

# Plunket sings sponsors' praises as centre gets new lease on life

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By DELWYN MASTERS

PLUNKET'S Karitane Family Centre in New Plymouth is reopening, thanks to a \$250,000 lifeline.

The centre closed in April following a funding crisis within the New Zealand Plunket Society, which also forced family centres in Hamilton, Tauranga and Gisborne to shut their doors.

But behind-the-scenes work by volunteers at New Plymouth Plunket has secured sponsorship from eight companies in Taranaki to allow the family centre to open on October 30, and keep it running for the next three years.

NZPS president Dianne Armstrong said her announcement of the closures earlier this year was the worst day of her career, "but the light has come out today with this announcement".

"This is the first of those (four) family centres that has reopened under the name of Plunket, and for that I feel very proud and humble.

"It would have been much easier to walk away.

"I will be able to talk about the overwhelming support of Taranaki business people right around the country — this is community support at its very best."

Powerco is the principal sponsor of the family centre, with further support from Mason Appliances, TSB Bank, Petrocorp Exploration, The Devon Hotel, Pack Centre Ltd, Taranaki Medlab and Yarrows Taranaki.

New Plymouth Plunket spokeswoman Margaret Betteridge said the centre would continue from where it left off, with the usual services returning.

The sponsorship will pay the wages of three staff members.

The mobile Plunket nurse, who was employed to fill the gap created by the centre's closure, will continue until her contract finishes in June. Ms Armstrong said it was too early to decide if the mobile service would end then.

But while Ms Armstrong said the reopening was a shining example of what community spirit could achieve, it should never have had to happen.

Plunket's money problems were the result of "cost-shifting at its very best".

"Health funding is leaving the community, and others are picking it up.



**HAPPY DAYS: Powerco chief executive Simon Moutter and his six-month-old daughter Erica celebrate the reopening of New Plymouth's Karitane Family Centre with Plunket treasurer Ann Hatch.**  
Photo: GLEN FERGUSSON

"We can't allow cost-shifting to occur.

"It's wonderful that we have a three-year time-frame to work within, but it would be very nice to come back to people and say, 'Your support was really welcome but we've achieved funding from Government, so we'd like to free your money up'.

"Seven thousand people in Taranaki signed a petition (against the centre's closure) and they weren't heard by the (Midland) RHA. You have to wonder how 7000 people sign and yet have not been heard."

Powerco chief executive Simon Moutter said many of his staff had young families, so it was

easy to gain support within the company to help reopen the centre.

New Plymouth Plunket secretary Ann Hatch said the commitment of three years' sponsorship was vital to the centre opening its doors again. "It was no use starting up the centre if there was only short-term funding available.

"We see it as an essential service, especially for new mothers, and we're delighted that Taranaki's business community has come in behind us."

● HAMILTON'S family centre has also reopened, run by an independent trust.