

# A tiny but mighty Eden

By CATHERINE HEALY

Managing a non-profit at age 26 might sound like a big ask.

But it seems Deb Schwarz of Meadowbank is taking it all in her stride.

She runs EDEN, the Eating Difficulties Education Network based in Epsom.

The organisation is the only one of its kind in the country and receives no government funding.

It works to prevent disordered eating through public education, counselling and training.

Mrs Schwarz grew up in St Heliers and started working as a teenager counsellor with Kidline 10 years ago.

She went on to study sociology and law before joining EDEN.

"I became interested in the idea that, if one person is struggling with a problem, they think there's something wrong with them. But when a large percentage of a population is struggling with the same problem, maybe there's something wrong with our society."

The results of a recent magazine survey (Next, March 2012) prompted Mrs Schwarz to speak up. Three out of four women surveyed were unhappy with their weight and 86 percent thought about their weight daily.



**Young leader:** Deb Schwarz of Meadowbank manages EDEN, the Eating Difficulties Education Network. **Photo:** CATHERINE HEALY

This combined with the results relating to plastic surgery, has Mrs Schwarz worried.

"We were surprised by women's willingness to have plastic surgery – 63 percent said they would consider it.

"The feedback we get is that surgery changes things on the outside but it doesn't deal with the emotional issues on the inside. We'd encourage people to get counselling alongside any surgery they're having."

The popularity of dieting is of particular concern.

"Dieting is one of the biggest risk factors for developing disordered eating.

Dieters are 18 times more likely to develop an eating issue," she says.

It's not just girls and women who are overly body conscious. EDEN works with student leaders in secondary schools and Mrs Schwarz says boys are worried about how they look too.

"Our Body Image Leaders say they think the media are now targeting men in the same way as women in beauty and fashion advertising. There are so many cosmetics for men now and the message is, you're not ok the way you are, but if you use this product you will be. Our students think that's a

## ► GETTING HELP

The organisation takes self-referrals for counselling and can provide education for teachers and health professionals. There are support groups and a library of information available.

■ There is an information evening on March 21 for friends and family supporting people with disordered eating. See [www.eden.org.nz](http://www.eden.org.nz) for more information.

contributing factor."

It might seem an overwhelming field for a young woman to work in, given the number of people wanting EDEN's help.

"We are tiny but mighty. There are four of us working part-time and we get over 30,000 contacts each year.

"That's why we focus on health promotion and training others.

"I find it such a fascinating, rewarding area to work in. People think it must be challenging but there is so much hope and satisfaction, particularly through working with students. They see the things in our society they want to change and then they find ways to do it. I'm very lucky to be doing this work."



**Safety first:** Police are doing all they can to help children cycle safely. There are free safety workshops in Glen Innes on Saturday.

## Fun focus on safety

Keeping kids safe on the roads is a top priority for the Glen Innes Neighbourhood Policing team so a Kids Safety Day is being held to do just that.

"When we began walking the streets and talking to people we noticed there were a number of children riding bicycles without wearing helmets," constable Alfred Faireka says.

He says the free event is for all families with children under the age of 12.

There will be a bouncy castle, a sausage sizzle, a bicycle decorating workshop and giveaways.

Take advantage of all the free services: Bicycle puncture repairs, bicycle

mechanics and helmet inspections, a child car-seat demonstration and a blind driveway workshop.

Auckland Transport will be giving out new helmets to people whose helmets no longer fit, are damaged or unsafe.

The carpark will be closed to cars for the event so Mr Faireka is asking that families instead walk or cycle to get there. Bikes can be parked safely on the marae.

■ The Kids Safety Day will be held in the Line Rd carpark between the Glen Innes police station and the library on February 25 from 9am to noon.