



Larry Winterburn and wife Helene (left foreground) surrounded by the community that helped build the dream.

Otaki home is a dream come true

An Otaki house that is literally designed around the wheel-in shower unit is a unique achievement both for the builders and the people behind the scenes.

For the Department of Maori Affairs, the people behind the building of the house, it's been a first, as well as breaking new ground for other government agencies such as Social Welfare and the Health Department.

And for Larry Winterburn, a paraplegic since a car accident in 1974, and his wife Helene and two daughters, it's a dream come true.

Building supervisor, Ron Green says the large shower unit off the main bedroom enables Larry to wheel his chair in and then transfer to a stool. The unit came from a local contractor and was earmarked for the house long before plans were drawn up.

Ron says a standard house plan was redesigned to fit around the shower unit. This meant widening doorways, the hallway, installing a ranchslider for ease of fire exit in the bedroom, lowering the kitchen sink, installing hand rails around the house and a concrete entrance ramp.

And how do Larry and his family like their new home?

"It's fantastic, just what we wanted."

Unsuitable renting

Confined to a wheelchair since a motoring accident in 1974, Larry has been unable to work and has received a benefit since that time. Unfortunately the house they were renting was unsuitable for a family and so a decision was made to try and buy a house.

Originally the couple were to have built on family-owned land in Otaki but that proved impossible so an alternative site was sought.

Maori Affairs came up with a section, but repayments would have been difficult if there had not been a change in Social Welfare legislation regarding loans for alterations to homes. Previously under the Disabled Person's

Community Welfare Act, loans could only go to existing homes not new homes. The change meant a five thousand dollar suspensory loan was offered to the Winterburns.

It also meant other aids such as special handrails, wheelchairs, commode chairs and crutches could be supplied.

Fleshed out

But it's been the people behind the bureaucracy who have fleshed out the bare bones of the house design.

Alison McNamara from the community health services of the Palmerston North Public Hospital became involved when advice was needed on what adaptations to the house plan were required. Her fellow worker Bridget Apthorp then took over liaising with Gina Lyne of the Social Welfare Department on the recommendation for a suspensory loan.

For Maori Affairs staff, senior building inspector Dan Pollock, inspector Ron Green and Doxy Whaanga a well-trodden path between the sub-office in Palmerston North and Otaki has been made.

Whanau support has not been lacking, with the Ngati Kapumanawawhiti hapu sustaining Larry and Helene.