

strategy for ageing

Like me, Diane Turner has her sights set on a healthy old age in the Eastern Bay.

The former Whakatane District Council chief executive has access to the best of research around the issues facing seniors. She knows that what we do at all stages of our lives has ripple effects for later years. She says that it's never too soon to plan.

Diane has worked in other parts of the country since she left her council role in 2011 but her family and friends are still here and she returns for weekends and holidays.



Two years ago she took on a director's role with the Ministry of Social Development's Office for Seniors, so her leadership and understanding of issues of ageing will impact us all. Diane and her team are working to ensure seniors are valued and acknowledged within society.

"We are all ageing. It matters to all of us that New Zealand is a place where we have the opportunity to live well in our later years."

Diane can rattle off statistics and share useful information like a pro. Yes, our numbers are growing exponentially and this has implications for health, housing, employment and more.

New to me is our high employment figures for people over 65 – one of the highest in the world. This could be because older people have few savings and need more than superannuation pro-



NEW OFFICE:
Former Whakatane District Council chief executive Diane Turner is now director of the Office for Seniors. Photo Ruth Gerzon

grey matters by Ruth Gerzon

A fortnightly series for seniors
by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages.

vides, or because we enjoy our work. I hope it is mostly the latter.

The Office for Seniors may only have a staff of seven but it has a significant impact, ensuring seniors' issues and concerns are visible, heard and responded to by other Government agencies such as those dealing with housing and health.

This year, a large part of Diane's work has been soliciting widespread input into a new strategy for an ageing population and she has succeeded admirably. There were 470 written submissions as well as the outcomes from meetings. The strategy is yet to be released but Diane did divulge that housing is seen as the number one priority.

Finding new homes when downsizing is not easy and may mean moving communities and making new friends. Also, it is likely in the future that 50 percent of seniors will be renting. Many rentals are insecure, with few long term leases.

When you are older, having to find and move to a new home, and sometimes to a new community is especially problematic. We need to find ways to make it easier for seniors facing housing issues.

In June this year our country joined the World Health Organisation Age Friendly Communities Network. The towns of Hamilton and New Plymouth have already used this network's framework to develop action plans to work towards their social and physical environ-

ments, and the council and other services support seniors. In Whakatane, lobby group Inclusion Whakatane plans to spearhead similar work here.

The Office for Seniors disseminates a wide variety of information to aid us all in making decisions about our future. The website, www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz is a mine of excellent information, and the SuperSeniors Facebook page and e-newsletter keep people up to date.

Clearly the impact of our growing numbers has been noted by Government. This growth has been unfortunately called the "grey tsunami", as though we are to sweep away all others, causing havoc in our wake.

The term is just a little bit apocalyptic for my liking, and certainly not a term Diane would use. She would agree with a more positive approach, welcoming our numbers and the energy and experience we have that can be tapped to improve life for us all.

We are fortunate to have her support and that of our champion in parliament, the minister for seniors Tracey Martin. With these two and their team working hard on our behalf I am confident our future is in good hands.

Readers can learn more about their plans at a presentation by Ms Martin on Thursday, November 22, at 10am in Whakatane War Memorial Centre reception lounge. Email easternbayvillages@gmail.com or phone 020 4161 5887 for more details.

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