

CELEBRATING CARERS

CHRISTMAS 2021

NEWS

Kia ora koutou,

When I was 19 years old, a single event changed my entire life. My fit, healthy, energetic mother had a severe stroke. What people don't always realise, and I didn't understand at the time, was that the effects of stroke extend much further than just the survivor. It can dramatically alter the lives of whānau and loved ones too. In the years following my mother's stroke, I watched my father adapt to his new role as carer – a role he never expected to have – with compassion and determination. He took on that role for 30 years, until, sadly, a fatal stroke suddenly ended his life.



Jo with her mother Audrey on her wedding day in 2000.

My experiences of caring for my mother are a major driver behind my involvement with the Stroke Foundation.

I came to appreciate the challenges of being a full-time carer when I cared for my mum for relatively short stints, helping her with the everyday tasks most of us take for granted. These memories and my experiences caring for my mother are a major driver behind my involvement with the Stroke Foundation.

I am honoured to serve as CEO and call on my personal experience of stroke to inspire everything we do as I guide the organisation into the future. Using those same skills learned when caring for my mother, I will face the challenges ahead with compassion and determination, so the Foundation can support everyone in the stroke affected community across Aotearoa.

With all this in mind, we have chosen to focus this Christmas Newsletter on carers. It provides us all with the opportunity to reflect on their amazing mahi to support stroke survivors to live their best lives. On behalf of everyone at the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand, thank you for everything that you do.

Jo Lambert
Chief Executive Officer

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LEARNING TO CARE FOR ANTHONY

By Louise

Anthony and Louise were just starting to build their lives together on their Taranaki dairy farm, when Anthony suffered a haemorrhagic stroke. Louise tells her story of becoming a carer and the challenges she faced during this time.

There is little that can prepare you for the role of carer; it's a role that you learn on the job, which means that most lessons are learned the hard way. For me, the most important lesson has been to ask for help. You can't do it all on your own: you need support from friends, family, and professionals – even other carers.

Anthony and I were your average young Kiwi couple. In fact, things were going pretty well for us: we had just bought our own dairy farm and were planning to start a family.

Like many NZ farmers, Anthony had a strong work ethic and often pushed himself too hard, putting in long days to get the farm looking the way he wanted. The day before his stroke was no exception. On that day he had spent nearly 12 hours using a motorised post hole borer on a hard piece of ground, strewn with rocks and tree stumps.

The next day Anthony woke up with a pounding headache. It was common for him to get migraines so he didn't think much of it at first, but after ten minutes he could feel something swooshing around in his brain. He then started to feel numb and lose his speech, so I rushed him to hospital where he was diagnosed with a haemorrhagic stroke (brain bleed).

Rehabilitation was a slow process. After his stroke, he was completely blind for ten days, and when his vision did return, it was only partially. He then began the task of relearning how to do basic things like banging in a nail.

At the time, we were a worker down on the farm so my focus was on keeping the business going and looking after Anthony's daily needs. I didn't have time to research stroke and find out what the potential long-term effects might be. We were in the dark as far as most of this was concerned, so it came as a shock to us both when Anthony didn't make a full recovery.



PHOTO: ANDY JACKSON

If I could pass on a single piece of advice to other carers, it would be to get help.

This realisation caused Anthony to become depressed and, later, suicidal. He was only sleeping for two hours a night and had started self-medicating. He also stopped taking his epilepsy medication, cold turkey – a move that is so dangerous his doctors are surprised that he survived it.

In desperation, I called the Taranaki Rural Support Trust who sent out a crisis team to visit Anthony each day. They also referred him for counselling and sent him to a specialist who altered his medication.

This intervention made a huge difference. Anthony says that counselling has helped him learn to live with the 'new Anthony'. He still gets tired easily and regularly has mood swings – as he also says, he's 'up and down like a yo-yo'. Even something as minor as accidentally touching an electric fence can cause him to break down and cry. But, despite it all, he's shown incredible courage and I'm so proud of him.

For me, post-stroke life has been emotionally exhausting. Grief isn't just something you experience after a person dies; it can be something you relive daily when the person you're with has



PHOTO: ANDY JACKSON

changed forever and what you had together has been lost.

Anthony is the same intelligent and interesting person, but stroke's long shadow dominates our daily lives and keeps us in limbo. We've put our plans of having a family on hold and made the difficult decision to sell the farm.

If I could pass on a single piece of advice to other carers, it would be to get help. (And Anthony would say the same thing to stroke survivors.) There's more support out there than you might think. The Stroke Foundation provides information and advice about caring, as well as emotional support (both are needed). They can also put you in touch with people who are in a similar situation – something that I think has helped me to gain perspective.

These days we're often told to 'live your best life'. When people use this term, they tend to mean that you should reach your full potential and that a fulfilled, happier version of yourself is achievable if you do it right. But, for me, living your best life should really mean doing your best for other people: like taking care of someone who needs you.

If you, or anyone you know, have been affected by the content in this story and require help, please contact any of the helplines below for support, they are available 24/7. For a crisis situation, please call 111.

Depression Helpline 0800 111 757
Healthline 0800 611 116
Lifeline 0800 543 354
Samaritans 0800 726 666

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Depression and anxiety are common after stroke, affecting around half of all stroke survivors. The Stroke Foundation's Community Stroke Advisors (CSAs) can provide free advice and practical support to help overcome these challenges. To find out how to get in contact with your local CSA, visit stroke.org.nz/community-stroke-advisor or call our National Office on 0800 78 76 53.

Thank you!

Without your support, our work is not possible. Thank you to everyone who contributed throughout 2020–21, you have made a considerable difference to the lives of thousands of stroke survivors.

4,496 STROKE SURVIVORS ENGAGED WITH OUR COMMUNITY STROKE ADVISOR SERVICE, UP 7.25% ON LAST YEAR AND PROVIDED OVER **36,000** HOURS OF DIRECT SUPPORT TO THOSE AFFECTED BY STROKE

76% OF THOSE WHO JOINED OUR COMMUNITY STROKE ADVISOR SERVICE REACHED THEIR GOALS

9,853 FREE BLOOD PRESSURE CHECKS WERE PROVIDED TO NEW ZEALANDERS BY OUR TWO MOBILE BIG BLOOD PRESSURE VANS

99 PEOPLE WERE REFERRED FOR URGENT MEDICAL ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THEIR BLOOD PRESSURE CHECK BECAUSE OF EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH READINGS

88% OF BLOOD PRESSURE CHECK PARTICIPANTS INDICATED THEY HAVE MADE CHANGES TO IMPROVE THEIR BLOOD PRESSURE MANAGEMENT

214 STROKE SURVIVORS ENGAGED WITH OUR RETURN TO WORK SERVICE IN THE LAST YEAR WITH **30%** COMPLETING THEIR ENGAGEMENT BY ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT



Fulltime caregiving can be tedious, exhausting, and emotionally challenging, yet it can also be uplifting and rewarding.

Mary Somervell is a business consultant and blogger. You can read more about Mary and Steve's experience of stroke recovery at insideoutworks.co.nz/blog.

A CARER'S PERSPECTIVE ON WELLBEING

Mary Somervell

Earlier this year, our lives took a turn when my husband, Steve, aged 67, had a serious stroke. It was a big shock for us, and it has been a steep learning curve since then. I understand that obstacles are part of life's journey and that when we acknowledge this, we can move forward. Here is some of what I've learned, I hope you find it helpful.

Focus on what you have, rather than what you have lost

Despite the challenges of stroke, our lives continue to be enjoyable and meaningful. We are recalibrating and understand that adjustments are necessary.

Having a stroke challenges a person's sense of identity. We have to remind stroke survivors, and ourselves, that they are the same person inside, despite any external limitations.

Learn to adjust and pace yourself

It takes longer to follow morning routines. I have extra duties as the sole driver and errand runner, and Steve takes longer to complete tasks and tires more easily, so I need to be patient and flexible about what can be done.

Take a step back and look at the bigger picture

It is easy to lose perspective when you or someone close to you is vulnerable. Sometimes just getting through the day can be an achievement. At these moments, we have to dig deep and focus on the bright side. For us, it helps to look out the window and appreciate the warm glow of a sunset or the light casting shadows on distant mountains.

Self-care is important for caregivers

I am grateful that Steve retains a steady equilibrium. He gets a bit emotional sometimes but not often. I'm usually the more emotional one, with good days and not so good days. Daily journal writing, mindful meditation and being active outdoors have helped to keep me calm and centred. As a healthy diversion, I have also started writing a book.

Getting help from others is vital

During lockdown, we have been without immediate family or close friends for backup, but we are fortunate to have neighbours we can call on in an emergency.

The Stroke Foundation plays an essential role in helping stroke survivors and caregivers through their recovery period. After Steve's hospital discharge, we received help from Anne-Marie, a Community Stroke Advisor, who has provided us with useful information and connected us with others in the community who are facing similar challenges.

STROKE FOUNDATION SUPPORT FOR CARERS

Our work to support carers is just as important as our services to support stroke survivors. Caring is a demanding role that can be overwhelming for many people.

Not only must carers learn how to manage complex health needs, they often need to make significant personal and financial adjustments. Our free services for carers support their wellbeing and help them to prepare for and adjust to the role. Support is tailored to the needs of the individual carer, and is usually a combination of one-to-one support and group sessions, such as seminars and support groups.



There is no time limit, support is available for as long as it is needed.

To access our carer support services, please contact your local Community Stroke Advisor by visiting stroke.org.nz/community-stroke-advisors or by phoning 0800 78 76 53.

To access our carer wellbeing resources, visit stroke.org.nz/carers-wellbeing

BIG BLOOD PRESSURE CHECK ROAD TRIP RESCHEDULED

To ensure public safety following recent changes in Covid-19 Alert Levels, we've rescheduled our annual Big Blood Pressure Check Road Trip to March 2022.

Our annual Big Blood Pressure Check Road Trip raises awareness of the link between high blood pressure and stroke. We provide free blood pressure and atrial fibrillation checks at participating PAK'nSAVE and New World stores throughout New Zealand.

Check our website for updates on the schedule: stroke.org.nz/big-blood-pressure-check-vans



THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING BEANIE UP!



This winter, New Zealanders across the country donned our stylish beanies in support of stroke survivors. The fundraising campaign, which ended in August, raised \$250,000 – that's 10,000 beanies sold – and was supported by community groups, families, local businesses, and government offices across New Zealand.

"We've been blown away by the support we've received for this year's Beanie Up campaign, and we'd like to thank everyone who got involved," says Don Scandrett, Acting Marketing and Fundraising Manager. "As a charity,

we rely heavily on donations to run our services, so we're extremely grateful for the support."

The money raised from the campaign will help fund additional critical services to meet growing demand. In the past twelve months, hospital referrals have risen by 6% in response to rising stroke rates caused by changing population demographics, including our ageing and growing population.

This year's campaign saw the launch of five new beanie styles, including a 100% wool beanie. And, once again, our adult pom-pom beanie was the clear favourite, selling out after the first month.

Our beanies are available for purchase all year round at:

[BEANIEUP.CO.NZ](https://beanieup.co.nz)

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

From our whānau to yours, thank you for being part of our supporter family! Wishing you a happy and healthy holiday season.



SUPPORT US

DONATE ONLINE

To donate securely online by credit card, simply follow this link: stroke.org.nz/donate

AUTOMATIC PAYMENT

To set up an automatic payment, use the details below:

Registered name: Stroke Foundation of New Zealand
Account number: 02 1269 0023111 01

MONTHLY GIVING

To set up monthly donations, get in touch with our new Regular Giving Coordinator, Georgina, on 04 815 8974 or visit stroke.org.nz/give-monthly



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



#FIGHTSTROKE