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THE PSN POST

Service, sacrifice and hope this Easter season



Easter is a season of reflection, faith and renewal. At its heart is the symbol of the Cross – a reminder of service, sacrifice and love given freely for the sake of others. It is a powerful story of hope: that acts of compassion, even when costly, can transform lives.

As we move into autumn, this message feels particularly relevant. Throughout our communities, many people continue to face hardship – families living with fear or uncertainty, people feeling isolated or overwhelmed, and those quietly carrying the weight of caring for others. Easter invites us to remember that meaningful service is never wasted, and that love expressed through action truly matters.

At PSN, this spirit of service is lived out every day across our communities. Recently, at a staff member's farewell, I was reminded of this. In my farewell remarks, I reflected on a verse from Hebrews:

“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2)

This staff member embodied that

verse – serving others with humility, generosity and quiet strength. Their work, like the work of so many at PSN, may not always have been seen or celebrated but it made a profound difference.

That same spirit of service is shared by you – our supporters, donors, volunteers and partners. Your generosity is an act of faith in action. You are helping carry the weight of others' burdens and creating pathways to safety, healing and hope.

Easter reminds us that sacrifice, when given in love, brings life. Thank you for walking alongside PSN. We hope you enjoy this edition of *The PSN Post* and the stories of PSN's work within our communities.

With gratitude and every blessing,
Shaun Greaves – Chief Executive

Shaping stronger futures:

Making wellbeing part of school culture

 Familyworks

For the past 13 years, Jessica has been a steady presence at Henderson Intermediate as a Social Worker in School (SWiS). This role brings professional social work support directly into the school environment, helping students to navigate emotional, social and family challenges that impact their learning and wellbeing. Today, she supports around 100 students in a school of 700 – but her impact reaches far beyond the four walls of her room.

When she first began, the service operated out of a small room and accessing her support was quite misunderstood and often had stigma attached.

“In the beginning, the role was full of challenges, trying to navigate the delivery of a therapeutic service into an education system. There was a great deal of learning and relationship building that needed to happen to get to where we are today.”

Over time, that has changed. Jessica’s SWiS programme now operates from a full classroom space and is woven into the school fabric. At the beginning of each year, she invites every class into the SWiS room, where she introduces the programme and normalises how to access support. Teachers are equipped with shared language and tools, creating consistency across the school.

“It’s a big task, but also one that pays off,” she reflects.

For Jessica, the shared language is key. When teachers and students use the same words around feelings and regulation, it sticks. The SWiS room becomes part of everyday learning, a therapeutic space that students can access within school to learn how to meet their needs.

“This is a huge accomplishment for us as a service,” she says. *“Children are learning to meet their mental and emotional needs alongside learning to*

read and write. It has become a part of our school culture, protected and valued.”

Meeting students at a critical age

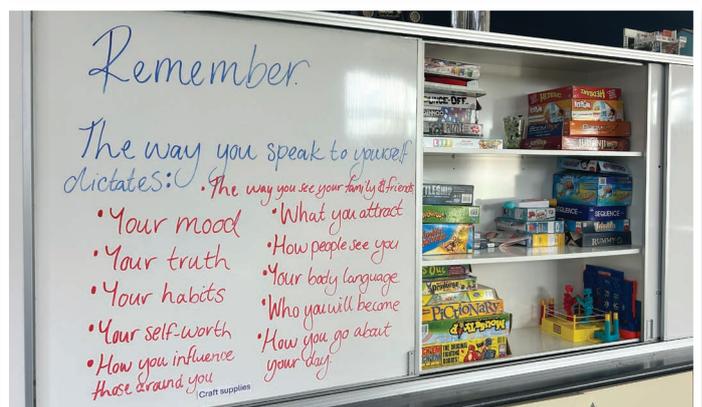
Intermediate years are a pivotal developmental window. Jessica sees firsthand how quickly things shift between Year 7 and Year 8.

“Intermediate is an interesting age group because it’s when the adolescent brain kicks in. Puberty starts, hormones are raging, and they stop sleeping,” she explains. *“They begin to relive everything they had experienced previously, but through a different lens. What we often see is a lot of kids suddenly not coping; where they were OK at primary, but now things are being understood through an adolescent brain.”*

Jessica sees at-risk students daily. *“If certain things are happening in their life, it puts them more at risk. Often complex situations like abuse, family violence, poverty, escalating or consistent mental health issues are impacting their adults at home.”*

Sometimes people mistakenly believe her role is to ‘fix’ children, which leads to adults being frustrated when this does not occur. Many of the children’s environments remain complex and unable to be changed. Instead, she focuses on equipping them with language and tools.

Jessica points out: *“The best thing that you can do, especially for this age and stage, is to teach them the language. So, they’re having those ‘aha’ moments: ‘OK, I understand why maybe I’m feeling like that. I understand that this is just a negative thought that I’m having, and it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s my reality.’”*



A different kind of therapy space

When you step inside Jessica's room, it feels very different from a traditional one. There are beanbags, exercise balls, art and craft materials, games, Lego, fidget tools, a Milo and biscuit station, as well as a much-loved giant bear called Bob.

"We need to move away from papers and questions," says Jessica – "that's not how we heal. We need to utilise games, arts and craft, even food. We need to be really specific about interacting with children in a way that is not controlling, not adult based, but comes from the child's world."

Students choose where to sit – they might draw, build, play, or simply lie down and listen to calming music. Her space is intentionally quieter and slower than a typical classroom.

"Sometimes I turn the lights off and put meditation music on. I tell them: this is your time to pause."

For many students, learning how to regulate their bodies and emotions – rather than react – is a critical life skill. In a world that often feels loud and overwhelming, learning how to slow their bodies and calm their minds can be transformative.

"Even the toughest kids I've had in this room, I've watched them sit down and play a game and be laughing and playing as children. That is a huge accomplishment."



Jessica's SWiS room, featuring the legendary Bob.

The Wednesday Boys

Group programmes form a significant part of Jessica's work, particularly for students who may not feel comfortable in one-to-one sessions. One of the groups, known as the "Wednesday Boys", brought together students who were struggling within the traditional school system – some with repeated stand-downs and suspensions.

"On a Wednesday, those boys would show up to school to attend their group session with me," Jessica recalls. "It gave them a reason to come to school. And what we learned from this is that we can get children to school if we put supports in place and try to meet their needs."

Rather than focusing solely on behavioural change, she has focused on connection and belonging. Youth mentors joined sessions to discuss hauora – caring for body and mind – and to model positive future pathways. By the end of the year, she saw a shift.

"My main message to the boys was to never give up, even though all odds were stacked against them. They went from very hardened boys to being able to play a game on the floor and remember they were still kids."

Looking ahead

After 13 years, Jessica is hopeful about the future.

"Honestly, I'm actually really hopeful for the next generations," she says. "The children have higher social and emotional intelligence as our society shifts in their views. People are more open. They talk about mental health. Wellbeing is something that is now valued."

Now that SWiS has been embedded in schools for more than a decade, Jessica is beginning to see former students return as adults – socially aware, emotionally literate ... and in some cases choosing careers dedicated to supporting others, including social work and counselling.

"This was their safe place," she says. "We plant seeds and now we are seeing them grow."

As demand continues to grow, the opportunity for SWiS to expand its reach and leadership across schools remains significant.

"The SWiS service has so much potential to grow and transform how we deliver social services," Jessica emphasises.



SWiS depends on generous supporters like you. Your gift to PSN helps fill the funding gap, giving children in schools the safe spaces and tools they need to thrive.

Donate today at: www.psn.org.nz/donate

A legacy of care



Supporting connection for people living with dementia

When people choose to leave a gift in their Will to PSN, they help create lasting, practical support for communities – often in quiet ways that continue to change lives week after week.

One heartening example is the Dees Social Group in Mairangi Bay, a long-running community programme supporting people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Established in 2010 in response to a growing local need, the group grew from conversations at Mairangi Bay Presbyterian Church and input from PSN’s Enliven team. They identified increasing isolation among people living at home with dementia. Together, they began a support service focused on reducing isolation, supporting wellbeing, and offering meaningful respite for caregivers. Over time, the group developed into a self-supporting community initiative, with PSN handing the project over fully to the caring community at Mairangi Bay Presbyterian Church.

Today, the group meets weekly in a safe, welcoming environment, offering structured activities that foster connection, confidence and enjoyment. Attendance is carefully managed to ensure participants receive the support and care they need.

Over the years, more than 100 people have attended Dees Social Group, with many remaining involved long-term. The impact is felt not only by participants, but also by caregivers who gain valuable time to rest and recharge.

As one caregiver shared:

John loves attending the Dees Social Group each Thursday. It gives him a purpose for the day, something to look forward to and give shape to his week. He feels very welcome, enjoys the company and regular activities, and sees people doing things which encourages him to give new things a go. As John’s carer, it gives me immense satisfaction knowing that John is spending his time enjoyably and with purpose at Dees, within a secure and safe environment.”

– Bernadette

Recently, a gift left in a Will to PSN helped make it possible for our organisation to contribute \$5,000 towards the ongoing coordination of the Dees Social Group. This vital funding, alongside other valued grants and community support, enables the programme to continue operating with the care, consistency and professionalism it requires. Without ongoing funding, the future of the group would be uncertain – potentially leaving many participants and their caregivers without a trusted source of connection they value and rely on.



Participants in Dees Social Group enjoying some games together.

This is the power of a bequest: a gift that continues to care for others long into the future. For more information about leaving a gift in your Will, please contact Vivienne Riddell on 09 520 8628 or 021 329 938



Our older people are gold:

Recognising wisdom, resilience and contribution

Enliven



By Wendy Hoskin, GM Enliven Health & Disability Services, PSN

As one octogenarian musician once wrote – *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, and changing they certainly are, especially for older people living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Bob Dylan wrote that song more than 50 years ago and he's still working, touring, and thriving – at 84.

In our society, where youth, innovation and risk-taking are celebrated, it's vital we recognise the immense value older people bring to our nation. Our older people are a powerful force of wisdom, resilience and contribution. Older people are the keepers of our stories. They hold lived experience of decades of social change, economic evolution, and cultural transformation. Their insights are invaluable.

According to New Zealand Census data, employment among those aged 65 to 69 rose to 44.0% in 2023. For 70- to 74-year-olds, 24.7% are still working, as are nearly 10.0% of those aged 75 and older. Those staying in the workforce bring stability, institutional knowledge and a strong work ethic.

Our older people contribute significantly to society by providing unpaid support – they care for grandchildren, for their partners, for their adult children living with disabilities. These roles are essential.

While there isn't a single figure for the economic value of older volunteers specifically, their efforts are part of the estimated \$4.0 billion national value of formal unpaid labour in the non-profit sector and the even larger \$41.4 billion estimated total value of unpaid care work in Aotearoa New Zealand. Older volunteers often contribute more time to unpaid activities than younger people, and their participation builds more connected, inclusive and resilient communities.

Culturally, kaumātua play a central role in Māori communities, guiding tikanga and ensuring the transmission of language, tradition and leadership.

Across all cultures, our older people provide the emotional anchor for families and communities.



Yet despite their major positive contributions, older people often face ageism and marginalisation. Harmful negative stereotypes of age are everywhere. Older people are frequently portrayed as dependent, weak, forgetful and technologically illiterate.

In addition, there is a view that older people need to be protected. In doing this, many decisions and freedoms are denied to them. Yet older people are absolutely capable of determining their own needs and wants. Ageing is not a decline – rather, it is a phase of life rich with potential, purpose and pride.

In the health and disability sector, the older people we work with challenge us to think differently about ageing, to design services that are not only accessible but empowering as well. At Enliven, we are privileged to work alongside older people who are redefining what it means to age well in Aotearoa New Zealand.

As we look to the future, let's ensure that older people are not just included – they are central. Their value is not in what they used to do, but in what they continue to do every day. They are our teachers, our caregivers, our leaders and our friends. In recognising their importance, we strengthen the very fabric of our country's society. Whether you're a policymaker, a service provider, a neighbour or a family member, ask yourself:

What am I doing to ensure older people feel seen, heard and respected?

Because when we uplift our elders, we strengthen the heart of our nation.

When the finish line looks different:
**Still moving forward
for Shine**



A West Auckland teenager has returned to Round the Bays this year with a very different goal – not to win but simply to take part.

Last year, at just 12 years old, Elijah ran the 8.4km course in an impressive 34 minutes 5 seconds – placing fourth in the Under-15 category. With the help of his mum, he also raised more than \$500 for Shine – PSN’s service supporting people affected by family violence.

After the 2025 Round the Bays, Elijah went from strength to strength with his running, winning the Auckland Cross Country Championships and placing second in the AIMS (Association of Intermediate and Middle Schools) Cross Country.

However, this year even walking the course was a major achievement.

Last November, after a serious bike accident on his way to school, Elijah badly shattered his femur and underwent a five-hour operation to place a rod from his hip to knee. Weeks in a wheelchair and months on crutches followed, before extensive rehabilitation began.

“Femur fractures are not small injuries, especially for a young athlete who absolutely loves to run,” says his mum. *“There was a long period where even walking again felt a long way off.”*

Despite the setback, Elijah approached rehabilitation with the same discipline he had brought to training. *“He was incredibly diligent with his rehab as he was so keen to get back to running and*



Left: Elijah at Starship Hospital, beginning his road to recovery after surgery. Right: Elijah in action at Round the Bays 2025



Left: Elijah at the finish line with his younger sister. Right: Elijah holding his 2024 and 2025 medals with his crutches, shortly after being cleared to walk again.

competing,” his mum says. *“Being cleared to walk again was a huge milestone.”*

This was Elijah’s third year taking part in Round the Bays for Shine. While he had hoped to compete for the podium this year, the goal changed from performance to participation.

“Running was taken off the table this year, but being part of it wasn’t,” his mum says. *“I think there’s something really powerful about showing kids – and adults – that how you show up can change, but your values don’t have to.”*

“I’m passionate about raising awareness and funds to help reduce family violence, and that’s something that has rubbed off on him.” says Elijah’s mum. *“It’s about choosing to support something meaningful, and even when life throws challenges at us, we can still find ways to make a positive impact. You don’t have to be at your best to make a difference”.*

Donations raised through Round the Bays help Shine continue supporting people to live safely and with dignity.



Please consider supporting Elijah’s efforts by making a donation. Every contribution makes a difference.

www.rtbauckland26.grassrootz.com/shine/the-unbreakabones

There when it matters most:

When people reach out, lives can be saved

Lifeline

Every day in Aotearoa New Zealand, people reach breaking point in their quietest, loneliest moments. For many, the darkest times come when worries feel overwhelming, isolation weighs heavily, and hope can feel impossibly far away. In those moments, a single conversation can mean everything.

Lifeline's mission is to reduce distress and save lives by providing safe, accessible, effective and professional support when people need it most.

Each month, Lifeline answers more than 3,300 calls and responds to around 15,200 texts from people of all ages and walks of life. People reach out for a wide range of reasons. Last year, Lifeline created over 4,700 safety plans to support people at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Behind every statistic is a real person – a parent, a teenager, a friend – facing pain that feels too overwhelming to carry alone.

Katie*, aged 15, texted Lifeline ready to end her life. A counsellor helped her calm her thoughts, move to safety, eat something, and promise to speak to her school counsellor the next day.

John*, overwhelmed after his wife left him, sat alone in his garage, convinced this was the end. He considered ending his life but decided to make one more call – to Lifeline.

That call mattered. That pause mattered. That human connection mattered. Our nation loses more than 12 precious lives to suicide every week¹. For every life lost, families are left incomplete, classrooms and workplaces grow quieter, friends carry that loss for years.

Without someone to listen – to offer calm care and hope – despair can grow unmanageable. But it doesn't have to. Timely, professional support can prevent tragedy. Compassionate, trained support works. Connection works. Being heard works.



Why your support matters.

Calls to Lifeline are free, confidential and available seven days a week. Lifeline receives no government funding and relies on public donations to remain available for those in crisis. Every call answered and every text replied to is only possible because people like you choose to help.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| \$36 → | supports one person in distress. |
| \$72 → | supports two people in distress. |
| \$100 → | supports someone at high risk of self-harm or suicide. |

Your generosity ensures a trained counsellor is there when someone reaches out in their darkest hour.

*names changed to protect identity



No one plans to be in crisis.
Will you help answer the call?

If you need support, free call
0800 LIFELINE or free text **HELP**.

www.lifeline.org.nz/donate

¹ www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/for-health-professionals/data-and-statistics/suicide/data-web-tool

