

# Media Release

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## **Children's ward volunteers celebrate 20 years**

Around 15 past and present play volunteers from Tauranga Hospital's children's ward celebrated their group's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday in October.

The Children in Hospital Liaison Group has six volunteers for the daily sessions providing play groups for children who are in hospital, and their visiting siblings.

They work along-side two full-time play specialists, Stacey Pennell and Debbie Blackwood, who say the volunteers are a huge support.

"They give up their time on a regular basis to play with the children or they may sit with a child who is too sick to take part on the morning play group. They are just fantastic," says Stacey.

When the group began in 1989, before the hospital had a dedicated play room, the volunteers wheeled a trolley of toys around the ward and outpatients department. Now morning play sessions are held Monday-Friday offering a range of play experiences.

Doreen Birchfield says she has 'absolutely loved' her 15 years of volunteering.

"I love the children and love being active. I get a lot of pleasure from playing with the children and getting to know them, especially the ones who come in regularly," says Doreen.

Doreen says being in hospital can be a scary time for children and the group aims to reduce the anxiety by making a child's stay happier through play.

Stacey says volunteers raise around \$1500 every year to buy new toys, activities and games.

ENDS



**Calli Te Huia (11), left, and Mana Khan (12) get a helping hand from Children in Hospital Liaison Group volunteers Di Tate, second from left, and Doreen Birchfield during the morning play session at Tauranga Hospital's children's ward.**

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