



OPEN WIDE: Natasha Riddell will receive free dental treatment in an initiative organised by dentist Dr Katie Ayers.

PICTURE: Mark Taylor.

Trusts help special needs kids get dental care

By **Natalie Akoorie**

Fifteen special needs children will receive desperately needed dental treatment thanks to three Waikato trusts which have joined forces to fund the \$34,000 initiative.

Spearheaded by specialist paediatric dentist Dr Katie Ayers, the initiative allows the group of intellectually disabled and special needs children to have the treatment at Braemar Day Hospital.

The children were taken off the Waikato District Health Board waiting list after the Braemar Charitable Trust, the Perry

Foundation and Foundation 2020 stepped up to cover the treatment costs.

“Unfortunately the children’s oral health needs are so great they can only be treated in hospital under general anaesthetic,” Dr Ayers said.

Those requiring dental care beyond the scope of the school dental service are referred to a dentist or, in severe cases, to public hospitals for treatment under general anaesthetic.

“Special needs children are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to more complex dental care,” she said. “This is because they are competing for access to

public hospitals with people who have more urgent health needs, and paying for private treatment is simply out of the question for most of these children’s families.”

Eleven-year-old Natasha Riddell, of Gordonton, is to be one of the 15 children who will receive the free treatment. Dad John Riddell said it had been 2½ years since Natasha had her teeth looked at by a dentist.

He said Natasha’s intellectual disability meant she had to have a general anaesthetic for dental work because she would not open her mouth to a dentist otherwise.

“That’s why we have to go through the hospital system.”

Mr Riddell said Natasha had been called up to Waikato Hospital for the work but because the theatre x-ray machine was broken, she would have to have mouth x-rays before being put under the anaesthetic – not an option for the Riddells. “We were thrilled when we were told we would be able to go through Braemar because we don’t know whether she’s got cavities – she can’t let us know that she’s got pain other than crying and that could mean a number of things.”

He and wife Gail were grateful to the three trusts. They expected Natasha to have the dental work in two weeks.