

Daring kids to be themselves



DARE Southland co-ordinator Brenda Hesson with some of the resources being used to introduce the new DARE to be You programme. Photo: Tania McCann

BY TANIA MCCANN

DARING young people to be themselves and make the right choices is one of the main aims of a new programme launched recently.

The DARE to be You programme replaces DARE to Make Change, a programme which has been assisting young people make positive changes in their lives since 1996.

DARE Southland co-ordinator Brenda Hesson said while the previous programme has been very successful, research had suggested its concepts, language and features didn't fit in with our unique culture and education system.

Based on the book *Gem of First Water*, the DARE to Make Change programme originally came from the American DARE Association and told the story of a young boy and the challenges he faced as he worked his way through something of a fantasy land. The new programme, DARE to be You is based on a New Zealand book, *Run for the Trees*, written by Mandy Hager. It tells the story of 13-year-old Ben Costas, who takes a journey to gain self-esteem. The story is told through

humour and compassion and takes participants on a breathless trip from Wellington to the West Coast and back.

The programme, which involves reading the book and working through a series of activities, is delivered by trained facilitators in a one-to-one or small group situation.

Children, who are experiencing difficulties for a variety of reasons, are referred by schools and community agencies, although families can also refer children.

DARE to be You is very New Zealand focused and is based on five different themes, which help build and reinforce self-esteem and encourage self-control, empathy and self-reliant decision making.

The change to the new programme coincides with the rebranding of DARE New Zealand and their change to being a standalone organisation, no longer affiliated with DARE America.

Currently there are 10 facilitators trained to deliver the programme in Southland, with a further 15

booked in for training later this month.

Ms Hesson said facilitators are all screened and undergo training before becoming involved with the children and while the number of facilitators becoming involved is very good, there is always more demand from children needing the programme than can be accommodated.

DARE Southland works in close partnership with the Police Youth Education Service and is funded by community funders, who assist with resources.

Ms Hesson said the DARE Foundation's aim is to give every New Zealander the skills they need to reach their full potential, by asking the hard questions about the real issues affecting us all today.

As well as the DARE to be You programme, DARE delivers a wide range of programmes, particularly through schools, which are designed to challenge children, their parents and their communities to develop skills in DARE - Decision-making, Assertiveness, Responsibility and Esteem - and enable them to make informed choices.