**Media Release**

7 August, 2019

**Countdown Kids Hospital Appeal Kicks Off for 2019**

The Countdown Kids Hospital Appeal 2019 was aptly launched today with a fantastic performance from the Whangarei Primary School kapa haka group at the Child Health Centre in Whangarei.

Paul Maxwell acting group manager of Countdown attended the launch and said he hoped the passion that the Kapa Haka group had for their performance would be reflected by the community for the Appeal which runs until 27 October.

Paul said that Countdown work hard to make Kiwis lives a little better every day and at the heart of that support is the Appeal.

Since the Appeal first began in 2007, Countdown customers and staff have raised $12.8 million to support thousands of sick kiwi kids and their families around the country.

Northland DHB Child, Youth, Maternal, Public & Oral Health general manager Jeanette Wedding told the audience over those 12 years Northland DHB has received $860,000 of those funds.

The Face of the Countdown Kids Hospital Appeal for 2019 is four and a half year old Zane Williams. Zane is one of five New Zealanders diagnosed with a rare genetic variant that affects how his brain works and because of this he has been diagnosed with global developmental delay, intellectual impairment and autism.

Zane’s mother Nicole Alach said she first came to the Child Health Centre just after his first birthday when he was still not yet crawling. A blood test revealed the deletion on his 12th Chromosome, and from there they have had intense, engaged wrap around services from the Child Health Centre.

Nicole says that it takes more than a village to raise a child with special needs and Zane’s therapists have taught him to walk, use a spoon, to play and communicate his basic needs.

“The team here all mean so much to Zane, our extended family and me. The mahi done here has helped so much to improve all of our quality of life. They have been there to support us in hard times and celebrations also. Always offering a hug, or more practical support when needed, like chasing him down the road if he got away from me.”

Last year Nicole was looking for a change in career and saw an administration support position at Child Health Centre advertised, which she knew straight away was where she needed to be and she now works with the team. The role can be quite emotionally challenging for her when she sees children Zane’s age only now looking to access services for their developmental delays, but she said she knows once they have finally connected with the service they will be offered the very best care.

Nicole is proud to have Zane as the face of the Appeal because she says it goes a long way to helping families with children suffering from a range of illnesses and conditions, and it is very much appreciated.

Northland DHB Child Health Services manager Yvonne Hunter said their wish list for 2019 includes new play equipment for the Whangarei Hospital Whānau House.

The Whānau House has on average 80 children per month staying overnight. Currently, there is no area for the children to play and lacks child proof fencing. Yvonne said they aim to use the money raised to create a more homely environment to ensure children are entertained and distracted while their families are dealing with their siblings spending time in hospital.

Added to the list are various pieces of medical equipment selected especially to ease the stress levels of children undergoing procedures such as a vein viewer which allows for easy location of a vein to insert a needle for taking bloods and giving lifesaving medication. Sleep apnoea monitors will be purchased for the Children’s Ward and Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) to monitor breathing in premature infants and for babies who are at high risk of sudden unexplained death in infancy (SUDI). Fridges are also on the list for SCBU and the Child Health Centre to keep expressed milk at the correct temperature for babies and for storing immunisations safely to allow for opportunistic vaccination.

Yvonne said last year they were handed a cheque for $81,000 which has made a significant difference to children with disabilities who have the use of a new wheelchair and mobility scooter both in the Child Health Centre and for use in the community. They were also able to purchase glucose monitoring systems for children with diabetes, a trauma stretcher, breast pumps, portable and wall mounted ophthalmoscopes for Child Health Centre and the Children’s Ward. Child Protection and Gateway Services received an IPad to use for distraction therapy when children are undergoing procedures. Kaitaia Hospital received a heated cot, and portable blood pressure monitors.

The team at the Child Health Service added $2000 to the Appeal from funds raised at a movie night and soup days and Yvonne said they are planning more joint fundraising again this year.

The aim this year is to raise $1 Million. Every little bit helps support the children and their whānau in Northland who are dealing with the stresses that come with ongoing health issues. Next time you are at Countdown and see the Countdown Kids Hospital Appeal remember what it’s all about and join in.

Image: Zane Williams and Jeanette Wedding cutting the Countdown Kids Hospital Appeal 2019 Cake

**ENDS**

*For further information, please contact:*

*Paula Martin, Communications Officer*

*Phone 09 4304101 extn 60519*