



STROKE CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE AT ANY TIME

AUTUMN 2023

NEWS



Kia ora koutou,

It's been almost two years since I became the CEO of the Stroke Foundation. In that time, I've met so many incredible people who face seemingly insurmountable challenges every day.

Whether confronting a difficult recovery, lifelong physical disabilities, or the possibility of being unable to return to work, our clients' bravery inspires me to do everything I can to make sure they do not walk alone on the journey to recovery.

In this time, I have also noticed an alarming new trend: the average age of New Zealand stroke survivors in some communities is getting younger.

Between 25 - 30% of New Zealand stroke survivors will experience stroke under the age of 65. For Māori, Pacific and Asian communities, the figure is even higher, with stroke occurring – on average – 10 to 15 years earlier than the rest of the population.

Young stroke survivors will live with the after-effects of stroke for longer and face a long and uncertain future. We need your support now more than ever, to help this growing number of significantly affected people.

In this newsletter, we will share the stories of two younger men who were hit by a stroke when they least expected it. They discuss the need for greater support to help survivors and their whānau pick up the pieces of their life after stroke.

You will also hear how your generosity helped them, guiding them through one of the toughest periods in their lives and restoring their sense of normality.

Their stories demonstrate the need for urgent change. We are doing everything we can to make this happen.

Already, in this year alone, we have...

- Partnered with our youth ambassador Edna Swart to launch new resources to give children access to support and a counselling helpline when someone they love has had a stroke.
- Called for the urgent expansion of ACC to cover 'non-accident' disabilities to ensure all New Zealanders can access the financial support they need to achieve the best possible recovery outcomes after a stroke hits.
- Launched Health15 – a new one-of-a-kind programme that brings free blood pressure tests and expert health and wellbeing advice directly on site to construction workers, to lower the risk of stroke among this vulnerable group.

None of this would be possible without your support. Your generosity means we can be there for people who never expected to need our help. It helps us plan for a future where, according to all the data, we will see strokes happening to people earlier and more frequently. It saves lives and rebuilds those destroyed by stroke.

Thank you for everything you've already done to power this work.

Ngā mihi nui,
Jo

THIS ISSUE: STROKE CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE AT ANY TIME; JOHN GRAY, FLY BOYES | HEALTH15 | ROUND THE BAYS | STROKE CHARITY MERGER

POWERING THE FIGHT AGAINST STROKE

John Gray, 35, a maths teacher from Rotorua, was travelling with his partner in Cambodia when he was hit by a stroke, completely unexpectedly.

Tell us about your stroke.

"I woke up with a tingling in my arm. We were planning to see some elephants that day. My partner had to support me on the walk. I wasn't in good shape. I remember thinking something was very wrong."

What happened when you got to the hospital?

"I visited a private hospital in Siem Reap, Cambodia, where I found out I'd had a stroke.

"I'm a young guy and I'm healthy. It never occurred to me that a stroke could happen to someone as young as me."

What happened after you came back to Aotearoa?

"I spent 12 days at a hospital in Thailand after leaving Cambodia. After flying home, a week in Waikato Hospital, and a night in Rotorua Hospital, before finally returning home.

"I decided to take a year out to focus on my recovery. I took a full immersion Te Reo Māori course. It was great to have that daily focus."

When did you hear about the Stroke Foundation?

"When I got out of the hospital, my partner suggested I reach out to the Stroke Foundation. My Community Stroke Advisor Vivienne was brilliant. She introduced me to another young guy who had experienced a stroke.

"A lot of the people in my stroke group were older. They were clearly having a harder time recovering. It was cool to meet another young person; to hear his story and share the challenges we were facing."

How did you adjust after you went back to work?

"I was an accountant before my stroke. I ended up returning to a different firm after completing my full immersion Te Reo Māori course."



"I'm a young guy and I'm healthy. It never occurred to me that a stroke could happen to someone as young as me."

John Gray

"I made mistakes that I wouldn't normally have made. The stress, and looking at a screen all day, just became too much.

I struggled when I returned to work but Rachelle, my Return-to-Work Advisor from the Stroke Foundation, was amazing.

"She helped me by emphasising the importance of regular rest and being straight up with your employers about how you're feeling, and the invisible symptoms of stroke."

Do you think you went back to work too early?

"It's hard to know you're not doing a good job even though you're trying your best. In hindsight, I wish I'd been braver. I shouldn't have returned to work as an accountant, but it was all I knew and it was the default option.

"If we had more of a safety net, I might have spent more time thinking about what was right for me at that time, but that financial pressure was certainly there."

How are you doing now?

"I'm doing well. I work as a maths teacher at my old high school now. I'm in the final year of my post-graduate teacher training through Ako Mātātupu.

I really enjoy the relationships with the kids. It can be hard at times but it's nice to take the focus away from money and towards helping people."



WALKING ALONGSIDE OUR CLIENTS

Fly Boyes, 53, a ski resort shuttle driver from Wānaka, woke up one morning and he found he could barely stand.

Tell us about your stroke.

"I was like a spaghetti man. I felt dizzy and I couldn't walk. I called my physiotherapist who diagnosed me with stroke.

"They sent me down to the acute ward in Dunedin. I stayed there for a few days before they sent me home."

What happened when you got out of the hospital?

"I've spent the past four and a half months resting. I've been trying to get a bit of exercise here and there. I've been walking lots, riding my bike. I've been in no pain, but I'm foggy."

How have you found the support following your stroke?

"My doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists were great, and the support I received from the Stroke Foundation was wonderful.

"But the whole work and income thing is where the system falls down. I've saved a little bit of money for retirement, and I guess that's what I need to use. I feel grateful that I'm able to look after myself, but I would have thought – at the very least – I would have received some sickness benefit.

"I'm not angry but it's not ideal. I'm lucky I don't own a business or have children, but do those people get help financially? I don't know..."

How are you making ends meet?

"My partner has been a wonderful support, but we've never really had those financial conversations before. Like many people, we just went with the flow.

"Suddenly, they need to step up through no fault of their own. It's hard to know how much to ask for or how much you want to lean on the other person financially.



"It's difficult for some people to have those conversations, particularly men. There's that stubbornness there. They can be too proud to ask for help."

"My doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists were great, and the support I received from the Stroke Foundation was wonderful."

Fly Boyes

Are you concerned about returning to work?

"I'm lucky enough to have been offered work on the mountain for winter.

"I'm not going to be driving a bus for some time, but I have lots of other skills. They are going to create a new role for me – coordinating the shuttles and greeting guests."

How are you doing now?

"I'm grateful. I'm on my balcony in downtown Wānaka with a view over the mountains. We have 27 degrees coming today. Woe is me!"



25-30% OF STROKE SURVIVORS
EXPERIENCE STROKE UNDER
THE AGE OF 65.

STROKE OCCURS – ON AVERAGE –
**10-15 YEARS EARLIER AMONG MĀORI,
PACIFIC AND ASIAN COMMUNITIES.**



THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING A STROKE IS
PREDICTED TO RISE BY 40%
BY 2028.

BECOME A REGULAR MONTHLY SUPPORTER AND HELP US SAVE LIVES

We are privileged to have a group of dedicated supporters who choose to donate monthly. By spreading your donations over the course of a year, you can help us to plan and prepare for the future.

We need to be there for people like John Gray and Fly Boyes, and the increasing number of stroke survivors who need our help to rebuild their lives after a stroke. If you've ever thought about becoming a monthly supporter and setting up a monthly donation, now is the time!

Visit stroke.org.nz/give-monthly to set up your regular gift or fill out the enclosed form and select 'Make this a monthly gift' at the top of the page to join this amazing team of regular supporters.



Events

Ka pai! Well done and a huge thank you to our Stroke Champions who raised more than \$7,000 to support our critical stroke prevention work at the Wellington and Auckland Round the Bays in February and March.

More than 80 per cent of our funding comes from our generous donors, corporates, grants, bequests, and stroke champions, so why not sign up to complete one of the following challenges today:

- Christchurch Marathon 16 April
- Rotorua Marathon 6 May
- Hawke's Bay Marathon 20 May

You can complete the challenges alone or in a group or choose your own challenge and do it when it suits!

Visit stroke.org.nz/fundraising-events to sign up.



Life-saving new service for construction workers

Last month, we launched Health15 – a new one-of-a-kind programme that brings free blood pressure tests and expert health and wellbeing advice directly to construction workers, to lower the risk of stroke among this vulnerable group.

Construction workers often work long hours, carrying out physically demanding mahi. This can make it hard to prioritise a healthy lifestyle or take the time to attend important health appointments.

That's why the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand has partnered with The Building Intelligence Group, a specialist construction project management company, to help construction workers spot the early warning signs of stroke and ease an economic burden from stroke which costs the country \$1.1 billion per year.

Stroke charities announce merger

We are pleased to announce that we will be merging with two regional stroke charities – Stroke Tairāwhiti and Stroke Central – to create one nationally-consistent community stroke service for Aotearoa.

Jo Lambert, Chief Executive of the Stroke Foundation, says: "With one stroke taking place every 55 minutes, there are currently 64,000 people living with the after effects of their stroke, and a further 300,000 indirectly impacted. Research conducted in 2015 predicted that by 2028, this figure would rise by 40 per cent, and we are on target to exceed this.

"This is why we are amalgamating with Stroke Central and Stroke Tairāwhiti to achieve our shared goals of reducing strokes, improving outcomes, and saving lives, ensuring everyone in New Zealand receives quality, evidence-based community stroke services close to home."

National Office, PO Box 12482, Wellington 6144
0800 STROKE (0800 78 76 53) / strokenz@stroke.org.nz / stroke.org.nz



TO MAKE A BEQUEST, EMAIL MARK.VIVIAN@STROKE.ORG.NZ