

## **Campaigning for accessible change places in public spaces**

'Accessible Change Places' is a project that is advocating for public toilets that are fully accessible and have a hoist and change bench. The aim is to have one accessible change place in a public space in Hamilton in 2017.

A collaborative leadership group is driving this project and consists of: Ambassador - Bernadette Stewart; Community Living representatives Kim Simpson and Saffron Mitchell; Parent to Parent; CCS Disability; Tailored Accessibility Solutions; Active Healthcare NZ; and the Hamilton City Council.

Bernadette Stewart cannot access her community the same way her friends do. Bernadette has a profound disability that requires access to a fully accessible change place. Bernadette's story is not an isolated one as there are many members of the community both in the Waikato and nationwide who struggle to live fulfilling lives, as they are bound by planning their life choices around toileting facilities. This often means people will stay home rather than face an embarrassing public situation. This vulnerability of people with disabilities can lead to a number of other issues, such as loneliness, anger, and extra stress on carers.

"Accessible change places mean that people with a disability won't have to stay in incontinent products all day. We can stay out longer when out with family, and can even go to the pub in the evening", says Bernadette.

Often people in this situation are confronted by isolation due to not having adequate facilities that meet their needs. In desperation, some families resort to changing their loved ones on the floor of public toilets – which is unhygienic, undignified, and unsafe, presenting risks for recipients and carers. The alternative is to sit in soiled clothing until they get home.

Accessible change places is advocating for the need of public change places, a move towards sustainable facilities for the future of Hamilton. Accessible change places will provide an adult sized change bench, a tracking hoist and enough space in a safe clean environment, for members of our community to use.

This is a cause that affects a large portion of our population. This includes people with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, motor neuron disease, people who have a physical disability either from birth, or from an accident, and the elderly.

"With baby boomers heading towards retirement we need to safeguard our futures and ensure all members of our society, especially our most vulnerable members are able to access the community and all of its facilities" says Saffron Mitchell, Community Living - a Disability Provider.

"This is something that could affect anyone one of us or someone we love, it is time for action" says Saffron.

Inclusive Communities mean people having all their basic needs met. It is not somebody else's problem, it is ours collectively.

“Currently we believe there are no public accessible change spaces in New Zealand and this is an opportunity for Hamilton to lead by example and inspire other areas to follow in our steps” says Saffron.

To find out more about the Accessible Change Places project, visit [www.facebook.com/accessiblechangeplaces](https://www.facebook.com/accessiblechangeplaces)