

One positive to come from Havelock North outbreak - kids know value of clean water

JOHN COWPLAND/Fairfax NZ

The Havelock North gastro outbreak will have a lasting impact on how its inhabitants value drinking water for years to come.

The tots at Village Kids childcare centre in Havelock North are under no illusion as to what caused the illness that struck them and their families down. "It's the water bug," yells one, "The sicky bug, the tummy bug in the water that makes you sick," says another.

Charlie, 4, thought he'd solved the town's dilemma when he found a beetle in a puddle. "I found the water bug," he is said to have informed his mates on Tuesday.

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Havelock North couple David and Nola Bassett, in their 80s, didn't think they'd see the day when you couldn't drink tap water in New Zealand.

They quickly gathered around to see the struggling arthropod responsible for poisoning 5200 of the town's 14,000 inhabitants.

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Sadly, it proved not to be the source of campylobacter.

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Village Kids 4-year-olds Aiden, left, and Lachie.

Heartily tired of not being able to drink from the centre's water fountain, or the taps at home, for nearly three weeks, the kids, like everyone else in the town, look forward to the day they no longer need to boil water to make it drinkable.

If there's one good thing to come out of the gastro crisis it might be that these youngsters will never again overlook the value of clean drinking water.

Owner of the centre, Paul Rooney, said about 80 per cent of the centre's 50 kids became ill in the outbreak that hit early last month.

The illness itself is not easily forgotten, but it's the fact that water from the tap can make you sick that might prove the more lasting memory.

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ous. David went down in a screaming heap in the early days of the outbreak, and the couple knew nothing about the water being contaminated until a neighbour called round.

FIGHTING OVER WATER

Married for 60 years, and having lived in various insalubrious spots abroad over the years, they didn't think they'd ever see the day that drinking water at home wasn't safe.



"It's just one of those things in life. You get over it. You hope they get the problem solved. No point bickering and arguing and bitching about it," David said.

They say they've always thought of water as precious.

"We take it for granted," they said in unison.

"I think the world is going to finish up one of these days fighting over water," David said. No trite remark that, coming from a man who spent his career in the oil industry.

Back at Village Kids, Rooney said it "took quite a lot of explaining that the water out of the tap looked the same but they couldn't drink it".

Going by their comments, it seems fair to say the kids understand enough to indicate that future generations, at least in this corner of Hawke's Bay, might place a higher value on something that has been taken to granted to date.

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