wheelchair, jokes that every time he goes into a house a builder has to follow behind.

Modifications he needs to a normal house include space and rails around the toilet, a wet-area shower rather than a cubicle, wider doorways plus the lowering of benches and light switches.

John is currently living in a Housing New Zealand Corporation state house.

He had to wait six months for the organisation to find a house strong enough to modify, because there were no accessible houses available.

He also has a special wheelchair which is able to turn in small spaces.

CCS – which provides services for disabled people – began a project six months ago to find accessible housing solutions, says project manager Christine Young.

An independent trust, the Whangarei Accessible Housing Trust, is being set up this month to provide community housing for disabled people.

Funding to buy and modify eight initial houses has been applied for from Housing New Zealand Corporation's special Housing Innovations fund.

Project leader Auriole Ruka says the idea of accessible housing provided by a trust is new to New Zealand.



OPENING DOORS: Wide doorways are just one thing John Povey needs in a house. A trust is being set up in Whangarei to provide accessible houses for disabled people.

The houses will be either owned by the trust or the disabled person.

Auriole says the trust will determine who is eligible for the houses and the majority of trustees will be disabled.

John, who will be a trustee, says it is the first time he will be given the option to buy a house.

"I'm glad that I've been given the opportunity."

CCS has also secured funds to employ a full-time housing co-ordinator for two years, says Auriole.

The housing co-ordinator will work with the trust and other agencies to find suitable houses for disabled people. □

— STORY/PHOTO: Denise Didsbury