

Designing for life

We're getting older, living longer, and are more willing to acknowledge that over our lifetime we are likely to experience a disabling condition. Enter: Lifetime Design Foundation.

Zinzan Cunningham reports.

Lifetime Design's Saffron Gardner says that design for the whole population is an idea whose time has come. Governments, town planners, designers, manufacturers and communities in Europe, Japan, the US and Australia are taking a fresh look at our living environments, and asking 'how can we ensure that everyone can fully participate in every aspect of life?'

"In a sense," says Gardner, "it's just part of a wider movement – an increasing number of people and organisations who share our vision and who demand products and services that meet the principles of Lifetime Design. We call this shift in consumer power a social and marketing movement because it has an intentional component. That is, it's not just a shift in opinions or tastes, but a planned, collective effort to bring about positive change."

The concept of Lifetime Design goes under many names: Inclusive Design, Universal Design, Accessible Design.

"But here in New Zealand we are talking about Lifetime Design as a way of expressing our commitment to the principles of ease of use, inclusion, access and adaptability and lifetime value."

So what's driving this new thinking? Gardner says the oft-mentioned affluent Baby Boomers, an ageing population, and the fact more New Zealand families are living with three or four generations under the same roof, all contribute to our consciousness that our homes – whatever shape they take – should be safe for our friends and family to be in.

"All this adds up to a growing demand for environments that work for everyone," she says.

Making the whole concept even more friendly is that it can save you money.

"Incorporating Lifetime Design principles at the design and construction phase adds only minimal cost, and has been estimated to be 30 times less expensive than trying to modify a dwelling later on."

The Ministry of Social Development,

"We are passionately independent and are proud of our diverse mix of people and sectors. As a way of never being captured by a single point of view we will not enter exclusive relationships with any business partner"

Drivers

- Housing NZ says the largest growth in households over the next 15 years will be those headed by people aged 55 or over. Housing plans made today set the scene for well over a decade.
- Older people today are not just living longer, they are remaining active longer. Their demands for housing, transport, products and services that work for them are a clear opportunity for builders, designers and manufacturers.
- New Zealand is experiencing a fundamental shift in attitudes. Older people today want to remain independent, self supporting and live as long as possible in their own homes, getting the care and the services that they need and desire at home.
- With a rapidly ageing population, the available time to develop environments that will work for older people is very limited.

Housing New Zealand, and the Ministry of Health have contributed funding to the start-up phase of the Lifetime Design Foundation. Supporters include Grey Power, Age Concern, Barnados, Parent Centre, Injury Prevention Society, Returned Services Association, Families Commission, the Barrier Free Trust, Community Housing Association, and Centre for Research and Social Assessment, G.J. Gardner Homes, and Generation Developments.

Lifetime Design Foundation is an independent incorporated society. Individuals and groups are encouraged to join.

"We are passionately independent and are proud of our diverse mix of people and sectors. As a way of never being captured by a single point of view we will not enter exclusive relationships with any business partner."

• www.lifetimedesign.org.nz



David Russell gives the Lifemark stamp

Launching Lifetime Design and the Lifemark

The recent national launch of Lifetime Design was very successful, according to Gardner.

"Waitakere mayor Bob Harvey promised to take Lifetime Design standards and principles to the Mayors' Forum and incorporate them into future residential planning.

"And Lifetime Design's ambassador, David Russell [former Consumers' Institute chief executive] stamped 'Lifemark' on the first Lifetime Design house plans being built by Generation Developments."

She says the Lifemark brand is awarded to companies who have had a product or spatial plan successfully assessed against the relevant Lifetime Design standards.

"Lifemark can create a compelling point of difference in the market. As yet, few industries have recognised the opportunities presented by our rapidly ageing population, diverse cultures, multi-generational families and the growing number of disabled people living in local communities. Businesses that can show products with a Lifemark will appeal to anyone in the population considering their whole family's needs over time."

Gardner says her organisation is now planning for regional launches in Wellington, North Shore, Manukau, Christchurch and Hamilton, and is developing user groups to develop standards for urban design, retirement homes and apartments as well as considering products when requested to by members.