

# OUR COMMUNITY, OUR PEOPLE

## Peace-of-mind for parents

BY AMY JOHNSTONE

ALTHOUGH it is a service most parents hope they will never have to use, more and more people are investing in their child's future by banking their umbilical cord blood.

Invercargill parents Bronwyn and Chris Hughes are two parents who have no regrets they made the decision to store their children's cord blood.

Using CordBank, an Auckland-based organisation which gives parents around New Zealand the opportunities to "bank" their baby's umbilical stem cells for future medical use, help is on hand should they ever need to make the call.

Bronwyn said she heard about the service through her mother-in-law.

"When we looked into it we thought it was definitely worth doing it," she said

Bronwyn said becoming pregnant with their first child, Kaela (now 2 ½), had been a hard road, so making the decision to use CordBank was not a difficult one.

When Kaela was 6-months-old, Bronwyn got pregnant with Gabriella (now 16 months) and when it came to making the decision about banking the cord blood again they thought they "can't have one without the other".

"With the amount of disease, illnesses... it's just a safeguard for your children."

Bronwyn said they have not used either of the girls' cord blood yet.

"Hopefully we'll never have to use it - it's just peace-of-mind that it's there."

Although cord blood banking has been done in other areas around the world for some time, CordBank was established in New Zealand in 2002.

CordBank spokesperson Kate Carter said two New Zealand children (whose parents stored their cord blood at CordBank) have been successfully treated with their own cord blood. One for a childhood cancer known as a neuroblastoma and another for a birth-related brain injury.

Cord blood can be used to treat a number of illnesses, such as leukemia and cerebral palsy, and because the cells came from the individual "it's a perfect match".

Along with the two children who have been treated with their cord blood, Kate said there were also other parents interested in receiving treatment for cerebral palsy.

A number of studies are underway in the US using a child's own cord blood to treat both cerebral palsy and Type 1 diabetes.

"[The families] tell us they see it as offering peace-of-mind and a kind of insurance, so to speak."

When people enquire about the service, Kate said they are sent a free information pack, which in-



**Connecting families:** Bronwyn Hughes and daughters Gabriella (16 months) and Kaela (2 ½).

cludes a contract and DVD.

After they register, the family will be sent a kit which includes everything needed to take the blood, which is given to the midwife or doctor for them to collect the umbilical cord blood at birth.

The blood will then be couriered to CordBank. Once back at the laboratory, Kate said the stem cells are taken out of the cord blood and stored in a cryogenic state. Once the child is 18-years-old, they then will have an opportunity to take over the contract.

"It's really, really easy.

"It's painless and non-invasive for either the mother or baby," Kate said.

Bronwyn said she would like to think one day in the future, government funding would become available for more people to be able to bank their baby's cord blood for future medical use.

"The more people that know about it, the more people will do it."