

Community safety given higher profile

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The Ashburton District is now a member of a growing network of towns and cities around New Zealand that have joined the Safe Communities network.

Achieving the accreditation required to become part of that network, however, has involved hours of work by the 27 agencies involved and the rewards came on Wednesday when the official paperwork was signed off in a ceremony at the Hakatere Marae.

Lesley Symington has been the key player in pulling the accreditation project together and has worked with each of the agencies involved to prepare an in-depth picture of the way safety issues are already covered, what was already being done well and where any gaps may be.

One of the big issues to emerge was the high rate of falls among the elderly, Symington said and that now forms one of six key areas that will be the organisation's focus.

Also included is rural safety, road safety, harm prevention and reduction – which includes family harm and suicide, alcohol and drugs, and the natural and built environment.

Evaluation was an important part of the process as the work that was being done had to be proven to make a difference, Symington said.



Celebrating Ashburton becoming part of the Australasian Safe Communities network (standing from left), Ashburton Mayor Donna Favel, Ashburton district councillor Liz McMillan, Ashburton police senior sergeant Leigh Jenkins, Judd Baker, ACC, Safer Ashburton Trust chairman Don McLeod with Tania Peters, director Safe Communities Foundation of New Zealand, in front.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

The Safer Communities initiative works under the umbrella of Safer Ashburton and is funded for five years from ACC as well as receiving some funding from the Ashburton District Council.

While achieving accreditation had involved a significant amount of work, the real work would begin now the paperwork had been completed, she said.

The 27 agencies involved cover a wide range of community safety services, including crime prevention, injury prevention, alcohol

and drug-related harm, family harm, falls prevention, road safety, rural safety, emergency services, education and early intervention/prevention have worked together to seek Safe Community accreditation.

A Safe Community is defined as "a community where people can go about their daily activities in an environment without fear, and without risk of harm or injury."

District councillor Liz McMillan chairs the Safe Communities steering group and said the key

strength of the initiative was that it brought together all the agencies involved in working to create a safer district.

"Lesley has had to collate everything in the district that makes us a safe community and we've had really good input from all the agencies. We now know what we have and where the gaps are so we're not reinventing the wheel," she said.

One of the key issues identified was the high rate of falls among the elderly, with Ashburton ranking second behind Waikanae in fall numbers.

"Falls prevention will be a big thing for us and this data shows we need to do something around this," McMillan said.

An initiative the group will be working on is a safety village expo at the Ashburton A&P Show, where groups involved in safety in the community will create an information base. Fifteen groups have already signed up.

The beauty of the Safe Community model was that it brought agencies together, to apply their collective "weight" to reducing injury and crime statistics over time and agencies working together had much more impact than agencies working alone, she said.

"Accreditation is a great beginning to our journey towards a safer district and improved quality of living for all Ashburton District residents".