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Opening curtains, opening doors to a new community space

Kaitaia-based social agency Open The Curtains (OTC) is making steady inroads towards progressing the establishment of a new community space at Tangonge Domain on Bonnetts Road.

OTC community initiatives manager Jason Reti says the immediate priority is to obtain a lease for the area, adding that the organisation has already presented a plan to the Te Hiku Community Board and the Far North District Council.

“There has been some encouraging support. The lease needs to be sanctioned by the Department of Conservation national headquarters and heard again before the Te Hiku Community Board in April. It will then be open for a public forum discussion and we anticipate the lease to be signed by June this year,” he says.

The redevelopment plan includes transforming the area into a recreation space for residents in the Kaitaia West area, featuring a natural playground, a basketball court and an easy-graded walking track equipped with basic exercise stations. Jason says other initiatives for the future include the establishment of a fruit forest and community gardens that have the potential to feed local whanau, as well as provide practical training and pathways into the horticulture industry.

“These ideas have been gathered from discussions with the Kaitaia West community. The park has the capacity to meet the needs of our most vulnerable groups – the youth and the elderly – while helping to boost community pride and ownership of the space,” he says.

Jason heads a new five-member working committee charged with the logistics of redevelopment. He says he is also working closely with Far North District Council district facilities team leader Mike Colebrook towards bringing the project to fruition, starting with the provision of paint to rejuvenate the old soccer clubrooms building on site.



Meanwhile, Jason has drawn on his extensive community connections to undergo preliminary work. He says Kaitaia College staff – with support from principal Jack Saxon – have mucked in mowing lawns, Fulton Hogan staff have cleared the roadside drain and formed a functional driveway, and NorthTec carpentry tutor Stephen Rameka has put his hand up to assist in the building of the playground.

“This initiative has helped break through the age-old myth faced with social work, where collaboration between community agencies has been seen as a difficult task,” Jason says.

Healthy Families Far North kaimahi rolled up their sleeves in the new year to help repaint the clubrooms and kaituhono Manuera Riwai hosted an introductory brainstorm session with OTC, the Department of Conservation, Te Hiku Hauora, Te Tai Tokerau Rugby League and Healthy Families Far North team members to nut out how each agency can collaborate to the Kaitaia community's benefit.

The meeting bore some exciting ideas for collaboration: “Healthy Families is about improving the lives of people where we live, learn, work and play. We are thrilled about the opportunity to smash through the silo mentality that cripples our ability to move forward with collective impact on what will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable community asset,” Manuera says.

The park committee next meets on Thursday March 9. All interested parties are invited to contact Jason Reti on 021 303 579 or jasonreti73@gmail.com to attend.

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