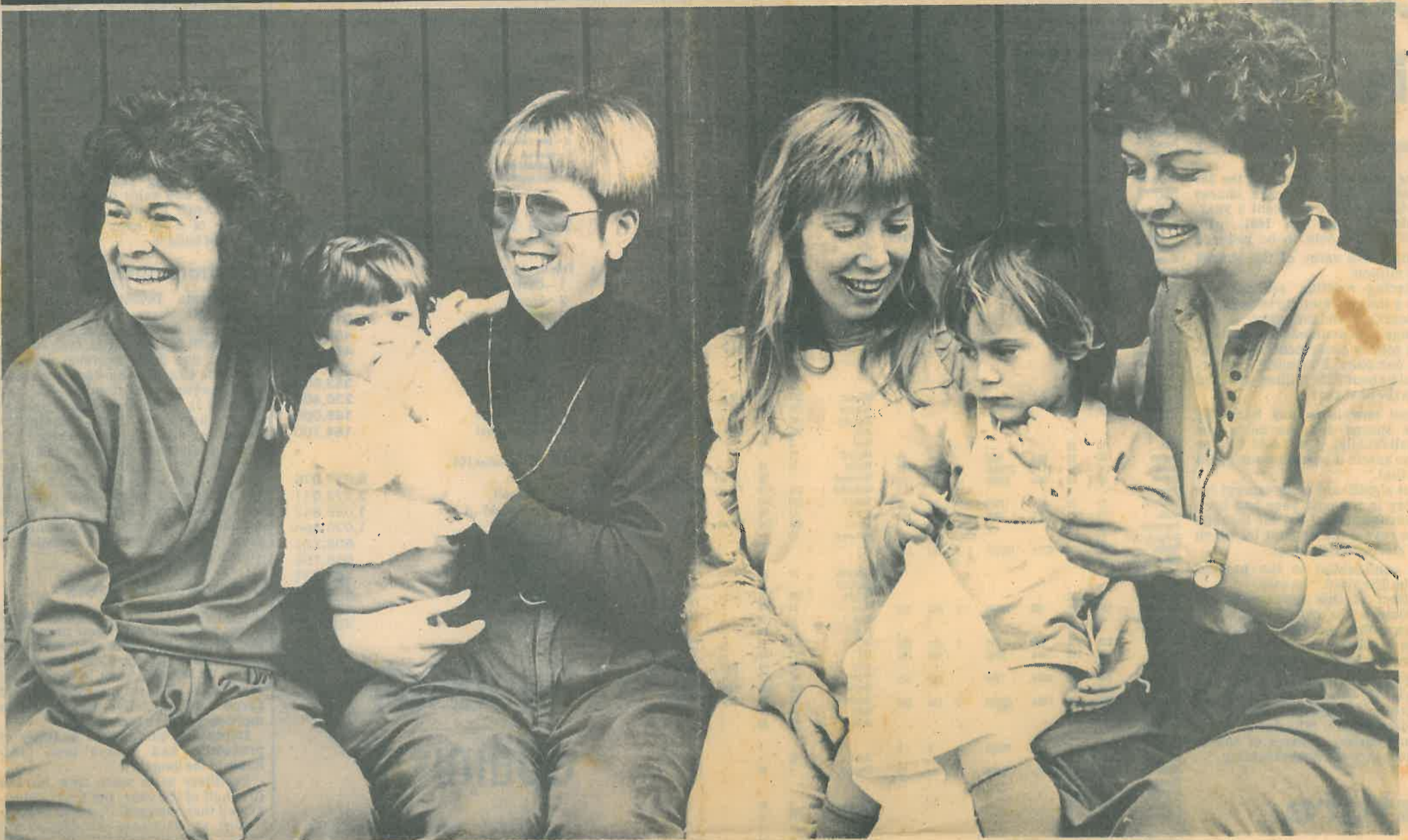


COMMUNITY

Midwives and mothers celebrate



□ The two midwives who will be offering the domino option, Lynley McFarland, left, and Feliz Barnett, far right. With them are Jane Scripps of Whau Valley with daughter Anna, and Julie Aperahama of Ruakaka with daughter Jardena beside Ms Barnett.

Party launches domino option

At the launching party of the new service, Mrs McFarland said: "We know from our experience how much good birthing influences our ability to cope as mothers."

"We have seen how well women in New Zealand can give birth at home, partly through having the support of midwives they know."

"This new service will give women who would still like a hospital birth some of the same benefits, through the continuity of care."

It was a good party. Some of the guests slept, some ran squealing round the car-yard chased by a boy with a toy gun and some lay under the tables eating muffins and sandwiches.

All around the grown-ups, mostly women, were in a quietly jubilant mood celebrating the official start of a new service with a name like the title of a Robert Ludlum novel — "The Domino Option".

A New Zealand first, domino is a contract arrangement between the Northland Area Health Board and independent midwives to provide a short-stay hospital birth with continuity of care before, during and after the birth.

Domino is an acronym of the words "domiciliary (home) in-and-out".

The arrangement caters for women who do not want a home birth but who wish to spend as short a time as possible in hospital, and be attended throughout by someone they know rather than a variety of personnel on shift work.

As in home births, midwife and mother get to know each other at pre-

birth domiciliary checks. The same midwife stays with the mother during labour and birthing in hospital and later makes post-natal home visits following the early discharge.

The first practitioners are Lynley McFarland, formerly afternoon supervisor on the base hospital's obstetric ward, and Whangarei's domiciliary (home birth) midwife, Feliz Barnett.

Both have signed "a domino contract", under which they may use the hospital's delivery suites.

It is similar to a general practitioner's contract, except that the Department of Health pays doctors for delivering babies, and the board pays the independent domino midwives.

But just to complicate things, the department pays for the midwives' domiciliary care — not the board.

It adds up to the same free service that all women having babies in New Zealand are legally entitled to.

Mrs McFarland currently has about six clients and hopes eventually for a case-load of about 10 a month.

Ms Barnett will continue to deliver babies at home, topping up her case-load with "dominos", and the two women will provide back-up support for each other.

Formalities were minimal at the very informal lunch party, held at the Hearing Association rooms in Whangarei.

Mrs McFarland read a telegram from the New Zealand College of Midwives sending "warmest wishes and congratulations to consumers and all concerned on the success of their lobbying which has resulted in achieving New Zealand's first official domino scheme".

Women were working all around the world for better birthing facilities, she said, and many were concerned at the increasing drive toward intervention in birth.

In England Caesarians had increased from four to 11% of births, and in New Zealand from the same level to about nine per cent.

She thanked the area health board for making the contract possible, and its

women's service development group, the Home Birth Association, the Parents' Centre and others who lobbied for the service.

The board's medical officer of health (head of community health services) Dr David Sloan, welcomed the contract which he called "an important and sensible arrangement".

A few women had already taken advantage of the service, and two of them at the party both said the domino option had suited them very well.

Leanne Rouse, mother of a toddler and a new baby, was in hospital for six hours before the birth, and went home three hours afterward.

Eileen Reynolds, mother of five, said it was a joy having a midwife she had got to know previously, with her throughout labour and birth. While she might have wanted to stay longer in hospital if she had been a first-time mother, she was delighted to return quickly to her own family with her new baby.

— Rosemary Rober