WINTER 2025

Newscan

How you're making a difference for New Zealanders facing cancer

Relay For Life 2025

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Cancer Society
Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa

Welcome to the Winter Edition of Newscan 2025!

I want to start by saying thank you. It is only because of kind supporters like you that we're able to provide essential services like our nurses, transport to treatment, and free accommodation to Kiwis who need them most.

As New Zealand's population continues to grow, so too does the number of people diagnosed with cancer. On average, right now, 74 New Zealanders are being diagnosed daily, making our crucial services and research that much more essential to ensure no one faces this difficult journey alone. That number is expected to double by 2040.

In this issue, you will read about our Memory Meadow to honour those who have passed, as well as our recent fundraising event, Relay For Life, and learn why lovely mum Nikki and her family take part in Relay For Life year after year. You'll also hear about the powerful journeys that Jenni and Julie have been through as they navigate life following their devastating diagnosis.

I hope that as you read these stories, you are reminded of the significant impact your support has had on Kiwis facing cancer. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for your continued support.


Helen Carter, Chief Executive

Ngā Mihi

Helen Carter
Chief Executive

Relay For Life 2025

On Saturday 29th March, we held our much-loved annual fundraising event – Relay For Life 2025! Participants of all ages relayed around the track for an incredible 12 hours. It was a chance for celebration, a time to remember loved ones lost to cancer, and an opportunity to fight back by raising awareness and funds for the Cancer Society.

An incredible total of $239 thousand had been raised to support the Cancer Society's crucial work. Thank you so much to everyone who took part in Relay For Life and gave your support!

Find out what Relay For Life means for mum, Nikki, on the next page.


Nikki and her family participating in Relay for Life in honour of Carlos

Carrying on Carlos' Legacy

When Nikki thinks of Relay For Life, she thinks of her son Carlos, his kindness, his strength, and the legacy he left behind.

Carlos was just 16 when his health started to change. One side of his face had swollen, and Nikki feared he was having a severe allergic reaction. But after several hospital visits and reassurances that nothing was wrong, the strange symptoms kept coming and going. He was a hard-working student at school. The school nurse frequently urged Nikki to take him in for further checks, but test after test came back with nothing definitive.

It wasn't until Carlos was 18, just three weeks before he passed, that he was finally diagnosed with lymphoma.


Nikki holding Carlos' photo

For Nikki, those three weeks were a blur of disbelief and heartbreak.

"We were in the hospital for a year, they kept telling us there was nothing wrong with him. And then three weeks just before he died, we got the diagnosis that he's got cancer."

Carlos didn't cry. Instead, he comforted his mum and told her, *"I'll be fine. Mum. I'm in the right place. You know, they're going to look after me. They told you it's going to be all right. He was very positive."*

It was just like Carlos to think of others before himself. From a young age, he had a giving heart.

Back in Year 9, when he told his mum he was joining Relay For Life, Nikki had questioned it. No one in their family had cancer, so why was he so determined to participate?

But Carlos saw things differently. *"You have to help people who are struggling with illnesses, Mum. You have to learn to give."*

And give he did. Carlos walked and fundraised for Relay For Life every year throughout high school, even as his undiagnosed illness took hold. He only missed his final year because he was too unwell.

Devastatingly, Carlos passed away in August 2017. The loss of Carlos is something Nikki and her whānau carry with them every day. But so too is the pride and purpose he left behind.

"When I walk at Relay, I feel like Carlos is with me. I just hope that he's feeling proud of us for what we're doing to continue his legacy. I'm there as Carlos, doing what he loved doing. We carry his memory with every step."

Since 2017, Nikki and her family have continued Carlos's Relay For Life journey. For Nikki, it's also about hope. Hope that one day, no family has to go through what hers did.

Her message to others is simple: *"If you're thinking about supporting Relay For Life, I support you and I push you to do so, and I will see you next year!"*

"I finally knew what I was fighting"

Jenni's breast cancer journey and the strength she found at the Cancer Society Lodge

Jenni and her son

Jenni and Keith taking part in Relay For Life

Jenni Dacomb

Jenni with her friend Lianne from the Lodge

At 57, Jenni Dacomb is proud to be where she is in life. She is a mother of three grown children, a loving wife, and someone who's recently faced cancer head-on not just once, but twice in her family.

In 2023, Jenni's husband, Keith, was told that the best course of action for his prostate cancer was five intense radiation sessions. It was a difficult time, but he responded to the treatment well. The couple stayed at the Cancer Society Lodge while he received treatment, and Jenni supported him every step of the way. She had no idea that just a year later, she would be walking a similar path.

When Jenni was diagnosed with breast cancer the day before her 57th birthday, she felt something unexpected: relief.

"I had felt awful for 3 years, I had long Covid, and constant exhaustion… I nearly didn't go to my mammogram in 2024; it was cold and rainy, and I just felt terrible. But I went. Thank goodness I did."

> *"It made sense to me. I finally knew why I'd been feeling so unwell. I knew what I was fighting."*

The reconstruction was no small surgery. Surgeons used tissue from her stomach to reconstruct her breast, a complex procedure requiring time and patience to recover. Everything seemed to go well. She spent a week in the hospital before heading home just in time for a different kind of Christmas - one filled with love, support, and a quiet gratitude for being together.

"It was a 14-hour operation, everything went well, and I was recovering fine. But then, in January, they found that some cancer cells had escaped. I was devastated."

And in early January, Jenni learned the cancer had spread. Some cancer cells were still present, and further treatment would be needed. The news devastated her. After such a major surgery, she had hoped it was behind her.

Despite the setback, Jenni faced the next step - radiation treatment. That's when the Cancer Society were able to step in and help.

Jenni returned to the Cancer Society Lodge, this time for her treatment. For three weeks, she received daily radiation - 15 sessions in total, five days a week, with weekends to rest. While treatment was straightforward, it still took a toll.

"I was extremely fortunate to be able to come back to the Lodge, it meant I could have my treatment while staying somewhere safe and welcoming."

Staying at the Lodge gave Jenni more than just a place to sleep, it gave her comfort as well as a place to build new connections.

> *"It's just amazing. You're with people going through the same thing, and there's a general understanding. You can laugh, really laugh, and no one thinks it's inappropriate. You're in it together."*

That sense of community, of not being alone, helped Jenni immensely, especially after supporting her husband, Keith, through his cancer diagnosis the year before.

"I'd already seen what treatment could be like. Keith had prostate cancer, and I was his carer. We stayed at the Lodge then, too. It helped me not to be afraid when it was my turn."

Now, the couple are supporting each other once again. But their cancer journeys haven't just affected Jenni and Keith; they've touched their whole family.

"My three kids are young adults now, and everyone copes differently. There were tears at the start, but I've been open with them since the beginning. I told them, don't stop your lives. Carry on. Send me photos. And they did! Photos of camping trips, of happy moments."

"To be at the Cancer Society Lodge, to feel supported, to feel seen—it makes a difference. Thank you. Honestly. Thank you to everyone who gives to make that possible."

If you'd like to support the thousands of Kiwis like Jenni who stay at our Cancer Society Lodges every year, head to cancer.org.nz/donatenow or simply fill out the donation form enclosed with your magazine. Thank you.

Memory Meadow – Donate a bulb, grow hope

In May, we planted fields of daffodils in Hamilton, Cambridge, Pirongia, Tauranga and Rotorua as part of our Memory Meadow initiative.

The purpose of the Memory Meadows is threefold. Firstly, to raise funds for the Cancer Society Waikato/Bay of Plenty. Secondly to hold an event where the community can come together to share stories of hope, courage and resilience in the face of cancer. And finally, to create a beautiful space for people to reflect and remember their loved ones.

Daffodils were donated by the public and planted by dozens of volunteers in each location.

Memory Meadow was made possible thanks to the support of sponsors, partners and local councils, and we look forward to adding more sites across the Waikato/Bay of Plenty region in 2026.

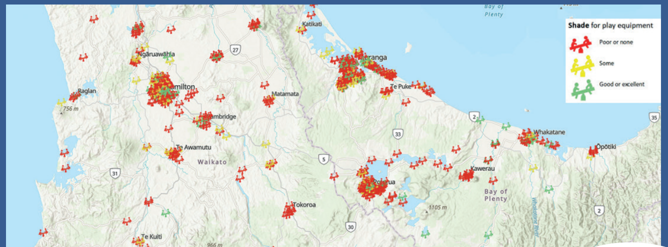
You can find out more and make a donation at www.memorymeadow.nz/

Incredible new web app makes finding a sun-safe playground easy.

We are excited to learn about the new web app developed by the University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka academic supporting sun safe play!

Skin cancer is a significant issue in New Zealand, and childhood sun exposure is a major risk factor. But the launch of an exciting new web app, 'NZ Playground Explorer', will help parents and caregivers make safer choices for their loved ones.

The NZ Playground Explorer is a free web app that provides detailed information and photographs for over 3,550 council-managed playgrounds across New Zealand. Not only can you discover the best playgrounds for your children to enjoy, but you can also filter your search to find playgrounds with the right amount of sun shade, an essential feature in protecting children from harmful UV rays.



Dr Bronwen McNoe creator of web app

To stay SunSmart, remember to:

- **Slip** on protective clothing
- **Slop** on sunscreen (SPF 30+)
- **Slap** on a wide-brimmed hat
- **Wrap** on close-fitting sunglasses
- **Slip** into the shade, especially between 10 am–4 pm

Explore the app and plan your next visit to a SunSmart playground! **https://www.otago.ac.nz/cancer-society-research/playgrounds**

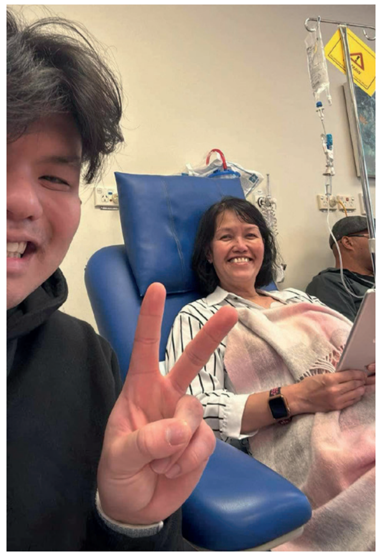
"I hope my gift helps someone like me."

Why Julie is leaving a legacy of love and support.

Julie

Julie Ortiz Valencia is a proud mother of three who never imagined she'd be facing stage 4 colorectal cancer at 61. But her response to the diagnosis wasn't fear or anger - it was grace, determination, and a desire to give back.

"There was never a moment of 'Why me? I just thought, 'Okay. This has happened. How do I deal with it? How do I fight it?"



Julie with her son during treatment

Julie's journey began after a routine bowel screening. What she thought was a minor issue turned out to be something far more serious. By June 2024, she had been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. It was completely devastating, but Julie refused to let it define her. Throughout her treatment, she found unexpected strength from the support of the Cancer Society.

> "Naomi, my Cancer Society nurse, would call me just to check in. When I told her my hair was thinning, she dropped off a care package - hats, information, brochures. I felt so blessed. So supported."

It was that care and compassion that inspired Julie to add a gift to the Cancer Society in her Will.

"When I saw there was an option to leave a gift, I thought, of course, I will. The Cancer Society has done so much for me."

"When I found out they survive on donations, I knew I had to. You need to keep going, people like me need this kind of support."

For Julie, it's about more than just money. It's about making sure that others who face a diagnosis like hers won't feel alone.

"This kind of support changes everything. It helps you stay positive, stay strong, and believe in the future. I want that for everyone."

Her message to others considering a gift in their Will is simple.

"Be a beacon of light in someone else's cancer journey. I've been so lucky to be supported - this is my way of giving back."

Julie continues to live with joy and purpose. She plays pickleball, volunteers with her local Rotary Club, and plans to travel to Europe on a pilgrimage.

"I'm just happy and blessed every day."

And through her legacy gift, that feeling of hope will live on.

Scan the QR code below to watch Julie share her story. **cancer.org.nz/julie-story**

Watch Julie share her story!

Leaving a gift in your Will for the Cancer Society is one of the biggest ways you can continue to support cancer patients in the future. If you would like to know more about leaving a life-changing gift in your Will, please contact Tracey at traceywood@cancersociety.org.nz

– Q + A –

Supporting a love one through cancer? Your questions answered!


Michelle Gunderson-Reid

A cancer diagnosis can affect every part of life for you and your loved ones. As a supporter of someone going through cancer, it's normal to have questions, feel uncertain, or not know where to start. Our Supportive Care Manager, Michelle Gundersen-Reid, answers your questions:

Q A loved one has been diagnosed with cancer, and I don't know what to say – I'm scared of saying the wrong thing. How can I support them?

A It is completely normal to feel unsure of what to say; most of us do. But just showing up matters more than saying the "perfect" thing.

Here are a few things that can really help:

- Small acts of kindness matter. A handwritten card or babysitting, can mean a lot. We have a habit of saying "Let me know if I can help" because we're not sure what people need, but that can put pressure on the loved one to come back with suggestions. Start small with something tangible and work from there.
- Know that your presence is powerful. Just being there means more than you realise.
- Encourage them to reach out to the Cancer Society. Or better yet, offer to help make that first contact for support services.
- And finally, it's okay for you to have big feelings too. Supporting someone with cancer is a lot. Talk to a friend or even a counsellor if you need to. You're not alone either.

Q My loved one has finished treatment, but things don't feel "back to normal." How can I support them during recovery?

A Totally understandable. "Back to normal" can be a bit of a myth after cancer.

Recovery isn't just physical, it's emotional and mental too. It's a process, and sometimes a slow one. Here's how you can help:

- Be patient. Some days will be better than others.
- Listen when they want to talk, and don't push when they don't.
- Offer practical help, a cooked meal, or just hanging out like old times.
- And remind them (and yourself) that it's okay if things feel different now. If they need extra support, our counsellors are available, as well as post cancer support groups.

Q How do I help someone who doesn't want to talk about their diagnosis or treatment?

A This one's tricky, but very common. Not everyone wants to talk about what they're going through, and that's okay. The best thing you can do is let them know you're there, no pressure, just support.

You can also show up in other ways:

- Help with errands.
- Watch a movie together.
- Send a text just saying, "thinking of you."
- Being present without needing them to open up, is a powerful form of love.

Have more questions? Write them down below and send back with your donation!

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Thank you so much for your incredible support! We couldn't do it without you.

Waikato/Bay of Plenty Cancer Society

For any queries regarding fundraising or donations please contact our friendly team.

☎ 0800 123 230 ✉ donations@cancer.org.nz

www.cancer.org.nz

Cancer Society

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