



**SPRING 2026**

# THE PSN POST

## New Beginnings and Hope

**Spring brings a sense of renewal, both in nature and in people's lives. As the world comes to life again, we're reminded to embrace new beginnings.**

At PSN, we celebrated Matariki in July. It was a special time to pause from our busy schedules, remember those who have passed, give thanks for the present, and look ahead with purpose. I hope these themes of remembrance, gratitude and optimism stay with us as we move into the blossoming season ahead. I would like to take a moment to thank everyone who generously supported the Family Works Winter Appeal. Your kindness has made a real difference for families experiencing hardship, helping to ease some of the pressures that can be especially difficult for children. While winter may be coming to an end, the challenges many families face do not simply disappear with the warmer weather. Your compassion and generosity remain as important as ever.

Spring also marks World Suicide Prevention Day in September and Mental Health Awareness Week in October. These occasions highlight the challenges many people face alone and remind us how your support helps Lifeline be there throughout the year for those struggling. September is Wills Month too, a time to think about

the legacy we leave behind. Your contribution today is already touching lives, and a gift in your Will can extend that impact for generations to come.

This year, we're excited to launch our very first PSN Christmas card fundraiser, featuring artwork created by Tamariki supported through our Family Works services. Every purchase helps raise more funds to support children and families while sharing a message of hope and kindness with those you care about. We would love your support by pre-ordering a pack for the festive season.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who stands alongside PSN, helping us create positive change across the communities we serve. I hope this edition of *The PSN Post* gives you a chance to pause, connect and reflect on the difference we make together.

With gratitude,

**Shaun Greaves**

CEO, Presbyterian Support Northern



# Building Stronger Families, One Change at a Time



**Few roles in life are as rewarding – or as challenging – as parenting, yet it doesn't come with a manual.** Every child is different, and what works for one family may not work for another. When challenges arise, it can be easy to feel isolated and wonder whether you're getting it right. That's where Family Works' Incredible Years programme is helping parents and caregivers feel more confident in one of life's most important roles.



This evidence-based training initiative, which Family Works has been delivering since 2013, supports parents, caregivers and whānau of children aged three to eight years. Originally developed by parenting expert Carolyn Webster-Stratton, Incredible Years has been helping families around the world since 1983. The programme is designed to strengthen parent-child relationships and support children's social, emotional and behavioural development.

Families can access the programme in several ways. Some parents and caregivers choose to enrol themselves, while others are referred, invited or encouraged to take part by professionals such as teachers, GPs, social workers or other support services.

Delivered in small groups by two trained facilitators, the programme uses video examples of everyday parent-child interactions to spark discussion. Parents and caregivers learn practical strategies through group conversations, role-play, books and take-home activities, giving them the opportunity to practise new approaches between sessions and share their experiences with others.

Facilitators say many participants arrive feeling nervous, worried they'll be judged or told they're parenting 'wrong'. Instead, they discover a welcoming environment where people openly share both their struggles and successes, learning from one another along the way. According to Family Works Team Leader Isabella Mirzaabbasi,

one of the biggest transformations isn't always in the children – it's in the parents.

*"Parents often become calmer and more consistent in how they respond to their children. They spend more positive time together, use praise more effectively, and feel better equipped to handle difficult situations. As a result, children often become more cooperative, more emotionally secure and better able to regulate their behaviour. Families frequently describe their homes as feeling calmer, happier and more connected."*

Interestingly, one of the simplest strategies often has the biggest impact. Facilitators say parents regularly tell them that spending just 10 to 15 minutes each day in child-led play transforms relationships. *"When children receive focused, positive attention, they feel connected, valued and noticed – which often reduces challenging behaviour before it even starts."*

## One mother shared her thoughts:

*"The programme helped me build a stronger bond with my son, better understand developmentally appropriate behaviour, and let go of worrying about things that simply didn't need my energy. I came away with practical strategies I could use every day and greater confidence in my own parenting."*

One of the biggest surprises for many participants is that they aren't alone, and that sense of connection was shared by many participants. One parent reflected on her experience: *"Knowing that I was not alone in my struggles and celebrating with others when they overcame a challenge was an incredibly healing process. Each and every one of you helped me find that happiness in myself again – and in my children."*

Other participants echoed that feeling: *"One of the most valuable aspects was hearing other parents honestly share both the difficult moments and the small wins. Celebrating each other's progress week by week reminded me that parenting isn't about perfection – it's about learning and growing together."*

*"As the weeks went by, I watched initially quiet parents become more involved in discussion. It's always comforting to know that the difficulties you're experiencing are common to others in some form."*

While Incredible Years is often thought of as a parenting programme, it can be equally valuable for grandparents and other caregivers. One grandparent reflected that parenting support simply wasn't something their generation had access to, making the programme an opportunity to learn new approaches and better support their grandchildren. *"I had no idea what the programme would be like. Being older, I'd never participated in anything like this. The wide range of topics and the discussions with other participants were invaluable. By the end of the programme, I felt much more confident handling situations that had once seemed unsolvable."*

Another grandparent said the initiative gave them a deeper understanding of today's parenting approaches and helped them better support their neurodiverse mokopuna. They left feeling better equipped to navigate difficult situations and more intentional about recognising and praising positive behaviour every day: *"We've gathered a much better understanding and approach to dealing with the challenges that arise when our wonderful mokopuna are in our care. We don't succeed at all times, but we're better at trying!"*

Perhaps the greatest takeaway from the programme is that no family needs to have all the answers. Every parent, grandparent and caregiver faces challenges. Having practical tools, encouragement and a community walking alongside you can make those situations feel far

less overwhelming. No family gets everything right all the time. But Incredible Years reminds us that we don't have to figure it out alone. Sometimes, the greatest gift isn't finding all the answers – it's discovering ways to keep growing alongside our children.

*"There is no way to be a perfect mother... but a million ways to be a good one."*

- Jill Churchill

## Interested in the Incredible Years programme?



Family Works' Incredible Years programme is free for parents, caregivers and whānau. We also offer **Incredible Years Autism (IYA)**, a specialist initiative designed to support parents and caregivers of children with autism by providing practical strategies to better understand, connect with and support their child.

*Incredible Years programmes offered each year:*

**Whangārei** – Incredible Years (2x)

**West Auckland** – Incredible Years (1x), Autism (1x)

**Auckland Central** – Incredible Years (1x), Autism (1x)

**Waikato** – Incredible Years (1x)

**Rotorua** – Incredible Years (1x), Autism (2x)

**Taupō** – Incredible Years (1x)

If you, or someone you know, could benefit from the programme, we'd love to hear from you. To find out more or enquire about upcoming groups, please contact your local Family Works team: [familyworksnorthern.org.nz/contact/locations](https://familyworksnorthern.org.nz/contact/locations)



**Help families thrive** – Your generosity helps PSN continue supporting children and families through services that build stronger, safer and more connected communities.

**Donate today at → [psn.org.nz/donate](https://psn.org.nz/donate)**



## Why Society Needs to Do More for Dementia

Enliven

Dementia is often described as a disease that slowly takes a person away. What is less visible – but just as devastating – is how it impacts the lives of those who care for them. Across Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond, carers are quietly carrying an immense emotional, physical and financial load, often with little recognition or support. Their stories make one thing clear: **society is not doing enough.**



### The hidden weight of caring

Listen closely to carers, and a pattern emerges. One woman describes how friends routinely ask after her husband's wellbeing but never hers. *"Sometimes it would just be nice if someone said, how are you? How are you coping?"* This reflects a deeper societal blind spot: we see the person with dementia, but can overlook the person caring for them behind the scenes.

Carers become nurses, administrators, cooks and emotional anchors. Many are older themselves, managing their own health while providing round-the-clock care. Even when a carer is injured, meals must be prepared, laundry done and medications managed. There is no pause button. One woman in her 80s speaks candidly about her fear of becoming sick: if she can no longer care for her husband, there is no clear back-up plan. This is not an isolated concern – **it is a systemic gap.**

### When support falls away

Social isolation compounds the strain as dementia-related changes can lead friends and family to drift away. As one carer put it, *"People that you think would be there for you, they're not."* This quiet withdrawal leaves carers navigating an already challenging journey alone. Some carers also describe being dismissed early on, with their loved one's symptoms misinterpreted as relationship issues rather than neurological decline. Delayed diagnosis prolongs uncertainty and limits opportunities for early support and planning.

### What meaningful support looks like

Yet within these stories, there are glimpses of what meaningful support looks like. Community-based services like Home-Based Support and Day Services

help people living with dementia and their carers remain in their own homes. Enliven Day Services provides structured activities, social connection and crucial respite. One carer describes how attending gave her husband *"a place where he belongs"*, while allowing her time to rest and regain her own sense of self. **These are not luxuries – they are a critical source of support.**

### A shared responsibility

Sometimes, this type of support is what makes it possible for carers to keep going. But no carer should have to rely on resilience alone. At the heart of this issue is dignity – not just for those living with dementia but also for the people who stand beside them. Carers are sustaining a hidden system that would otherwise collapse, doing society's work often without recognition and all too frequently without help. We can do better. Not with grand gestures, but with practical, sustained commitments: more services, better support, and a cultural shift that values carers along with those they care for. Because dementia is not just an individual diagnosis – it is a shared societal responsibility.

Enliven supports people living with dementia to remain independent, connected and living well in their own homes and communities, while also supporting family and whānau carers.

For more information, visit  
[enlivennorthern.org.nz](http://enlivennorthern.org.nz).

# A living Legacy – The Gift That Lives On

Most of us hope to leave this world a little better than we found it. We invest time in our families, support the people and causes we care about, volunteer, lend a hand, encourage others and quietly make a difference in ways that often go unseen. Through acts of kindness, generosity and compassion, we create a legacy that reaches far beyond ourselves. **A legacy isn't simply what we leave behind – it's the lasting impact we have on the lives of others.** For some, that legacy also includes leaving a gift in their Will. September's Wills Month is an opportunity to think not only about preparing an important legal document, but also about the values, hopes and difference we would like to pass on to future generations.

Recent research from JBWere suggests we are experiencing one of the largest inter-generational transfers of wealth in our history. Yet only around six per cent of New Zealanders choose to leave a charitable gift in their Will. For those who do, it is a deeply personal way to carry their commitment forward, helping causes they care about continue their work and create positive change. By including a legacy gift in your Will, you can help organisations like PSN address some of Aotearoa New Zealand's greatest social challenges.

For more than 140 years, PSN has walked alongside children, families and older people through life's joys and hardships. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, people receive practical help, compassionate care and hope when they need it most. A gift in your Will continues your legacy of

care, helping future generations receive the support they need for years to come. Your gift could improve services for children in need, provide vans to transport older people to day programmes, upgrade refuge kitchens for families staying at Shine's refuges, or contribute to building repairs for essential community services such as Lifeline.

Whether large or small, every bequest is a lasting expression of kindness and compassion – a gift that continues to change lives long into the future. If you've been thinking about leaving a gift in your Will, perhaps now is the right time to take the next step and have a conversation. There's no obligation – simply an opportunity to ask questions, explore your options and discover the difference your generosity could make.

If you've already included PSN in your Will, thank you. Your generosity will help create lasting change for future generations.

**To learn more, please contact Vivienne Riddell on 09 520 8628 or 021 329 938.**



*"Be rich in good deeds, and be generous and willing to share." – 1 Timothy 6:18*

## A Time to Remember, Reflect and Look Ahead

Matariki, the Māori New Year, is a unique celebration in Aotearoa New Zealand – a sacred occasion to remember those who have gone before us and look towards the year ahead. At PSN, we gathered at Communities Feeding Communities to honour this special time, reflect on the year that has passed and welcome a new season. As part of the Hautapu ceremony (a traditional dawn ceremony of offerings and remembrance), an umu (earth oven) was prepared. The steam from the cooked food rose towards the stars, symbolically carrying our offerings, karakia (prayers or blessings) and the

names of those no longer with us. As the steam disappeared into the midwinter sky beneath the Matariki star cluster, it felt like a powerful connection between the grief we carry and the hope we hold for tomorrow. It was a profound gift to pause, reflect on what we need to let go of and set our intentions for the year ahead. Together we shared kai, a meaningful expression of gratitude, connection and community. Long after the stars have faded from the winter sky, that invitation remains – to carry forward hope, act with kindness and approach the year ahead with purpose.



*In this new year, and as we observe World Suicide Prevention Day, let's remember the power of connection. Reaching out, listening without judgement and being there can make all the difference.*



**Help us Carry Hope forward –**  
Your support helps PSN create stronger, safer and more connected communities.

**Make a gift today → [psn.org.nz/donate](https://psn.org.nz/donate)**

## Every Conversation Counts

This year, **World Suicide Prevention Day** (10 October) highlights the need to change the narrative on suicide by starting conversations, reducing stigma, strengthening connection and ensuring people can access support when they need it most. **These conversations matter every day.** At Lifeline, we believe no one should face difficult times alone.

A single conversation can make all the difference – and even save a life. **Every day, people reach out to Lifeline for support, including those in crisis.** Behind every call is a person, a whānau and a story. Every suicide is a devastating loss, while thousands more people experience suicidal distress each year, often in silence. Whether you or someone you know is struggling, **Lifeline is here to listen.**

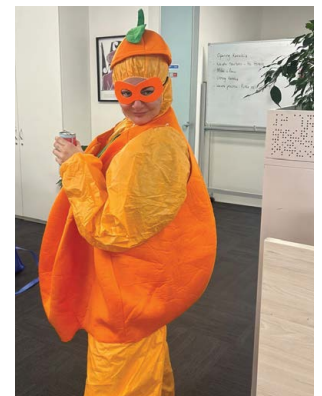
World Suicide Prevention Day is one day, but the need for support doesn't end there. For over 60 years, Lifeline has provided a safe, compassionate and non-judgemental space where anyone can talk openly, feel heard and know they are not alone – all year round.

**Suicide Crisis Helpline – 0508 TAUTOKO (0508 828 865) – is operated by trained and experienced social service practitioners who have undergone suicide prevention training. If you are thinking about suicide, call the Suicide Crisis Helpline. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, please call emergency services immediately on 111.**

## Raising Awareness. Inspiring Hope.

Shine's annual Light It Orange campaign took place in July, raising vital funds and awareness of family violence. Our Shine Education and Training team launched the campaign with an orange-themed morning tea, where staff got creative with orange outfits, props and food. Alongside the fun, staff shared insights into Shine's crisis response work and programmes, and discussed family violence messaging in pop culture and media.

For the second year, the Sky Tower in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland was lit orange at the start of July – a powerful beacon of hope and a reminder that help is available through Shine. Thank you to everyone who took part, helping raise awareness and spark important conversations about family violence.



Orange in action! A few snaps from PSN's Light It Orange workplace event, and the Sky Tower glowing orange in support of the campaign.



**Get Involved** – Inspired by Light it Orange? Help Shine raise awareness and vital funds for people experiencing family violence.

Visit [lightitorange.org.nz](https://lightitorange.org.nz) to get involved all year round.

**Shine**



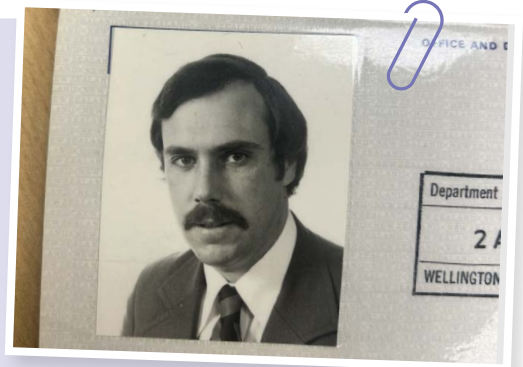
A Lifetime of Listening

## Neil on Hardship, Hope and the Power of Being Heard

# Lifeline

**When someone is at their lowest, a calm voice on the other end of the line can change everything.**

Having recently retired after a journey spanning close to four decades as a Lifeline counsellor, Neil sat down with us to reflect not only on the thousands of conversations he's shared, but also on the quiet lessons they've taught him about hardship, hope and the extraordinary power of simply listening. Ironically, Neil never imagined counselling would become his life's work.



Neil's passport photo from around the time he first volunteered at Lifeline.

*"I was working in general insurance," he recalls. "I'd recently gone through a divorce, and another relationship had also ended." One day, while driving along the Ōrewa Highway, a radio advertisement caught his attention: Lifeline was looking for volunteers. "I remember thinking, 'I should do that.'"*

Looking back now, Neil believes something had been drawing him towards helping others for a long time. What started as a volunteer opportunity eventually led to a fulfilling career with Lifeline.

*"I've always been someone who people naturally confided in," he says. "They'd tell me about their problems, and I'd usually have plenty of advice. But then I'd see them a month or two later and realise they hadn't taken any of it." Rather than becoming frustrated, he became curious. "I wanted to become the sort of person who could genuinely help," Neil explains.*

That curiosity led him to volunteer at Lifeline – and discover one of the most important lessons of his career.

*"One of the first things I learnt in training was that we don't tell people what to do; instead, we help people arrive at their own solutions. Ideally, they leave the conversation feeling the answer came from them. It's about helping people discover their own way forward, rather than giving advice."*

Over the years, Neil says he also learnt another valuable lesson – not about counselling techniques but about himself. *"When I first began, I felt I had to adopt a particular counselling persona. I thought I had to speak a certain way and almost play the role of a counsellor,"* he admits. Eventually, he realised authenticity mattered far more.

*"Being my natural self actually works better. People can tell when you're genuine."*

While Neil has spent decades supporting others through their struggles, he says some of his greatest strengths as a Lifeline counsellor were shaped by his own difficult experiences.

**"One of my motivations for doing this work – and continuing to enjoy it – is that I've been through some very difficult periods in my own life".**

Looking back, Neil often wonders how different those seasons may have been if Lifeline had been part of his own journey. *"I often think, 'Why didn't I have someone like Lifeline when I was struggling?'"*

Later, when he sought counselling himself, it changed his life. *"I've experienced both sides now – being the person who needed help and being the person offering it. If I can help somebody work through the pain I went through a little, then it's all been worthwhile,"* he says.

His mother often reminded him that hard times make people stronger. *"I remember thinking: 'I don't want to become stronger through hard times! Why can't I just become stronger another way?' But now I can see the wisdom in what she meant."*

*"It's incredibly humbling,"* Neil says of answering a Lifeline call. *"Someone you've never met is trusting you with the most intimate parts of their life."*

Sometimes those conversations involve people who no longer want to live. *"When that happens, everything changes. You begin assessing whether they have a plan, the means to carry it out, and whether they're at immediate risk."* Then comes the responsibility.

***"My entire focus becomes helping keep that person safe. Not safe forever – just safe for today. That's my responsibility in that moment."***

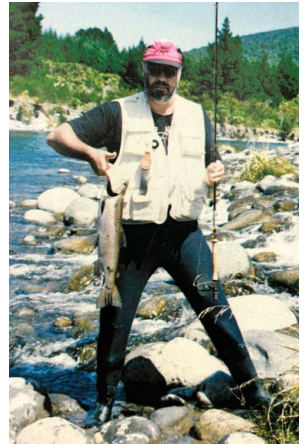
Despite the emotional weight of the work, Neil says there are encouraging changes too. *"I think campaigns encouraging people – particularly men – to talk more openly about mental health have made a real difference. There's been a huge effort to reduce stigma and make it easier for people to seek help. I think that's a very positive change,"* he says.

When asked what he'd like people to know about Lifeline, his answer is simple: *"Listening without judgement is powerful."*

He believes every conversation matters because sometimes being heard is exactly what someone needs. Counselling, he says, has changed his own life too. *"It's helped me become much more self-aware and understand myself better. Years ago, I didn't think very highly of myself. Today, I feel much more comfortable with who I am. That's quite a gift."*

Looking back over four decades of service, Neil remains characteristically humble. *"When I would answer the phone, my focus was on one person. Maybe I can help them."*

As Neil heads into retirement and looks forward to fishing, woodworking, cycling, reading and spending more time with his supportive partner, he leaves behind an extraordinary legacy of compassion. *"I've been privileged to spend many years doing work that has real meaning. Now it's time for the next chapter,"* he says.



Neil enjoying some trout fishing in his younger years.

While Neil may be beginning a new chapter, the work continues. Thanks to the generosity of Lifeline supporters, trained counsellors continue to be there for people around Aotearoa New Zealand, offering a listening ear when it matters most.

**From all of us at Lifeline and PSN, thank you, Neil, for your dedication and compassion, and for the countless lives you've impacted along the way.** On behalf of the thousands of callers who found comfort in your voice over the years, we're deeply grateful. *Enjoy your well-earned retirement.*



Neil surrounded by PSN colleagues and cutting the cake at his farewell celebration.

## Lifeline counsellors are here if you need to talk.

They provide safe, free and confidential support. Free call **0800 LIFELINE (0800 543 354)** or free text **HELP (4357)**. To learn more about Lifeline, please visit [lifeline.org.nz](http://lifeline.org.nz).

