

**Kaye Robertson**

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**The support means more  
than you know**

**Te Teira Tawhai**

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**I have lost most of my  
family to cancer and now  
I'm sharing my own  
cancer journey**

**Lucy Harding**

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**Grateful for the amazing  
support**

# CANCER KAIARAHĪ

**SERVICE: INSPIRATIONAL STORIES**

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Tihewa Māori mate,

E nga mareikura, e Kaye Robertson (Kai Tahu), Lucy Harding (Ngati Mamoe) (Ngati Toa), me te rangatira (Hoa) Julian McKay (Ngati Mamoe), Hoki atu ra koutou kite kainga tuturu mo koutou kua whetu-rangi tia kite ao wairua.

Kua mutu a koutou mahi i runga ite whenua. Haere ra, Haere ra, Haere ra, Hoki atu ki o koutou mātua tupuna e tatari mai na ia koutou. Na ihoa te, tīmatanga nama ano te whaka mutunga.

Kia whaka kororia tia tona nei ingua i nga wā katoa, matua, tama, wairua tapu me nga Anahera pono te mangai hei tautoko aia nei ake nei ae.

*-Matua Tana*

# NGĀ KETE CANCER KAIARAHĪ SERVICE

The Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service is a free service in Southland designed to support whānau with high suspicion of/or diagnosis of cancer.

The service supports individuals and whānau to get the right information, make informed decisions, and eliminate any barriers.

A Cancer Support Group is also available, held every second Wednesday at Te Tomairangi Marae.

To get in touch with us phone (03) 214 5260 or Freephone 0800 925 242, or visit us at 92 Spey Street (Level 2), Invercargill.



Barbara Metzger and Jo Cullen feel privileged to have the opportunity to walk alongside and support whānau affected by cancer.

We are here as social support to do the practical and sometimes challenging stuff, so our clients have more time for the good stuff.

We can ensure people get to their appointments, understand what is happening and most importantly, take some of the stress off their shoulders. We are navigators.

This role is all about the people.

Being diagnosed with cancer can be overwhelming for not only the individual, but the whānau as well. We know that some individuals want to protect their family and be seen as strong, resilient and brave. We can help take some of the load by being the whānau member's support, the person they can talk to and ensure they understand exactly what is happening to their whānau.

We are in a privileged position of having strong community contacts such as Work

and Income and National Travel Assistance, and knowing the ins and outs of a lot of different departments. Because of this, we are able to help guide whanau through this new and sometimes confusing process.

We can support with travel assistance, getting people organised to go to Dunedin, assist with accommodation, and be their liaison between hospital and other people. We are a second set of ears at appointments - taking notes and putting it into language that may be easier to understand. We can help to make a plan and understand treatment options. Sometimes it's just catching up for a cuppa and remembering to laugh!

We can't name all of the ways we help people, because everyone needs something different.

For some, the realisation they have cancer is one thing, but it's the overwhelming feeling of having to sort so many things. We had a client recently who had borrowed a caravan because they were told they needed to be in Dunedin for six weeks treatment, and they were worried about finding somewhere to park it. But, no one had told them they could get \$140 a night for accommodation close to the hospital.

The role can have some challenging moments. However, we stay in it because we love it. It's all about the people. It's rewarding work and we just do the best we can possibly do.

It's all about the people.

Client Raewyn Burton said, "The Cancer Kaiarahi team were my translators. My mind was exhausted and my body was shattered, but they LISTENED then translated into a language that I understood, but also added valuable knowledge about the cancer process with the utmost respect. I am honoured to have the Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service by my side throughout my ordeal."

Client Heidi Kreis said, "The Cancer Kaiarahi team were a life-saver. They started attending appointments with me and translating all of the medical jargon that made no sense to me. They ensured I had the medications that I needed, and supported me on my emotional days when it was all just a bit too much. If I needed help with anything, they were always my go-to! Nothing was ever a problem and they always made me feel at ease."



## **CANCER SUPPORT GROUP**

THIS GROUP IS FOR WHĀNAU  
AFFECTED BY CANCER

Held every second Wednesday  
Te Tomairangi Marae  
54 Eye Street  
9am-10.30am  
Open to all

For more information phone  
0800 925 242





TE TEIRA TAWHAI



# TE TEIRA TAWHAI

OCTOBER 2024

**I have lost my entire family to cancer and kidney failure, a son to a car crash, and now I am recovering from my own battle with cancer. Throughout this journey I have met some incredible people and received some amazing support.**

I was born in 1977 and raised on the east coast with Te Whānau-ā-Apanui (Māori iwi). I lived with my parents and brother in the school house because my father was a principal and my mother was a sign language teacher.

I didn't enjoy school because I couldn't read, write or spell. I was only going to eat my lunch and play rugby. I never fit in either; I was whiter than everyone else and the only one with coloured eyes, freckles and straight hair. I stood out like a sore thumb.

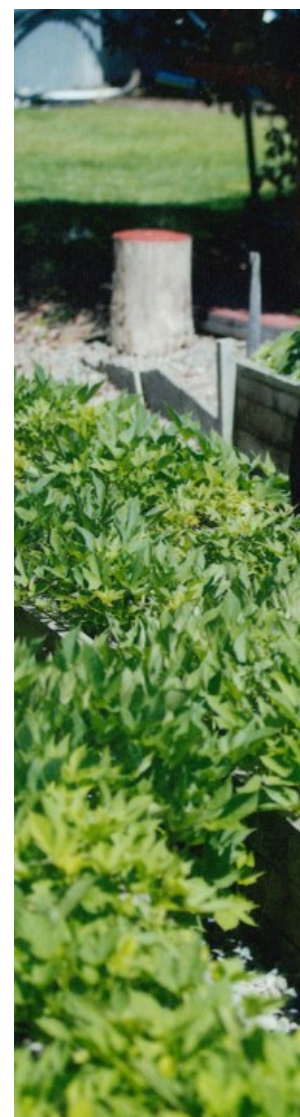
At home though, life was wonderful. My parents were my idols. If I wasn't outside with Dad, I would be in the kitchen cooking and cleaning with my Mum. They taught me everything I know.

Every weekend Dad and I would go up the river on horses, camp at our favourite spot, and go pig hunting. He taught me how to garden too, which ignited a life-long passion. Dad was a kumara grower and would sell his kumara to turners and growers in Tauranga. The kumara was a gift passed down from our tupuna, and then passed on to me.

In my eyes, my father was famous. He was an actor, a kapa haka leader, and had travelled all over the world. Before I was born he was teaching in America, and before that in India. He was an amazing man with so much wisdom and knowledge.

Together we continued to grow kumara. Dad showed me how to grow it – You have to awhi it like a pepi! Our gardens got bigger and bigger and I was doing a lot of kumara growing mahi. At one point we had 75 fish bins full of kumara in our shed. We would often give bins away at birthdays and tangi.

I left school at 14. I was so excited – no more pen and paper! My Uncle, who was in forestry cutting down



pine trees with a chainsaw, asked if I wanted to work with him and I jumped at the chance. I actually thought it was the only job in the world because where we lived there weren't many other options. I stayed in forestry for the next 30 odd years.

My mother was a wonderful woman. She would always make sure my lunch was made for mahi, and would have something prepared for me when I got home.

She was from the Chatham Islands and we would go and visit every school holidays. I always said that one day I would live there because I loved it and I fitted in.

In 1994 my mother was diagnosed with bowel cancer.

**“IF I WASN'T OUTSIDE WITH DAD, I WOULD BE IN THE KITCHEN COOKING AND CLEANING WITH MY MUM. THEY TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING I KNOW.**

I was about 16 at the time and I started noticing a lot of whānau coming in and out of our whare. I didn't know what it meant. A day or two later I arrived home from mahi and went to the school for a shower. While I was in the shower one of my cousins raced over and yelled to me Mum is calling you, come quick!

I quickly got dressed and raced home to find my brother and cousin sitting on Mum's bed. I was too late. By the time I arrived she had peacefully passed away. She was just 52-years-old. I knew she had been unwell but I had no idea what cancer was. I honestly thought she would be OK and get better.





My Dad, brother and I stayed in the school house for another year until my father retired and we moved to another house 10 minutes down the road. We never went back to the Chatham Islands after Mum was gone.

My father remarried and moved to England with his new wife. She is a wonderful woman. Her name is Barbara Ewing and she is an author and an actress. They lived in England for 12 years. When they returned home I remember putting on a huge celebration at our marae and another wedding.

While they were living in England, I went there for my 21st birthday. Their home was amazing. It was right in the middle of London, 75 stairs up (no elevator!). There were gargoyles around the windows and on the roof Dad had built beautiful gardens. The view was amazing – you could see the Queen's Palace and the biggest toy store in the world!

Back in New Zealand, In 1997, I decided to head south. I had seen England, but



I hadn't seen my own country. I went to Rotorua Airport and flew to Christchurch where I met up with a cousin and together we moved to Invercargill. I was running drugs at the time. I met a woman and she got pregnant but I was too scared to tell my father so I left. I moved to the Chatham Island and I stayed there for the next three years.

Eventually I came back to Invercargill and met my daughter. Her mother and I decided to work things out and we stayed together for the next 18 years. During that time we had three more children. My kids are now 28, 25, 21, and my youngest would have been 19 now.

In 2012 my father was diagnosed with cancer of the hip bones. He was 75-years-old and he passed away at his office. He wouldn't stop working. I miss him so much. In 2018, my brother also passed away after being diagnosed with kidney failure.

When my partner and I parted ways I moved back up North and she stayed down here. My two youngest sons moved up North to live with me. I loved it! I taught them everything my Dad had taught me from diving to gardening, hunting, kapa haka and rugby.

The only thing I couldn't help them with was their school education and eventually they moved back to Invercargill to carry out their final years of school.

Some time later my son messaged and asked if I would come to Invercargill

for his birthday and I was on the next plane here. That was two years ago now! While here I met a woman and we fell in love.

Life was great! I was so happy. Then, about six months after I arrived back in Invercargill, I went for a dive. I would often dive, I loved it, especially in the South where there was just an abundance of kai moana. But something felt wrong. My breathing was strange, my energy was low and my body didn't feel right.

The following morning I discovered a lump the size of a tennis ball on the side of my neck. After some testing at the hospital it was discovered I had head and neck cancer, which had started between my eyes, travelled down my cheeks and ended in a lump on my neck.

I had the lump removed and while I was recovering the thought crossed my mind that I had no support around me apart from my kids and partner – I knew no one else, I didn't even have a doctor.

Then I met the Ngā Kete Cancer Support Kaimahi, and I was blown away. They supported me with everything I needed to do and walked alongside me throughout my cancer journey. Their support was amazing – I've never had support like that before.

I started chemotherapy and radiation in Dunedin – every week day for four months. At the time I weighed 116kg and, aside from the cancer, I was in my prime. I was the strongest and biggest I had ever been, and I was proud of my body.

My partner and I would arrive home every Friday for the weekend. All I can remember was sleeping over those weekends. I lost my taste buds, I stopped eating and my weight started dropping but I knew I would pull through.

Every Friday when we would return home my youngest son, O Maruhuatau Otuwhare Tawhai, would come over and help us unload the car. One week he came running up the driveway, put his arms around me and said Dad! I love you! He was giving me the biggest hug I think he had ever given me and to this day, I always think about that because he had never done that before.

One week later, we were heading home and I called him just as we were driving past the Eastern Cemetery to let him know we were almost home. He told me he was at my house and was just shooting to the shop with his mates and that he would come back soon.

When he didn't arrive I thought it was odd but we unloaded the car ourselves and I phoned my son's girlfriend to find out where he was. She thought he was at my house. She, along with my other son, went out to find him.



Around 10pm that night my daughter, who was living in Auckland, phoned me. She said, Dad, don't be scared. I said what's up? And that's when she told me my son had been involved in a car crash. "Maruhuata has been in an accident. He's dead Dad." I just screamed and screamed and ripped the hoses through my nose, down my throat, from my body.

The following day I found out my son had been killed along with three other young men from Bluff in a car crash on Queens Drive. I was sick. I couldn't do anything. I had to go back to Dunedin on the Sunday for treatment because if I missed any I would have to start again.

My body was destroyed. My head was destroyed. I couldn't understand what was going on and because of all of the treatment I couldn't focus, I couldn't grieve.

That was the hardest thing I have ever had to go through. I lost a child while having cancer and fighting for my own life at the same time.

All the whānau came down to pick up my son and take him home. When I finished treatment for the week I went to the Marae to see my boy. Everyone had to clear the room because COVID was only just happening and I couldn't afford to catch it.

I spent some hours with my boy and then I would go back to Dunedin. We did this every day, driving backwards and forwards so I could be with him. Sometimes I would just sit in the car and look at the marae, watching the people go in and out.

At his tangi I had to keep my distance. I couldn't hug my whānau. Once I saw him go down, I walked away. My whole family were looking at me but not touching me or hearing what I had to say. When we were leaving the urupā, I went to the marae and gave a mihi to all the cooks that put the kai on for my son. It's all I could do.

I went back to Dunedin and straight away, I caught COVID. I had to isolate in a room for three weeks by myself, and I can't even put into words what that was like.

I was never able to grieve for my boy during the rest of that year, but as soon as I was in recovery, the grief set in. I missed him and I cried for him. How could I have stopped this? What if I didn't ring him that day? I shouldn't have asked him to come around. He would still be alive if I wasn't sick. I blamed myself for a long time. If it wasn't for my partner and the Cancer Kaiarahi Service I would never have got through it.

The Cancer Kaimahi would visit me and they were incredibly supportive during my grief and recovery. While I was grieving, they mentioned a support group they were thinking of starting. I remember when I first arrived at the Cancer Support Group I was the only male and I realised it wasn't just for Maori, it was for everyone. I was able to open up to the group and I strongly believe the group saved me. I was able to kōrero about my feelings. I've been going for almost two years now and it's growing. I'd like to see it grow even more.

I've been given the all-clear now. Sometimes my mouth still goes dry and I hate that I am so skinny but I am eating now and hopefully will start gaining weight again. It's been one year since I finished treatment.

I hope to once again grow kumara. I now have tā moko all over my body that is kumara and kumara vines. I waited 30 years to get that tā moko, and I am so proud of it.

I often think about all of those that I have lost throughout my life, but I am grateful for what I still have. I appreciate the little things in life and I am looking forward to a cancer-free future.

LYNN WEST





# LYNN WEST

OCTOBER 2024

**Four years ago I was suffering from a nasty flu, which ended up saving my life. That flu led to early detection of cancer. Throughout my treatment there were some days I didn't think I would make it to see the following day. The Ngā Kete Cancer Kaiarahi Service were a huge support and feel like whānau to me now.**

Suffering from a nasty bout of the flu, I went to see my doctor who sent me to the hospital.

This happened right around the time COVID entered the country and, due to this, I was placed into a tent for around seven weeks. I continued to get weaker, which concerned the doctors so much they sent me for a CT scan.

That scan showed I had cancer on the inside of my body near my hips. I was so shocked by the diagnosis, I had no idea I had cancer. If it wasn't for the flu, I don't know how I would have found out and, due to the early detection, it saved my life.

Soon after, my son took me to Dunedin to get a biopsy, and later a doctor told me if I didn't start chemotherapy, I would be dead within two months.

That was a huge scare! I didn't hesitate. I immediately started my chemotherapy. I had chemo every Thursday of every third week for around seven months, and I can't even begin to describe how ill I was during this time.

**“I DIDN'T KNOW IF IT WOULD BE A GOOD DAY OR A BAD DAY. WOULD I BE ALIVE TOMORROW? MY MIND CONTINUOUSLY TRAVELLED ALL OVER THE PLACE.”**

I was sick every day, lying on the couch, and sleeping a lot during the day. I could barely eat and I dropped to 58kg. I was just skin and bone. I also got thrush throughout my mouth and that made eating even harder.

It was a hell of a ride. It's so hard to describe what it was like going through treatment. I didn't know if it would be a good day or a bad day. Would I be alive tomorrow? My mind continuously travelled all over the place, but I just couldn't stop it.

My daughter helped me to refer to the Cancer Kaiarahi Service at Ngā Kete, and they were with me throughout my entire treatment. I remember that I could barely

walk, and they would come to my house, help get me up, help me to the car, take me to my appointments and bring me back home again.

It was amazing to have their support. I can't even put it into words. The Kaimahi, as well as the nurse from hospital, kept me going. They are like whānau to me now. I know I can ring them whenever I need.

One of the kaimahi even took me to Dunedin for my radiation treatment, following chemo. She organised the entire thing including my accommodation at Daffodil House. Radiation wasn't as bad as chemotherapy, although I suffered from numb hands and feet for a long time. I still managed to have a few laughs during this time. I remember thinking, I've never sat around and drunk a ton of water with a group of men!

I have really struggled to talk about what I have been through, so I was grateful when the kaimahi introduced me to the Cancer Support Group. I found it helpful to talk to people who had been through the same as I had. I still enjoy attending the group every fortnight. As well, I am also part of the Kaumātua group every Wednesday at Te Tomairangi Marae.

**“THE  
KAIMAHI, AS  
WELL AS THE  
NURSE FROM  
HOSPITAL,  
KEPT ME  
GOING.”**

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I love being a part of it. Taurite Tū (strength and balance class) has been helpful for me, and I love being part of the ukulele group. It gives me a reason to get out of the house, which is great for me because I enjoy getting out and doing different things.

At my latest specialist appointment I was told the cancer is gone, and I feel lucky that part of my life is over. Now I can focus on the future. I feel so grateful to have had the support of Barbara and Jo, and the nurses at both Southland and Dunedin Hospitals.



TERINA GILBERT



# TERINA GILBERT

JULY 2022

**Ko Terina toku ingoa  
Ko Ngai Tahu toku Iwi  
Ko Kati mamoe raua koe waitaha toku hapu  
Ko Takitimu te Waka  
Ko waihopai te awa  
Ko Ōtākou toku Marae**

**I held a Pink Ribbon Breakfast at my whare in May last year to highlight the importance of checking for breast lumps in both men and women. I wanted to make a difference! Little did I know, five months later it would be me sitting in a doctor's chair being diagnosed with triple positive breast cancer.**

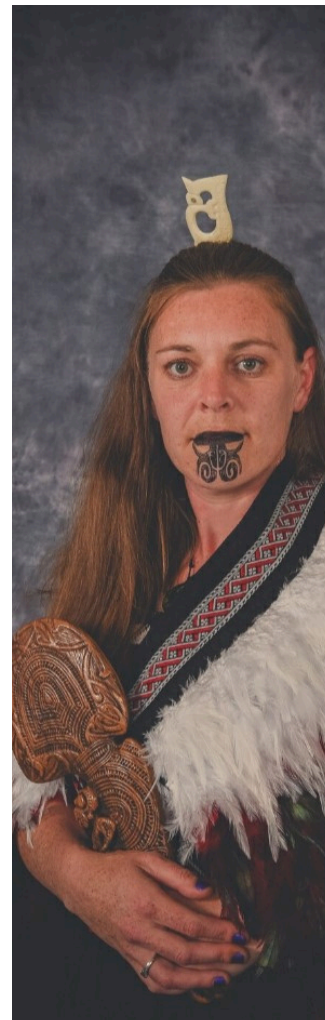
Cancer was something I never thought would enter my whānau, but at the age of 33 with a husband and two young children, that was my reality.

I found a lump on my left breast one day so I went to the doctor to get it looked at. I was treated for a cyst but soon I was down at A&E getting a scan done, followed later by a mammogram and biopsy.

Less than one month later, I was diagnosed with triple positive breast cancer – DSIC (Ductal carcinoma in situ - the presence of abnormal cells inside a milk duct in the breast), a mass tumor and lymph node involvement which meant it had spread. I was terrified. I had no idea what to expect or what was going to come next.

On November 13, I started the first of six rounds of chemotherapy. It was brutal. Physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually brutal. It also lowered my immunity so I also ended up with tonsillitis, shingles, and skin infections.

During my treatment, I was placed into early menopause. My ovaries were shut down so my body could stop producing estragon to feed the cancer. So, at 33, in the middle of summer, I went through menopause along with my Mum. This also means I can't have any more children, so I feel absolutely blessed to have already had my two beautiful children.



Half way through chemotherapy, I met the Nga Kete Cancer Kaiarahi team after a friend told me about the service and I self-referred. At first, I had no idea how they could possibly help me when I was already pushing my whanau and friends away. However, I am so grateful I let them in, because I can barely even describe how much they helped me!

I remember when I first met them; I just burst into tears because finally I could talk to someone who just understood me and what I was going through. Until then, I couldn't tell my family and friends how to help me because I didn't know how to help me. I was struggling with losing my hair and people staring at me, but the team didn't look at me any differently.

**“IT’S OK TO FEEL LIKE CRAP AS LONG AS I CAN GET UP AND KEEP GOING.”**

Once the chemo was over I had to have a mastectomy. That was really hard. I struggled with losing my dignity, my womanhood, just everything. Recovery was easy, but then I developed lymphedema so now I have to wear a compression bandage on my arm every day.

The results of my treatment weren't what we had hoped. It showed I had more cancer so then I was sent to Dunedin for radiation – away from my kids, my husband, my home. It seemed as though the nightmare would never end.

But, the whole way through Barbara and Jo were there for me. It was a relief mentally and emotionally, and even financially.



They would turn up and sometimes just talk, which was sometimes all I needed.

It was those visits that gave me the confidence to reach back out to my whānau and friends. Before all of this, I thought I would just burden people when they turned up but after meeting Barb and Jo, I realized I could open myself back up. It also helped my whānau to know I was talking to someone.

They have made me realise it is normal to feel what I'm going through. It's ok to feel like crap as long as I can get up and keep going. I am also receiving counselling, which helps.

The hardest part of my journey was having no control. I was living appointment to appointment, treatment by treatment, sometimes day by day. Barb and Jo have supported me in taking over and not letting cancer control me anymore. I'm getting some scans done shortly to ensure I am all clear, and genetic testing to see if I carry the gene. If so, I can have another mastectomy and the removal of my ovaries.

The support of Barb and Jo meant the world to me. It meant I could vent about anything and everything knowing it was safe. I feel like if I hadn't met these two, I would still be that highly anxious, stressed out woman instead of allowing myself to feel what I was feeling. No matter how hard it gets I can always ring them.

Things are getting better now. My hair is growing back, I had my teeth fixed ahead of treatment so that feels great, I have met some wonderful people, and I can't wait to put together another pink ribbon breakfast – even bigger than the last one!

I've won this battle because I'm still here, and I feel the best I have ever felt before!

It is so important for young people to understand it's not just older people! Cancer isn't picky, it doesn't care how old you are or what life you've had before it turns up, it's here and you need to deal with it. Take the support and keep going!



LUCY HARDING





# LUCY HARDING

AUGUST 2022

**Barbara and Jo from the Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service visited me following my cancer diagnosis and we've been one big happy whānau ever since. They have supported me throughout my entire journey.**

My name is Lucy Harding, I'm 79-years-old and have been living in Riverton for the past 40 years.

I have had a wonderful life, growing up in Marlborough and moving my way down the country working in hotels as a housemaid. Once I ended up in Southland, I began working at the freezing works where I spent the next 34 wonderful years until retirement. My late husband worked at the freezing works too and we spent lots of time outside work doing home renovations. I didn't have any children. I thought later in life it would have been nice to have kids but by then it was too late.

Last year I started losing weight – a lot of weight. At first I thought it was wonderful but then I started losing a bit too much and there didn't seem to be a reason, and it got scary. I didn't have any pain to explain the weight loss.

I couldn't eat anymore and I was surviving on small drinks every day (Ensure). I knew it wasn't enough but I couldn't bring myself to eat.

I went to the doctor and they started treated me for a thyroid. I was treated for this for about three months but it wasn't until I hemorrhaged that my cancer was found. My advice to anyone experiencing unexplained weight loss is to keep going back to the doctor.

It was during day surgery in Invercargill they found the cancer on my ovaries and a lymph node. I then went to Christchurch for a three-hour surgery and I was so grateful that the surgeon was able to remove everything. I was lucky that I had no pain, but it did take a long time for it to heal.

It wasn't until after the operation they told me I had



cancer. It didn't feel real and I was in complete denial about it.

Throughout this scary time, I was lucky to have my niece Katrina (Mouse) supporting me. Mouse travelled from her home in Oamaru to support me with recovery from my surgery and met me in Dunedin to support me through my radiotherapy. She's been a great support. I also received huge support from my nephew Bill who looked after my house and dog while I was away. Ashleigh from the Cancer Society has also been a huge support.

Following my operation, I was introduced to Barbara and Jo from the Cancer Kaiarahi Service through Ashleigh. I didn't know much about Ngā Kete prior to this but I'm so pleased to have met them! We have been one big happy whānau ever since and they have supported me on my long and arduous journey ever since. They're like sisters to me now.

They have been a huge help. They have taken me to treatment, to town to see specialists. I knew I could ring them whenever I needed to talk. They took me here, there and everywhere and once they even brought me some lovely clothes! They have absolutely put themselves out for me and I feel so grateful for their unconditional support. They filled out forms for me and they even helped get everything I need for home help.

I remember Barbara came with me to see the doctor about treatment following the surgery, which included either chemotherapy or radiation. It was so helpful having her there because I wasn't sure what it all meant and I was worried about having to leave my dog for 6 weeks to go to radiation in Dunedin. But, Barbara told me I could take my dog which made me feel so much better.

At the end of this meeting with the doctor, I was told there was no more cancer. The surgeon had managed to remove the whole lot.

Barbara and Jo took me to Dunedin for my radiation – they even took my car so I could easily get around in Dunedin while I was there.

Now, I'm feeling great and the doctors say I am cancer free! I'm so grateful for the support of my niece and the support of Barbara and Jo and Ashleigh from the Cancer Society.



**MIKE REWITA**



# MIKE REWITA

OCTOBER 2024

**A sore chest led to a bowel cancer diagnosis three years ago and, while I don't know how long I have left, I refuse to let it get me down and I am enjoying my life. I also feel lucky to have had a huge amount of support from the Ngā Kete Cancer Kaiarahi Service, hospital nurses, and Hospice.**

I have had a wonderful life. I grew up in the North Island with my four sisters and two brothers before moving South.

I love it down here. I have met tons of people and I enjoy the slower lifestyle. My children are all grown now – four girls and one boy.

One day I was busy working when my chest started getting sore. I went to see my doctor and he knew, straight away, that it was cancer based off the questions he was asking me.

Soon after I was diagnosed with bowel cancer. I think I was numb because I didn't take it in and I just carried on as normal. But, before I knew it, I was being sent to appointments at hospitals across the South Island and it finally hit me. What am I going through? How could I have cancer? Will this be the end of me?

I hid myself away from everyone and tried to pretend it wasn't happening but I was so sick from the chemotherapy I couldn't eat and I would sleep most days on my

**“I DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHEN I MIGHT DIE. IT COULD BE TODAY, OR IT COULD BE IN 20 YEARS BUT I'M JUST HAPPY TO LIVE MY LIFE AND ENJOY THE TIME I DO HAVE.”**

couch. Everything tasted like cardboard and I couldn't have cold drinks. I lost a ton of weight and still, I continued to ignore everyone.

I've had chemotherapy, radiation, and three operations. One of those operations was to insert a port in my upper chest.

My mindset around my cancer journey started to change and I realised hiding myself away from everyone was the worst thing I could do. I needed the support and I noticed once I started talking to people about it, I started feeling better about what was happening to me.

Since then, I have a completely different outlook. I don't worry about the cancer, I know it's there but I don't let it get me down because I am still living my life. I get out there, I talk to people, I go for rides on my motorbike and I spend time with friends and family.

Throughout the journey I was referred to the Ngā Kete Cancer Kaiarahi Service from the hospital. They have been a massive help to me. They often ring me to see how I'm doing and to ask if I need anything. They have been a huge support. The service also run a support group for people affected by cancer and I have been attending that. I find it helpful and the guest speakers very informative.

Once they even organised a cleaner for me to come in and do the things I couldn't when I was really unwell and that was a huge help!

Knowing the support of the service and the group is there has been an amazing feeling. I know I can talk to them whenever I need to.

It's been three years now since my diagnosis and one year since I was told I only had 3-6 months to live. But, the tumour has since shrunk and I am taking a lower dose of chemotherapy. I don't worry about when I might die. It could be today, or it could be in 20 years but I'm just happy to live my life and enjoy the time I do have.

I have been so lucky with the wrap-around support from the nurses, Hospice, Ngā Kete, everyone! It's like another family to me and I appreciate all of them, and all they have done for me.



HEIDI KREIS





# HEIDI KREIS

JULY 2020

**For Heidi Kreis, a mother of three, growing up in the sweltering heat of Queensland, Australia, led to a diagnosis of melanoma so severe the surgeon deemed it the worst case he had ever seen at Southland Hospital. Throughout Heidi's horrible ordeal, Barbara Metzger from the Cancer Pathway Service "assisted me with everything, helped me to understand medical jargon and supported me throughout treatment."**

Four years ago my world was turned upside down. I was told I had a form of cancer called Melanoma and that it was the worst case the surgeon had ever seen at Southland Hospital.

It came as a massive shock. I knew I had a mole on my left thigh but I would never have imagined it could have taken over my entire body.

It all started in September 2016. I noticed the mole slowly growing, it had become darker and it started to get itchy.

**"MY ADVICE TO EVERYONE IS TO LISTEN TO YOUR BODY. LOOK AT IT AND LISTEN TO IT, KEEP CHECKING – SPOTS, DOTS, ANYTHING – IF YOU'RE UNSURE GET THEM CHECKED OUT."**

At the time, I was a heavy drinker and I was smoking cigarettes and marijuana. I tried to ignore the changing mole and swept it under the carpet. It's only a mole, I thought, it can't be that bad.

But one day I showed a family member who insisted I get it checked out. I went to see a doctor who told me it needed to be removed so I was referred to Southland Hospital.

I was absolutely blindsided when the surgeon who removed the mole sat me down to tell me that it was cancer and that it had spread throughout my entire body. It was, he said, the worst case he had ever seen in Southland Hospital. It turns out I had ignored it for far too long.

I absolutely lost it. I have my boys to take care of – what does this mean for me now?

Life got really scary. Suddenly, everything revolved around appointments, surgeries, X-rays, scans, more surgery, and more surgery – I can't even count how many surgeries I have had to try and remove the cancer. I was then told the surgeon could no longer operate as the cancer was too deep and the only chance left for me was treatment, and to give up alcohol, smokes and marijuana – I quit the lot cold-turkey that day.

Throughout this process, a lovely woman named Rachel Oxley assisted me and later referred me to Barbara Metzger, the Cancer Pathway Kaiawhina from Ngā Kete Mātauranga Pounamu Charitable Trust. I have found Ngā Kete to be a good fit for me as I identify strongly with kaupapa māori.

Barbara was a life-saver. She started attending appointments with me and translating all of the medical jargon that made no sense to me. She ensured I had the medications that I needed, and supported me on my emotional days when it was all just a bit too much. If I needed help with anything, Barbara was always my go-to! Nothing was ever a problem and she always made me feel at ease.

I have now taken ten cycles of Keytruda (pembrolizumba), which is a cancer medicine that interferes with the growth and spread of cancer cells in the body and is used alone or in combination with other medicines to treat certain types of cancer such as advanced skin cancer (melanoma).

I had a really tough time after I decided to quit smoking, alcohol and marijuana, and Barbara was there to support me through it, and I also received some support through the Southern Stop Smoking Service. I have now been smoke free, alcohol free and marijuana free for just over one year.

It certainly hasn't been easy and I've had some dark days, but it's been incredibly rewarding. I have noticed a big difference with my children and our relationships have grown closer. I still have urges; I still have really bad days but I find that chocolate helps! Chocolate every night in my household! I also find cleaning therapeutic so I spend a lot of time dusting, polishing and vacuuming.

There have been some setbacks. Unfortunately, just as life was getting back on track at the beginning of this year, I became ill again. But this was different; I was really sick. I couldn't get out of bed and I couldn't speak properly. I was admitted to CCU three times during the COVID-19 lockdown before it was discovered I had Addison's disease.

Throughout the lockdown and my illness with Addison's, Barbara stayed in regular contact and went above and beyond to support me during this difficult time.

I'm excited to say that I am now in remission, I am taking medication to keep the Addison's disease under control, and I am looking forward to the future!

My advice to everyone is to listen to your body. Look at it and listen to it, keep checking – spots, dots, anything – if you're unsure get them checked out.

I am so thankful to Cindy Quertier at the Cancer Society, who helped to organise all of my travel to appointments, to Rachel Oxley for her support at the Southland Hospital, and to Barbara, who has supported me the whole way through. Words can't say enough to express my gratitude.

## **OCTOBER 2024**

Four years ago, Ngā Kete published Heidi Kreis' story about surviving melanoma. Since then, Heidi remains in remission, has been alcohol, smoke and drug free and is enjoying life and routines.

I have made some huge changes in my life in the past five years.

Since I have been clean, I have noticed a big difference with my children and our relationships have grown closer. I used to be so hungover I couldn't take my son to school some days and he would often get in trouble. Now he attends school every day and he is doing so well.

I moved into a new house about two years ago, which has been amazing. I love cleaning and organising so I really enjoy spending time keeping the house tidy and organised. I am also enjoying living my life to a routine, which keeps me grounded and comfortable.

I also regularly attend the Cancer Support Group, which has been amazing. We laugh together and it's a great space for everyone to come and sit in a safe place, relax and listen, and learn different strategies. It's uplifting and I always feel better after going.

I'm excited to say that I am now in remission, I am taking medication to keep the Addison's disease under control, and I am looking forward to the future! I am keeping on top of my health and ensuring I get the regular checks such as mammograms, hearing tests, and eye tests.



**GLENDA RONGEN**



# GLENDARONGEN

AUGUST 2018

**My name is Glenda Rongen, I'm an experienced nurse, a mother of one and grandmother of five. Two years ago I was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer and have since undergone a double mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiation. During that time, I've felt defined by my illness, known as that lady with cancer, but the Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service made me feel normal again and helped me to regain my confidence.**

My cancer diagnosis came as a massive shock. I had a personal trainer and I was the fittest I'd been in 20 years. I felt good, I had no symptoms and a few months prior I'd had a clear mammogram.

So when I felt an unusual thickening on my right breast I didn't think much of it, but when I noticed it was growing rapidly I went to get it checked out, even though at this stage I wasn't concerned.

**“BARBARA METZGER WORKED WITH ME TO HELP REGAIN MY CONFIDENCE AND SHE MADE ME FEEL NORMAL AGAIN. SHE'D PICK ME UP AND TAKE ME FOR COFFEE, WHICH WAS IMPORTANT TO ME BECAUSE IT WAS A NORMAL THING TO DO.”**

My doctor referred me to the hospital, and straight away the surgeon told me I had advanced breast cancer and an aggressive tumour which was growing about 1cm per week. From that point forward my life revolved around surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. It all happened so fast.

I experienced some challenges following my first surgery. I developed multiple seromas, which became infected (a collection of fluid that builds up under the surface of your skin) but chemotherapy and radiotherapy went well. I knew I was going to lose my hair so I shaved all of it off ahead of treatment.

After the treatment my friend took me on the trip of a lifetime! It all stemmed from a comment I made when I was diagnosed – I'll never be able to ride through Paris in a sports car with the wind in my hair. She took me to San Francisco, London, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Paris, Barcelona, Portugal and Shanghai. It was the first time I'd felt normal since my diagnosis.

But when I returned so too did the lady with cancer. I felt I'd lost my autonomy and become identified by the disease.

I had a wig, but I only wore it once because I didn't like it. Everything about my life was prescribed and everyone else makes a lot of your decisions. It was strange for me being on the other side as well having spent a career in the health profession.

So I decided to self-refer to the Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service for support after the treatment process. Barbara Metzger worked with me to help regain my confidence and she made me feel normal again. She'd pick me up and take me for coffee, which was important to me because it was a normal thing to do.

Barbara and I would sometimes spend our entire visit discussing anything but cancer because she let me steer the conversation. It was so great having someone involved who wasn't a family member, and I felt it was a special relationship between her and I. She's my person, there for me, which is important even if you're from a background like mine – I still hadn't had cancer before.

She helped me get back in touch with my creative side, she supported me in registering my granddaughter as Ngai Tahu, and she'll frequently text or call just to see how I'm doing. When issues arose that required other input she was able to refer me on to the appropriate provider.

I had my second mastectomy recently, which was my choice and not because cancer had reoccurred, and Barbara helped me through that as well. I'm not interested in a reconstruction or false breasts. It's so freeing not having any! In fact, I intend to get a beautiful tattoo in their place.

Unfortunately, a few days after my second mastectomy my husband suffered a cardiac arrest at our house and some unexpected CPR was required. Thankfully due to the efforts of our grandson and the ambulance service, a good outcome resulted! Barbara was very supportive during this time.

I'm looking forward to my future, getting back into employment, getting back into creating, gardening and interior design (a course I started while undergoing treatment).

Thank you to Barbara and the Ngā Kete Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service, you helped me through a difficult time in my life and I am so grateful for your support.



RAEWYN BURTON





# RAEWYN BURTON

NOVEMBER 2021

**Barbara Metzger was my translator. My mind was exhausted and my body was shattered, but Barbara LISTENED then translated into a language that I understood, but also added her valuable knowledge about the cancer process with the utmost respect. I am honoured to have Barbara and the Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service by my side throughout my ordeal.**

My hikoi (story) began on 14 October 2018 with a sporting injury.

I had moved back to Queenstown after working as a tour guide on Waiheke Island to help my daughter and son-in-law run their business. They had started the business, but my name was on the documents.

Soon after arriving in Queenstown, I joined the roller derby team. Roller derby has been a passion of mine and I really enjoy taking part.

**“THROUGHOUT ALL OF IT, BARBARA HAS BEEN THERE FOR ME. IF I COME ACROSS AN OBSTACLE OR I NEED A LISTENING EAR I CALL OR EMAIL BARBARA AND SHE SAYS, “LEAVE IT WITH ME” – BUT SHE ALWAYS COMES BACK AND ASKS MY PERMISSION - IT’S ALL ABOUT RESPECT.”**

I was at my first practice when the accident happened. I tried to stop but I fell. I stretched out my arm to break my fall but instead I ended up breaking my wrist. The pain was intense, but it was my shoulder that hurt the most. Following CT scans, the doctors said the pain in my shoulder was being caused by my broken wrist.

I had surgery to put three pins into my wrist, got a cast on, and carried on with my life. Two days out of hospital, I flew to the North Island as my mother had fallen ill. I tended to her health and personal needs for a month. My shoulder pain was not easing up.

Any type of movement was heavy and excruciating and that snowballed into a lack of sleep.

I had my cast removed in November 2018 followed by the three pins. From my



elbow to my fingers, everything was swollen and black.

At this point, I was also referred to physio, who quickly observed that I was guarding my shoulder. She suggested I book in for an ultrasound.

I had the ultrasound in December 2018 and it confirmed that I had a retracted infraspinatus and supraspinatus complete with tears and a torn teres minor. In January 2019, I was sent for an MRI.

The report came back the same as the ultrasound, however it also showed fatty infiltration was present, which meant it was a pre-existing injury. Apparently, I have had this injury for years and the roller derby accident is what set it off.

This meant, however, that ACC would not cover the injury due to it being pre-existing. But, I was unable to work and being a business owner meant Work and Income wouldn't cover me either. My mental health quickly began to suffer.

I have endured a lot of trauma throughout my life but the pain of living with a non-treated injury brought all of those traumatic memories to the forefront. Living with pain in your body and mind can take you to some dark places.

I was fortunate that in March 2019 the Ministry of Social Development granted me a benefit.

However, the story continues.

In October 2020, I had my two-yearly mammogram. The mammogram revealed I had breast cancer. It was on the same side as my shoulder injury.

The doctor spoke to me about options and mentioned removing the lump. This gave me hope. However, after an examination I was told I would have to have the entire breast removed because of my shoulder injury – I couldn't lift my arm to receive radiation treatment. Once again, my shoulder, which was still painful, was causing so much grief.

My daughter and I met Barbara on the day on my pre-op. Barbara asked if there was anything she could do for me and I asked her to support us by coming to the appointment.

In November 2020, I had the surgery.

Throughout all of it, Barbara has been there for me. If I come across an obstacle or I need a listening ear I call or email Barbara and she says, "Leave it with me" – but she always comes back and asks my permission - It's all about respect.

My daughter saw and felt that Barbara was the right person for her mum and that she had someone to lean on if needed. This was massive for me.

I couldn't be more grateful for the support and assistance I have received from the Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service.

I am now clear of cancer but the battle is still ongoing. I developed lymphedema after the breast and the cancer were removed and my shoulder is still painful. I am currently awaiting an operation to have a Reverse Shoulder Operation.

But I do feel better knowing I have Barbara and the Māori Cancer Kaiarahi Service in my corner.

# ANONYMOUS

OCTOBER 2024

**My whole life has been plagued by cancer. I lost both my parents and nine siblings to different types of cancer. Three years ago I was diagnosed with lung cancer but I continue to think positive, and I feel so grateful to be surrounded by a huge amount of support.**

About three years ago I noticed blood in my phlegm and, while I didn't feel unwell, I thought I had better go to the doctor and get it checked out.

I was sent for an X-ray and it was discovered I had cancer on my left lung and on my lymph nodes. It came as a huge shock because I had no other symptoms and have always been a healthy, active person. I had never suffered from any type of health issues!

The hospital referred me to the Cancer Kaiarahi Service and I am so grateful for that. I met the two lovely kaimahi and they supported me throughout my entire treatment and did everything for my wife and I.

They would often come and check on how I was doing and knowing they were just a phone call away was a huge reassurance. Every day I think about the amazing support they were and continue to be. You couldn't expect anything more!

I was sent to Dunedin and stayed at Daffodil House while I underwent radiation treatment for a month. Following radiation, I had chemotherapy at Southland Hospital for several months.

The chemotherapy had no ill effects on me – I didn't lose weight, I didn't feel sick, and since then the cancer on my lung has decreased in size.

Throughout my treatment I continued to stay active. I was out mowing the lawns, in the garden, doing housework and walking daily. I kept my mind completely occupied and I think this, along with the support of my amazing wife Thelma, the Cancer Kaiarahi Service, and my whānau, is what got what me through it all.

I continued to remain positive throughout treatment. I would never think about the bad things, only the good things. I just don't take the time to worry about what's happening inside my body. What's the point?

The specialists have now said I am in remission. Without the amazing support I received I could have been in a completely different place! The support has made a huge difference in my life, and because of this the Cancer Kaiarahi kaimahi will always be important to me.



TRACY PETERSON



# TRACY PETERSON

OCTOBER 2024

**Five years ago I was diagnosed with breast cancer and life has been a whirlwind ever since, but with the support of the Cancer Kaiarahi Service and Support Group I feel uplifted, connected and supported.**

I have lost a lot of people in my life to cancer.

My mother, my nana and my great grandmother all suffered from bowel cancer, and my beautiful two-year-old grandson was diagnosed with brain cancer, which spread to his spine. All of these amazing people in my life have lost their battles with cancer.

Then, on 19 July 2019, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I was shocked because I had no symptoms at all, I had no changes to my breast, and couldn't feel any lumps.

**“THERE WOULD BE DAYS I'D BE SUFFERING FROM ANXIETY BUT AFTER GETTING TO THE GROUP I WOULD COMPLETELY FORGET ABOUT IT. I WOULD BE LOST WITHOUT THIS GROUP.”**

I had been having bloods done at a doctor practice with nurses every first Monday of the month 3 monthly for diabetes. I missed an appointment and went on a Tuesday (I believe my grandson was watching over me to go to this new nurse) where I had a locum nurse. I had been going to this GP for some years and a mammogram had not been mentioned. I also hadn't requested one. I was at least 2 years overdue.

This angel nurse saved my life as she asked about mammogram screening and I was very blasé about it, but agreed to be added to the register.

I hadn't really thought about going for a mammogram because I hadn't felt any lumps and I wasn't sick. But, following the mammogram I was asked to have an ultrasound and I just knew something wasn't right.

Soon after the surgeon called me in to tell me I had tumours in my left breast and that it had spread to my lymph nodes.

I still had no symptoms. Absolutely none. It turned out the lumps were so deep I would never have noticed them. It wouldn't have been such a huge shock if I had

been told I had bowel cancer since it runs in my family, but I never expected this.

I had a single mastectomy but soon after I got really sick and it was discovered I had developed an infection and sepsis. I had to then have another surgery to remove the infection and this has left me with a heart condition.

I went through hormone treatment and 21 rounds of radiation, but even still I was feeling anxious about my remaining breast in case I developed more cancer.

At this time I was living in Christchurch with no support system. I went through all of this on my own but I knew I was strong enough to cope.

I moved to Invercargill and, in February of this year, I got the call I had been waiting for. I was booked in for my second mastectomy.

In 2021 I was scrolling through Facebook and seen a post about lymphatic drainage, which I responded too. I was then contacted by a member of Southland Breast Cancer support group where I was fortunate to meet Terina who posted about a new Cancer Support Group through Ngā Kete Mātauranga Pounamu.

This led me to the Ngā Kete Cancer Kaiarahi Service. I had no idea a service like this was even available and I remember being so shy when I first went to the group. There were a lot of tears and hugs, and some yummy baking. Thanks Barb.

Two years on and I have only missed one week, and the group has become like family to me. There would be days I'd be suffering from anxiety but after getting to the group I would completely forget about it. I would be lost without this group.

We have been lucky enough, as a group, to attend fortnightly meetings, been invited to hui through the Cancer Society and Andrea Jerry-Ryan in Invercargill and Gore, Race4life where we got to participate in the most amazing activities - motorbike rides, race car laps, and helicopter rides over the very bottom of the South Island. We were very spoilt that day, it was a bit overwhelming, and something we still discuss regularly.

We are a diverse group in different stages of our journey but the one thing we have in common is our care and support for each other and the care we receive from the amazing supportive Ngā Kete staff. No question is ever a silly question.

Through the group, I met the Cancer Kaiarahi kaimahi and they have been incredibly helpful and supportive.

I was so used to going through this on my own, so when it came time for my third surgery I was planning on hiring a taxi but the kaimahi told me not to be so silly



and was promptly at my door ready to take me. She had even picked some flowers from her garden to put a smile on my face.

I honestly don't know how to explain what the support has meant to me; there are no words to describe how thankful I am.

Sometimes she'll even ring just to check in on me and really takes the time to support me.

While I will still have hormone treatment for the next two years, I have now been given the all-clear and can finally move on with my life.

I just want to highlight how important it is to make sure you're up to date with all of your health checks. Just because you have no symptoms, it doesn't mean you don't have cancer.

JULAN MCKAY



# JULIAN MCKAY

FEBRUARY 2019

**My name is Julian McKay, I'm a father of four and grandfather of nine. Six years ago I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma (a blood cancer that's also in my bones) after suffering from a crippling sore back and sore ribs. I am telling my story to let people know that early detection is critically important. If you have a sore back, I recommend you get it checked out as soon as possible! I waited far too long.**

It's a real shock when you find out you have cancer.

I was 70-years-old and working at the Alliance Freezing Works when I developed an excruciating sore back and ribs. I remember lying in bed and being unable to shift the pain. I thought I must have hurt it. Never once did I think of cancer.

I know now that I left it too long. I dealt with the pain alone for probably about a year before one night it got so bad that I called one of my sons begging him to help me and he called an ambulance.

I was sent for all kinds of tests in hospital and by the end of the day I was sent to Dunedin Hospital in the ambulance. Soon I was told I had cancer and I spent the next 2-3 weeks in Dunedin undergoing tests and treatment.

**“ I MAKE SURE TO TELL PEOPLE NOW, IF YOU HAVE AN UNEXPLAINED SORE BACK PLEASE GO AND GET IT CHECKED! ”**

I remember being in total disbelief. How could a sore back be cancer? I make sure to tell people now, if you have an unexplained sore back please go and get it checked!

I've always been a fit and healthy man. As a young boy I ran in the school's sports races and would always place, I played rugby for Southland School Boys' (junior and senior), I swam in carnivals and I would bike for miles with my paper run. I joined the army and later worked at the wharf at Bluff as a cargo worker for years. I spent years rock n' roll dancing and even run my own deejay organisation here in town called Mista rock n Roll DJ.

I was blessed with four sons Rani, Jason, Arron and Taylor – three of them are in Australia now and the other is in Dunedin. I have six grandchildren in Australia and three here in New Zealand.

The last six years have been a battle but I have been lucky to have met some incredible people along the way. The staff at Oncology in Invercargill are great. I would sometimes spend up to four hours a day there in chemotherapy. Although, lately my treatment has been suspended as I was quite unwell.

My sister, Diane, has always looked after me. She has been my rock! Earlier this year she was heading away for work for a couple of weeks and she was worried about me being on my own, so she got in touch with Barbara Metzger.

Barbara has been fantastic! She has guided me and kept a good eye on me. She makes sure I've got all of the things I should have, or getting.

She even took me out to the Race4Life recently at Teretonga and this was one of the best days of my life! I was able to check out the views in a helicopter, speed down the beach on the back of a Harley and race round the track in a Porsche at 230kmh!

Barbara has been a wonderful support and I feel comfortable having her in my corner.



HELEN-MARIE HARWOOD



# HELEN-MARIE HARWOOD

NOVEMBER 2024

**All of my life I have been plagued with sinus issues, and usually a good dose of antibiotics sorts it out. But this time it was a lot more serious than that and I received a shocking cancer diagnosis. It has been a battle, but I am so privileged to have the support of my beautiful family, my workplace, and the Ngā Kete Cancer Kaiarahi Service.**

My sinuses were really playing up in December last year. Usually I would go and see my doctor who would prescribe me antibiotics and the problem would disappear.

My doctor was unavailable due to the time of year so I went to see a practice nurse instead. She checked me out and told me my sinuses weren't infected and she planned to refer me to Ear, Nose and Throat.

I thought she was being ridiculous. I had lived with this issue my entire life and I knew what the problem was. It was every symptom I had always experienced during a flare-up.

Nevertheless I went to my appointment at Ear, Nose and Throat, and was told I needed a biopsy because a lump had been found on the back of my tongue. This meant a night in hospital and a week off work.

**“THEY WERE THE TEAM I NEEDED, BUT DIDN'T REALISE I NEEDED – AND STILL DO. THERE'S SO MUCH OF THIS JOURNEY I COULDN'T HAVE DONE WITHOUT THEM.”**

I thought this was a huge overreaction for a simple sinus problem but I went along with it because I had no choice. Never once did I think they would tell me I had cancer.

After the biopsy I was sitting at home one night when a notification popped up on my health app. It was full of big words but at the bottom it had CCd in the Cancer Registration. I was shocked and in complete denial. Surely my sinus issue wasn't cancer. I must have read it wrong.

But I didn't read it wrong, and soon after I was diagnosed with mouth, throat and

gland cancer and sent to Christchurch and Dunedin Hospital for more scans. I couldn't believe it. I didn't want to believe it.

Treatment started quickly in Dunedin. Six weeks of radiation with some chemotherapy throughout. I was told I may feel unwell during this time but I had no idea I would be so sick. I pictured having treatment and enjoying the rest of the day, but that wasn't the reality. Instead, I would spend the rest of the day nauseous and tired and, by the end of it, I was so unwell I had to stay in hospital for two weeks. I was dehydrated and dropping 1kg per day.

I was 118kg before all of this happened and I have since lost about 30kg. In any normal situation that would be amazing, but I didn't want to lose it this way, and the doctors did not want me to lose weight. Also, because of losing it so fast, I have lost muscle mass and become weak.

I was unwell for about two months after treatment. I knew I would be sick for a while, but I thought I would get my life back the way it was. Instead, I was tired, low in energy, suffered anxiety and couldn't eat much.

Things were tough during this time but I was so lucky to have the Ngā Kete Cancer Kaiarahi team step in and support me. The team would ring and text me to check in to see how I was and if I needed anything, and when I got home from treatment they would visit me regularly.

They were the team I needed, but didn't realise I needed – and still do. There's so much of this journey I couldn't have done without them. I can open up and talk to them about things I can't discuss with my family, and I feel so privileged to have them in my corner.

I can't speak highly enough of the kaimahi Barbara and Jo. There are not enough words. I have been so lucky to have the whole of Ngā Kete supporting me. The CEO has been amazing, supportive and helpful, and I have also had the incredible support of my husband Wayne, best friend Kathy, cousin Barbara, son Connor, and granddaughter Sunshyne.

I also now attend the Ngā Kete Cancer Support Group, which has been fantastic. I can openly talk to the group about my anxiety, and fear of the cancer returning and we can all relate to each others experiences. The group has been validation for me in the way that I feel, and so welcoming.

I'm getting used to the new me now and slowly coming to terms with what happened. I am grateful to all of those who supported me throughout this ordeal.







“They’ve taken me to Dunedin for appointments, taken me to Christchurch and taken me to all my appointments in Invercargill.

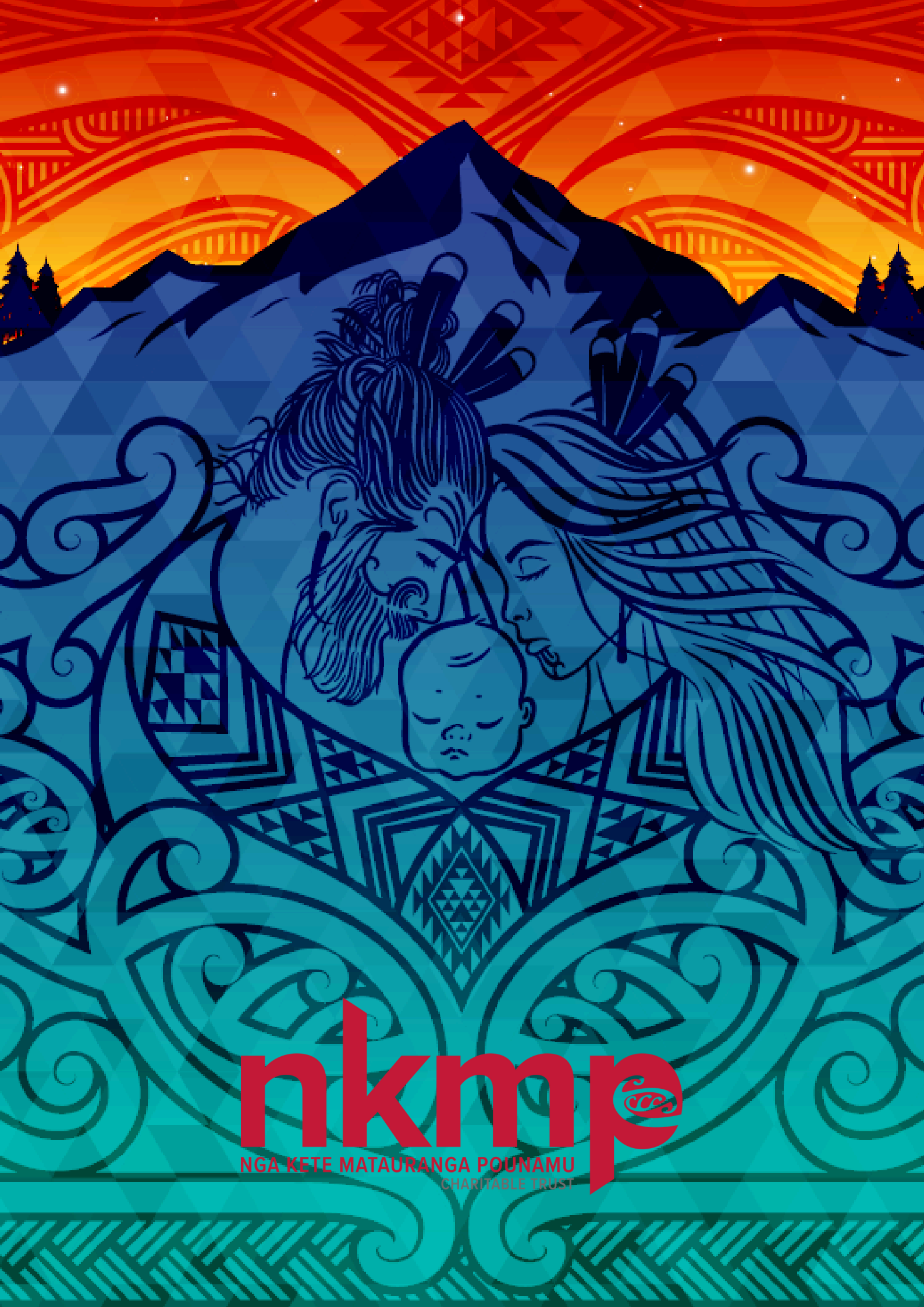
The support means more than you know. I would be sitting at the gate hitchhiking because I used to hitchhike to my appointments.

We have that many laughs. You couldn’t get through life without a laugh could you. And that’s why I don’t get down.

I don’t cry over myself, but I cry over this.”

Kaye Robertson





**nkmp**  
NGA KETE MATAURANGA POUNAMU  
CHARITABLE TRUST