

Wanganui
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Pre-school taken to the children

Rural children in the Hunterville area are given the chance to develop social skills through the mobile Pre School Unit which travels to the children.

The unit is run by head teacher, Rosemary Hunter and her assistant teacher Colleen Lynch, who cover a mileage average over the 300 mark weekly and stretching from Rata to Taihape, serving seven groups of children aged from 2½ years to school age.

However, the unit is also a life saver for mothers with younger children who can attend and meet up with other rural mothers similarly placed, Ms Hunter said.

The unit has been on the circuit about nine years. Ms Hunter has been on the job for a year now and Ms Lynch for nearly a month. Both enjoy the variety and challenge the job holds. After spending five years in a large, well endowed New Plymouth kindergarten, it has been a real change for Rosemary to drive around the rural districts and meet up with small groups in different venues each day of the week. Colleen comes from Gore where she was an itinerant teacher visiting eight playgroups under the Rural Educational Activities Programme.

Halls are mainly used for the purpose, but some sessions take place in private homes. The Rata preschool children meet in a bach on Robyn and David Wilton's property at Putorino.

Each session runs independently with a group co-ordinator who arranges parent helpers, collects the term subscriptions and who is also on the central committee of the unit. The sessions usually run for two hours, but Taihape have a two-and-a-half-hour session and there is a three hour session held on Friday mornings in Hunterville where children from all the groups may gather for an extra session as an integrated group.

The van is supplied by the Education Department

and carries all the kindergarten equipment. This has to be unloaded and then repacked for each session Ms Hunter said. The children help with this and mothers also give a hand.

The parent committee is made up of representatives from each play group plus any other interested persons. Monthly meetings are held and committee members and teachers discuss group needs, fundraising, social functions, parent education, liaison with other preschool groups and the purchase of equipment. A sessional grant is received from the Department of Education towards the running of the unit. The remaining costs are met by parent donations and fundraising, Ms Hunter said.

The van is maintained by the Hunterville School Bus Garage.

The Hunterville groups have 15 or 16 mothers prepared to sit on the committee, giving the Mobile Unit terrific support, Ms Hunter said. Many have to spend an hour travelling each way to meetings.

The programme offered to these rural children includes blocks, puzzles, painting, sand and water activities and music. Through this programme the children can develop skills in discussion and language, learn to co-operate and also pick up certain manual skills. But the social possibilities opened to otherwise isolated children is the major benefit, Ms Hunter said.

Hunterville's town children have the benefit of a very strong Playcentre and there is the Kohanga Reo at the Rata Marae also offering preschool training for children, giving the district a well balanced choice and ensuring rural children shall not be disadvantaged.

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Colleen Lynch helps pupils with their carpentry.