

## **Voices column for Nelson Mail**

**By Rhoda McDonald**

Golden Bay's incredible strength of community was there in spades (literally!) during the December floods.

While shovelling silt at Pohara Valley properties I was privileged to observe a truly coherent and connected community working together, despite it being under extreme stress. I was wowed by the huge cooperative spirit and ability to find the necessary resources and the just-get-on-with-it attitude.

At times organisation was understandably shambolic. There were frayed nerves and some strongly voiced opinions. But everyone worked together and looked after each other. And the practical generosity was wonderful.

During the floods our local health professionals demonstrated just what an impressive and versatile team they are. For example, with the Bay split in two at Bird's Hill by the large slip, a doctor and nurse ran impromptu surgery sessions at Collingwood while management staff used their nursing skills to reach residents who the District Nurse was unable to get to.

Meanwhile emails from our community board chair and councillor proved invaluable to inform, direct resources and reassure people that everything possible was being committed to the crisis.

It is no wonder that such a diversity of talented people choose to make a home here. Golden Bay is accepting of people from all walks of life, all backgrounds and beliefs.

I have been deeply moved by the strength of welcome I have received; from the wonderful powhiri at our beautiful marae, to the people who have stopped to talk to me in the street or supermarket.

That diversity produces a range of views. During the first month and a half of working for the integrated family health centre, I have heard the full range of opinions.

I, along with everyone involved in planning the facility, know some have reservations about facets of the integrated facility. We realise we can't please everyone and that what will be delivered can never be perfect. And yes, a few of the new arrangements may not be as personally convenient for some as now.

But I would encourage all Golden Bay people to look at the big picture, and what is best and sustainable long term for the community as a whole.

I am fortunate to be able to hear these views with fresh ears, while calling on my long experience as both a nurse and a health manager.

My first observation is Golden Bay is extremely lucky to have fantastic health services, given our 5000 permanent residents equate to the size of a small suburb in other areas. Of course our isolation means we have to have services here. But I know of comparable communities that have nothing like our range and quality of health services.

And I know the constant pressure on health industry costs means we must be as efficient as we can to keep what we have now and make it work as well as humanly possible.

Without an integrated approach, our existing health services are vulnerable simply because they are not big enough to be individually viable.

Health integration is about keeping the services we have. But it is much, much more than that. It is a complex idea to understand. At a simple level it is about getting economies of scale and running more efficiently - having staff that work as one team, one kitchen, one garden, one reception area, one phone and computer system etc.

It is also about putting the patient - rather than the organisations that deliver the services - at the centre so the systems work better together for the patient.

A bigger multi-service facility will attract and keep staff more easily, provide better training and the opportunity to develop a wider range of skills.

Golden Bay's integrated family health centre will be better for patients, residents and their families. It'll be better for staff and it makes sense financially.

Planning for the facility is now well down the track so let's pull together and make it happen.

**Rhoda McDonald is Service Director, Golden Bay Integrated Family Health Centre**