

WINTER 2024

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

# Newscan

## A Shock Cancer Diagnosis for Ella

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Has Cancer



**Cancer  
Society**

Te Kāhui Matepukupuku  
o Aotearoa

# Welcome to the Winter Edition of Newscan 2024!

As the temperature drops and the woolly blankets come out, rest assured that the team at the Cancer Society are working as hard as ever to help Kiwis facing cancer. Throughout this issue, you will read stories from cancer patients Cilla, Ella, Geoff, and Daron, and hear from carers Jay and Elizabeth who have stood alongside their loved ones as they face such arduous battles. I hope that as you read these stories, you are reminded of the immense impact your support has on Kiwis facing cancer. You enable our nurses, psychologists, volunteer drivers, and free accommodation to be there when it's so desperately needed.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you for your continued support. With cancer diagnoses still rising at an alarming rate, I also want to share how important it is that New Zealanders are prepared for all sorts of conversations in the workplace. I encourage you to lean into them with kindness, empathy, and understanding, and recommend looking at the workplace conversation tips below for advice on navigating these difficult conversations. Wishing you a safe and warm winter,



Ngā Mihi

Helen Carter  
Chief Executive

## Tough Cancer Conversations at Work

With rising rates of cancer affecting more of the New Zealand workforce, it's so important business owners, managers and colleagues know how to support an employee with cancer. Check out our tips below.

### 1. How should I respond to a diagnosis?

- Someone with a new cancer diagnosis is grappling with their own mortality - this is huge. They may be anxious about losing their livelihood and being a burden to their colleagues.
- Allow them time to process the news in a way that works for them. Get clarity about how much they want to share with the wider team and avoid asking details about timeframes.

### 2. How can I support my colleague during treatment?

- If your colleague is open with their cancer diagnosis, find ways to help that are practical and unintrusive such as frozen meals, offers to run errands, or small acts of kindness. Employers can also contact 0800 CANCER to get advice.
- Keep a note of milestones, be it the first, 10<sup>th</sup> or final day of chemotherapy and consider checking in with them either directly or via their support person.

### 3. Returning to work

- Remember there are lots of invisible ways a person who has undergone cancer treatment may struggle when they return to the office. They may experience numbness in their hands affecting fine motor skills, or suffer from fatigue, brain fog, or nausea.
- Talk openly about workload expectations and remember the mental health rollercoaster is still very much in motion.



# Relay For Life

On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March, we held our much-loved annual event – Relay For Life! It was a chance for celebration, a time to remember loved ones lost to

After waiting a year for a liver donor, Cilla's health was deteriorating rapidly. Jay decided it was time to leave her job to look after her, and the timing couldn't have been more perfect. Just two weeks after Jay resigned, Cilla was given the wonderful news that a donor had been found and her transplant could go ahead!

Ever since, Cilla has had a new lease on life and is even back on stage with Jay, performing Zumba at Relay For Life.

cancer, and an opportunity to fight back by raising awareness and funds for the Cancer Society.

On the day, participants relayed around a track for 12 hours, raising a total of \$200,000 across Waikato and Bay of Plenty – an incredible result! At RFL, participants also enjoyed a range of fun activities while their teammates walked the track, including bag decorating, a talent show, and Zumba.

**We sat down with Zumba instructor Jay and her mother Cilla to find out what Relay means for them, and why they keep coming back.**

*"When I was 13, my dad was diagnosed with leukaemia. He had turned 40 in October and then he passed away that December... So, when mum was diagnosed with cancer - I was really very scared."* - Jay

In 2018, Jay's mother Cilla was first diagnosed with cancer when the doctors found a tumour in her liver. She was given a 50/50 chance of survival, participating in a clinical trial that thankfully shrunk her cancer. But devastatingly, in 2022, Cilla's cancer came back.

*"Mum's cancer was just getting worse, so I decided to quit my job to look after her full-time... We've always had a close bond."*



*"I don't have any other words than it blows my mind that mums come across to the other side and she's so much better. It makes me proud to see her up there [on the Relay For Life stage]."*

*"I said to Mum every year in honour of you, Dad, and my uncles, this is my contribution back into the community. [Running Zumba at Relay For Life] is my way of saying thank you to the lord and thank you to people like the Cancer Society who have been there for us. Because I see the joy that it brings for people who are Relaying for cancer."*

**“I love this cause. It's so worthy and I just feel like if we could get behind this cause especially because it affects so many people in this community – it's really important.”**



# Ella's Shock Breast Cancer Diagnosis, and how the Cancer Society Lodge Changed Everything.

**"I got my diagnosis on Friday and my flights [to move overseas] were on the Monday. I'd given up my job, my flat, I'd even sold all my belongings..."**

29-year-old Ella was preparing for an overseas trip of a lifetime when she noticed a strange lump in the shower.

*"It was a one-off what the hell moment. I was having a shower when I found a lump on my left breast. Purely because of the cost of health care overseas, I decided to get it checked."*



Ella and her sister

*My GP said don't be worried. [She told me] people your age have less than a 2% chance of getting breast cancer. But just to be careful, we'll do an ultrasound..."*

A few important tests later, Ella and her partner Lewis were called in to see a specialist.

*"We got put into a room and were made to wait for a very long time, about an hour by ourselves. So, you spiral. Eventually three people walked in with this massive folder. I was like, oh no, this is not going to be good. The first thing they said was 'you have breast cancer'."*

**After that, I don't even remember anything. I just went into shock... ”**

It was terrible timing, forcing Ella to cancel her flights to the UK and Canada, and instead move in with her parents.

*"The first step was fertility preservation - a course of injections and a procedure to remove the eggs. It came out with enough eggs that it would give me a 40% chance of having one child if I had to rely on them later on."*

*I asked the oncologist if I could do another round of fertility preservation before starting the chemotherapy, but it was recommended to me that if I did that, then I'd be putting the curative outcome*

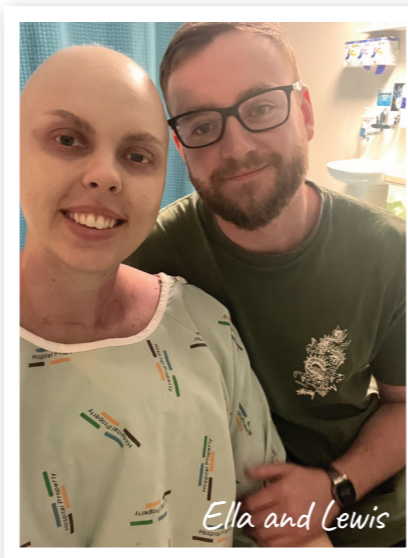
*at risk. So, I had to carry on with the chemo. That was a disappointing way to start for me."*

For Ella, chemotherapy was split into two parts. The first rounds of chemotherapy were difficult but manageable, but for Ella, it was the second half that pushed her to the limit.

*"The first half was more psychologically traumatic because I lost my hair, eyebrows, and even eyelashes."*

**“ I went from having long hair to being completely bald. I think for a woman, in particular, that's really difficult. ”**

*And then the second half I was on a chemo drug commonly referred to as the Red Devil, and it is essentially hell on earth. It was horrible. It was nausea to the point where no matter how many pills you are taking, like 20 or 30 pills a day, it's still making you feel really unwell. And the fatigue is unreal. It was really, really tough."*



Ella and Lewis



Ella undergoing treatment in hospital

*"I got [chemo] fortnightly, and I would only just recover in time to get the next one and then start the process over again. I had days where I could barely get out of bed and I had to make lists for myself about the basics that I needed to achieve for the day - like get dressed, brush your teeth, have a shower."*

After chemotherapy, Ella needed surgery to remove what was left of the cancer, and then a series of radiation treatments. While preparing for radiation, Ella realised the immense toll it would take travelling from her parents' home to the hospital each day for 4 weeks. Without reliable transport or support, thanks to you, Ella was given an incredible opportunity to shift her treatment down to Hamilton where she could use our Cancer Society Lodge.

**“ It was amazing. Staying at the Cancer Society Lodge changed a month of my life and made it a lot easier. ”**

*The rooms were awesome, and the shuttle service to and from the hospital was amazing. I did try and walk a little bit because I wanted to get my steps and do some exercise, but having that to rely on was amazing."*

*"Not having to drive [to the hospital and back each day] made me feel safer. I felt less stressed because I wasn't having to sit in traffic for hours, and it removed the guilt associated with having a support person give up that much time Monday to Friday for four weeks."*

The Lodge changed Ella's entire cancer experience, and after seeing the impact first-hand, Ella would encourage anyone thinking about supporting to get involved.

*"I spoke to so many people in the Lodge who wouldn't have had access to their treatment if they had not had the Lodge available to them. They live in remote towns and things like that. Everyone was really appreciative."*

*It changes the whole experience being able to stay there, so supporting Cancer Society is an amazing cause."*

*"If you can, donate some money. Help other people out who are in a similar situation to me or even worse honestly. It's not just a number in a bank account, [when you donate] it's making a tangible difference to people's lives."*



Ella celebrates finishing cancer treatment

To support the thousands of Kiwis like Ella who stay at our Cancer Society Lodge's every day, head to [cancer.org.nz/donatenow](https://cancer.org.nz/donatenow) or simply fill out the donation form enclosed with your magazine. Thank you.

Watch Ella share her story at [cancer.org.nz/ella-story](https://cancer.org.nz/ella-story)

### Breast cancer in New Zealand

- 1 in 9 Kiwi women will be diagnosed with breast cancer across their lifetime
- Breast cancer is the most common cancer women in NZ face
- The incidence of breast cancer increases as women age
- Tragically more than 650 women die of breast cancer every year

# Memory Meadows

Last month we had the launch of our Memory Meadows - two beautiful parks in Hamilton and Te Awamutu that have been planted with 10,000 daffodils in memory of loved ones lost to cancer.

Come Spring, the daffodils will be in bloom providing the community a special space to remember and celebrate loved ones.

If you would like to donate a daffodil bulb, please head to [www.memorymeadow.nz](http://www.memorymeadow.nz)



# Geoff Bikes Cape Reinga to Bluff for Cancer Society

Five and a half years ago Geoff set out to walk the length of New Zealand on the Te Araroa Trail. But his plans to walk the 3,000 kilometres in a single five-month stretch were interrupted when he was diagnosed with lymphoma just a few weeks into his trek. Geoff carried on walking between tests, making it to Hamilton before he had to return home to Northland to undergo six rounds of chemotherapy followed by radiation treatment where he stayed at Cancer Society's Lodge.

*"I had a wonderful time at the Cancer Society Lodge... the convenience of being so close to my treatment was great."*

*Cancer Society is such a valuable resource for people that are going through [cancer]. It's hard enough going through it rather than having the stress of figuring out how to get [to your treatments] as well."*



*Geoff with his bike on the Te Araroa Trail*

Once he had recovered, Geoff went back to where he left off on the trail the following spring and finally made it to Bluff on 25th February 2022.

This year, Geoff chose to challenge himself once again by undertaking the Te Araroa on his bike, setting off with around 260 other cyclists in late February on a 30-day long journey to raise money for the Cancer Society. A journey that at 70 years old is very impressive!

*"I think it's quite important to let people know that there is hope - cancer isn't necessarily a death sentence and I hope that if you are going through this journey you are encouraged."*

**Services like our Cancer Society Lodge are made possible only because of support from people like you. Thank you for supporting people like Geoff, and making an immense difference in their lives when they need it most.**



*Brittany and Daron*

*"I've always had long hair since high school. They said after my third round of chemotherapy that I'd notice my hair. I decided to test it in the shower and gave my hair a tug. I saw how much came out and how easy it was."*

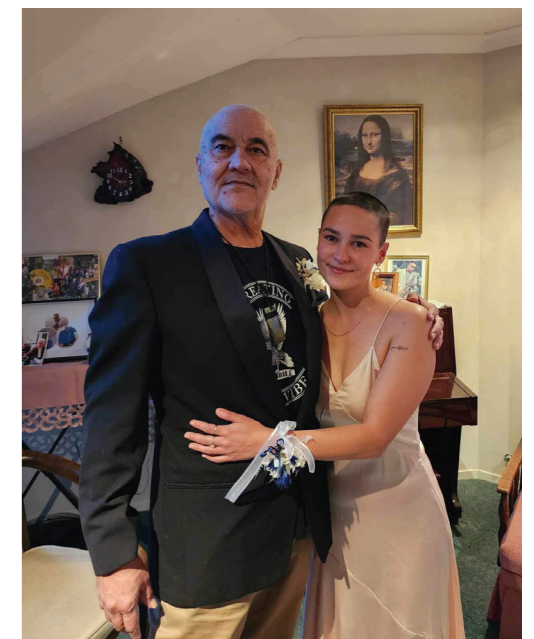
Last year, Daron MacDonald and his whānau were rocked by a shock diagnosis of pancreatic cancer.

To honour her father, his daughter, Brittany decided to cut her own hair in a special Chop the Mop fundraiser surrounded by friends and whānau.

*"Brittany felt she wanted to do something because she's proud of me, my attitude and the way we're going about it," says Daron.*

*"Brittany made a wonderful evening. She bought two corsages, one for me and one for herself. She invited me to be her date to the ball, so I got out my dinner suit. Then we cut each other's ponytail."*

Throughout Daron's cancer journey he has been supported by Cancer Society nurse, Leoni Lawry. He also found our free transport to treatment service incredibly helpful to get to and from chemotherapy.



# A Father Goes to the Ball!

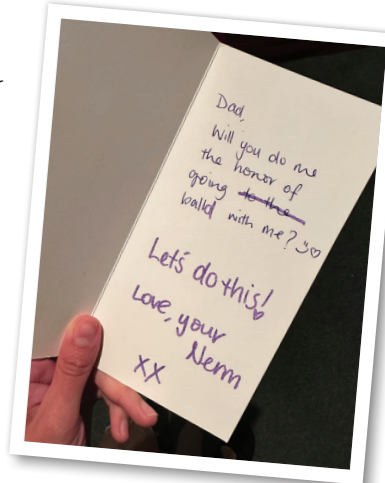
*"I've always had long hair since high school. They said after my third round of chemotherapy that I'd notice my hair. I decided to test it*

*"You guys are wonderful. And I've met people at chemotherapy. There's a community - it's very real. There's an eclectic amount of different people, some very sad stories but some wonderful, good stories too. I hope all the best for all of us."*

Daron and his whānau raised over \$3,000 from their hair cutting fundraiser and feel very grateful to everyone who donated.

*"It's amazing, just wonderful people donating - even from people we don't even know! The goal was \$1,000 to start with but we raised that in just a few days so we put the target up!"*

Like all fathers, Daron stresses the importance of his family during his cancer experience. *"My children are all special. Everybody's kids are wonderful and I'm no exception. My children and my wife, they're my rocks. I find it quite overwhelming what they're like, they're just really cool and I'm so proud of them."*



# The Love of my Life has Cancer

**This story was written by Elizabeth, who is currently supporting her husband Peter through cancer, and recently stayed at our Cancer Society Lodge. We thought it was beautiful and wanted to share it with you.**

The love of my life has cancer.

Our story is not unique. It is a common story.

Because I love him, I do not complain. I work hard to keep the burdens of daily life from him. I work hard to not reveal my pain. He is battling for us, and I strive for this battle to be his only one. His battle is big enough without seeing mine.

When he entered the hospital for a three week stay, it was with trepidation that I accepted a place at Cancer Society's Lodge. I am tired. I am terrified. I am distracted. I am trying to find my car keys and phone, all the time. This is a place full of strangers. It will be like a dormitory. Pain will be all around me. I am already hanging by a thread. Sometimes I just want to be alone.

Then, I walked through the doors of the Lodge, and I began to breathe, just a little bit. It is true what they say, the little things are the big things.

I was greeted with care and gentleness. The workers and volunteers are intuitive and responsive. I sensed they knew our story themselves. Without being intrusive, they guide me through how to be here.

At the lodge the windows are enormous. Did the architects design this for us? For people like me?



*Peter and Elizabeth*

I read the history of this lodge, and see, yes, this is for us. Purposefully and lovingly made for all of us. It is comforting and unpretentious. There is a library, and the art is lovely. I am distracted in a new way, a positive way.

Room 40 is mine. It is perfect for me. Perhaps this was a good decision after all.

The dining room is lovely, surrounded by decks and gardens. I decide to dine outside whenever I can. Is this an appetite I feel coming on? I find I don't want to be alone so much.

As we journeyed through his hospitalization, I found myself able to focus a bit. I was resting more peacefully, eating more appropriately, and locating my phone more frequently. This is a place of peace. And, the guests are not strangers, they are like me. We know each other though we have never met before,

we know how to be with each other. The small kindnesses are all around - a smile, a cheesecake, a shuttle driver with a penchant for puns.

So, here I am on my last day at Cancer Society's Lions Lodge, Hamilton - a National Treasure. I am leaving with him, the love of my life, and taking these small gifts with me in my heart. I will practice these quiet lessons from the Lodge. The little things are the big things, and this is a big lesson for us all.

With a grateful and full heart, E.

*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](http://www.cancer.org.nz)

