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Drink-tab collection helps sick children



Paul Norfolk and Katherine Paton, 14, display thousands of drink-can tabs.

Photo / Martin Sykes – 09 June 2008.

Recycled drink-can tabs are bringing in thousands of dollars to help Kiwi children suffering from kidney disorders.

The aluminium tabs on the top of drink cans have raised more than

\$35,000 for Kiwi organisation Kidney Kids over the past five years through the Kan Tabs project.

The tabs are collected in their thousands and packaged, before being taken to metal merchants for weighing and exchange for money - lots of money, says national chairman Terry Hemmingsen.

"The first time I took in a load, the guys at the recycling place couldn't believe we'd collected so many can tabs - and just can tabs."

Around 3600 can tabs are equivalent to a kilogram, and a tonne can add up to about \$2000.

Kidney Kids national manager Paul Norfolk acknowledges that the idea of collecting can tabs is "simple", but has a great impact not only on the children and families involved, but within the community also.

"It's a recycling thing. It's doing good and going back into the community.

"Instead of throwing the cans in those big bins, take some time to take the can tabs off," he said.

"The can tabs have a little bit of titanium in them, and that titanium goes back into the health and medical profession.

"The money buys blood-pressure monitors and other medical equipment.

"Last year we used \$40,000 to make information DVDs, which are free and available to any doctor or families that think they have any problems," Mr Norfolk said.

All the money raised from the collection of can tabs goes towards Kidney Kids' annual camps and the social needs of the children affected - providing them with indoor game activities, colouring pencils and other services such as emotional support, Mr Hemmingsen said.

"Some of the kidney kids are on 12 hours of dialysis a day.

"What do you do for a child who has to stay inside all day and who wants to be outside playing with their friends?" said Mr Hemmingsen, who is the principal at National Park School.

He said the project originated from two schoolgirls who started collecting can tabs at Koputaroa School in Horowhenua, where he was previously principal.

Lions Clubs and primary schools up and down the country are now part of the scheme, with many of them collecting can tabs, taking them to be recycled and then sending a cheque in to Kidney Kids.

Mr Hemmingsen said: "It has grown into a nationwide project and it's the largest Lions Club project in New Zealand.

"We have everyone helping us, from domestic flight crews who have been saving them for us, to can tabs coming in from Japan, Australia, Norfolk Island and Fiji."

Mr Hemmingsen acknowledged the symbol of the Kan Tab project as "a symbol of hope" - the slogan reading: "Each time a tab is torn from a can and placed in a pocket or a bag, a conscious thought is made to support a sick child."

For more information contact your local Lions Club or visit the Lions Clubs NZ website on www.lionsclubs.org.nz - Kan Tabs for Kidney Kids