

## Otara Health History 1998 – 2002

A contract for services between the Health Funding Authority and Otara Health Inc. was completed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 1998. While the initial contract was dated only for a year, the organisation and its supporters saw this as the beginning of a long term set of initiatives. The contract included systems for effective communication with the community, referrals, liaison and co-ordination with other providers. The establishment of health education services with Otara groups around a number of health issues was also highlighted. It was the intention that Otara Health Inc. be the first point of contact for all health service issues in Otara and that the organisation would be actively involved in identifying local health issues and facilitating an appropriate response. Otara Health opened for business on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1998. A number of projects were set up and delivered in the first two to three years of the organisation's activities. These are outlined below and are further highlighted in the 'Achievements' page of this website:

- **'Way Smoothers'** was an initiative which was planned to bridge the gap between providers and patients around cultural understandings and misunderstandings of health issues and medical conditions. Widespread consultation was carried out with Otara general practices and a proposal emerged to train local people who could speak the languages to work alongside doctors, practice nurses, pharmacists and hospital staff to improve community uptake of services, treatment and medications. A strong working relationship was established with Auckland Regional Public Health Service to plan the project and develop the workers. Training took place and workers were recruited for the first project outlined below.
- **Meningococcal Disease Awareness programme** – Provision of a door-to-door awareness and information campaign to cover 90% of Otara high risk areas. Six local people were recruited and trained to deliver the project which was renewed for the following three years. The project was initiated and evaluated by Auckland Healthcare. Evaluation results showed higher rates of awareness of symptoms of the disease and Otara families accessing healthcare earlier than before.
- Tuberculosis Awareness programme - this initiative was carried out using a similar model to the Meningococcal programme after a TB outbreak at a local college. The 'Way Smoother' approach was again shown to be more successful than other healthcare services in reaching those who needed the programme most.
- As a result of successes from the above projects, the **Directly Observed Therapy (DOT) programme** arose. Personally administering medication to non-compliant TB patients had traditionally been undertaken by Public Health Nurses but this was proving to be expensive and time consuming. A collaborative pilot between Auckland Regional Public Health (ARPHs) and Otara Health was to be trialled. ARPHs provided training and clinical oversight of the two local women who were recruited to make contact with the TB patients and to administer the medication. Again, the project proved to be successful and ARPHs continues to employ DOT workers.
- **Well Child project** – A project worker from Otara Health was employed to work alongside the South Auckland Well Child Trust and South Auckland Health along with other Well Child service providers to work on the development of a database to record the birth of every baby born to Otara parents

This would enable Well Child checks, immunisations etc to be tracked by health professionals. Families could then be assisted to complete key health activities for their children. This initiative led to the development of 'Kidznet' database.

- **Free bus** – Otara Health advocated with Middlemore Hospital for improved transport to essential clinical services. This resulted in the successful establishment of a free bus travelling to Middlemore hospital and to what is now the Manukau Superclinic.
- **Otara Health & Housing schemes** – assessments carried out by Otara Health staff during the Meningococcal Awareness Campaign showed significant needs for families in a number of areas, in particular with housing. There was a high proportion of renters, with the majority of residents being low income earners. Overcrowding was a real problem, as were cold, damp housing conditions. Dr. Chris Bullen, a Public Health Physician with ARPHS instigated a community-based project to attempt to address the connection between housing and poor health. Following consultation with the community and a network of agencies, Dr. Bullen reported to the National Health Committee. Following the report, a number of recommendations were made to statutory agencies providing services in Otara. Two housing projects led by Otara Health were delivered.
- **The Otara Health & Housing Campaign (the Ambassadors project)** – employed local people of mixed ethnic background in a door-to-door campaign. The project relied on strong inter-agency collaboration, where of Health and Housing Ambassadors carried out assessments and addressed a range of issues from overcrowding, dealing with damp, mould and ventilation, to income support assistance, rubbish disposal, providing rat bait, composting and installing smoke detectors. Evaluation of the programme showed that the community experienced real and measurable improvements as a result of the project. The success of the project was also reflected in cross-sector agencies working together in a more integrated and co-ordinated fashion.
- **Our Home Our Place** – grew out of a Housing Reference Group convened by Otara Health. It was recognised that the majority of housing in Otara was built for small nuclear families, rather than the extended Pacific and Māori families actually living in the area. A hui was held to develop ideas on how new housing might be constructed to better meet the physical, cultural and extended family / whānau needs of Otara families.
- **He Kainga Oranga, the Housing, Insulation and Health study** – Otara was one of seven localities to take part in a multi-disciplinary research programme undertaken by the University of Otago. The study explored links between living in a warmer home and related health improvements. Otara Health was engaged to liaise with the community and to help identify the participants in the study. 200 homes were insulated as a result of the research.
- **The Healthy Housing Development Programme** – was instigated by Housing New Zealand Corporation to reduce overcrowding. Otara Health was contracted as part of the project, with the role of supporting the work of Public Health Nurses, linking residents into essential health and social services and supporting families with basic housekeeping strategies.