

When We're Needed Most

As winter arrives, I find myself thinking about the children in our communities who will feel it most - not just the cold, but everything that comes with it.

For some families with young children, this winter is especially hard. Rising fuel costs ripple through, meaning less money for food and the basics - and with power bills climbing as the cold sets in, those already stretched are feeling the squeeze from every direction. Our Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) see the signs every day - children arriving without a warm jacket, without lunch, or without the emotional reserves to settle in and learn. These children aren't struggling because of anything they have done. They are carrying the weight of adult hardship with none of the tools to manage it. That is the quiet reality of winter in too many of our classrooms.

This edition of the PSN Post sheds a light on that reality - and on the remarkable people working within it. Our SWiS team sit at a unique point of connection: present in schools, trusted by families, and able to offer early support before challenges grow into crisis.

Like many of you, I feel the shift that winter brings. The shorter days can make it harder to stay connected, to get out, to feel part of something. Not everyone has access to family and support to make winter easier. And for children especially, those months can feel very long indeed.

Your generosity helps ensure that nobody has to face it alone. It keeps our teams in schools, in homes, and alongside the families and people who need them most. Small acts of generosity can bring real hope - and if you are able, I warmly invite you to support the work of PSN this winter.

With gratitude,

Shaun Greaves

Chief Executive Officer, Presbyterian Support Northern



When families can't afford winter
Children pay the price



For many children, winter means gumboots by the door, hot Milo after school and an extra blanket on the bed. For others, winter is different. Winter shows up in the classroom in ways that are hard to ignore – and impossible to forget. Family Works Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) are seeing it across our communities every day – children arriving without warm jackets, without lunch, without shoes and carrying worries no child should have to carry.



SWiS play a vital role in addressing poor learning, low attendance, behavioural challenges, bullying, and a lack of essentials like food, school supplies, and winter clothing. These challenges often stem from deeper issues including financial hardship and sometimes family violence. As the cost of food, rent, petrol and power continue to rise, already-stretched households are being pushed even harder.

A survey released in May 2026 by Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa – the key body representing more than 270 community-based social service providers – paints a stark picture: families are making impossible choices between fuel and food and often are no longer able to afford to drive to critical appointments.¹

This sits alongside findings from The Salvation Army's 2026 State of the Nation report, which found that food insecurity and material hardship remained high throughout 2025, with lower-income households facing disproportionately higher cost increases. Nationally, 14.3% of children are living without basics like enough food, warm clothing or stable housing – and the number of families relying on a main benefit continues to rise.² The need is outstripping what social service providers can manage alone. That is where the generosity of people like you makes all the difference.

While children are never responsible for these pressures, they are often the ones who feel the impact most deeply. Here in our own communities, the need is real and growing. With fuel costs surging

Last year, Communities Feeding Communities provided:

3,048 food parcels – reaching

6,482 adults and

6,439 children.³



and the cost of living continuing to rise, we are already seeing demand on our services increase faster than ever – and winter is only just starting. Our financial mentoring team helped more than 1,000 people secure basics like food and housing,³ and the number of clients supported through school-based interventions grew by 30%.³

The signs are often practical – a child arriving wet, cold and hungry, or absent altogether because the cost of getting to school has become one pressure too many. **The Whangārei Family Works SWiS team shared:**

“From our perspective, winter brings a noticeable shift in the needs of the whānau (families) we support. We often see an increase in illness, which impacts school attendance and engagement, as well as children arriving at school tired, cold, and sometimes without adequate clothing for the weather. During the colder months, many

whānau do their best to keep warm by sleeping together in shared spaces such as the lounge. While this is a thoughtful and caring approach to ensure everyone stays warm, it can impact children's sleep quality, routines, and overall wellbeing. We are also seeing the ongoing impact of the rising cost of living, which is placing additional pressure. For many, this means making difficult decisions between heating their homes, putting fuel in the car, or buying food. We see children arriving at school hungry and cold, which makes it hard for them to concentrate, regulate and fully engage in learning."



The Waitākere Family Works SWiS team described what they are experiencing on the ground:

"We see an increase in illness due to damp homes and overcrowding, and a lack of warm clothing and bedding – at times, children arriving in jandals as their only footwear in the cold. The overcrowding can also stem from families not being able to maintain the cost of living – rent, power and everything else – so having to move in with family members just to survive."

Sometimes, the impact is more emotional: anxiety, exhaustion, withdrawal, behaviour changes and difficulty focusing. The quiet signs that something at home is heavy right now. **A Waikato Family Works family worker reflected on what this can look like:**

"It's often behavioural, but not always in obvious ways. It doesn't always have to be the child lashing out or getting into fights. It can also be things like them becoming really isolated in class or not wanting to go to school because their

anxiety is so high. There are often a number of contributing factors. Sometimes they're noticing that Mum and Dad are struggling financially and they're seeing that stress. Kids pick up on everything. Even if nothing is said, they notice when parents are stressed – especially financially – and they internalise that."

Research from the Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey 2025 found that only 29% of young people showing significant signs of distress are accessing professional help; this means the majority are going without support.⁴ **The Waikato Family Works family worker also reflected on how financial stress ripples out across the whole family:**

"I think there are going to be a lot more behavioural concerns. Families were already struggling, and with the rising costs it's becoming near impossible for some of them. And when people are under that kind of stress and don't know how to regulate their emotions, they sometimes release their anger or frustration – and unfortunately, that can be through family violence."

It is a pattern recognised nationally. New Zealand Police have identified cost-of-living pressure, tight finances and unemployment as key drivers of family violence – a concern that is playing out in classrooms across our communities.⁵ This reminds us how far the SWiS role extends beyond the child. For many children, school can become the one stable place in an unsettled season - and their SWiS worker the one trusted adult they turn to. More than half of young people in the Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey say they would seek help from a trusted adult when they need support.⁴ For many, that adult is their SWiS worker. As one SWiS worker commented: "With some practical and emotional support in place, children may be at school a bit more often – somewhere they can eat and be warm."

Based inside schools, SWiS are trusted adults who step in early – listening, supporting, advocating, and connecting children and families with practical and emotional support. They work alongside teachers and whānau to ensure no child struggles alone. The impact is measurable: for every dollar invested in SWiS, \$3.50 of social value is created.³

"It's not just about helping the child in front of us. The work we're doing is about the future as well. We're helping children learn how to regulate emotions, how to communicate, how to cope – so they don't carry those patterns into adulthood."

The hope is that they grow up with those skills and pass them on, so they don't go through the same hardship or trauma.” – Waikato Family Works

“For many of the tamariki (children) we work alongside, something as simple as a warm bed, dry home or full puku (stomach) can make all the difference. With the right support, we can help ease the pressures of winter and give our tamariki the best chance to learn, grow and thrive.”

– Whangārei SWiS

Winter does not create hardship, but it can intensify it, adding weight to households already doing their best. Children often carry that stress

silently. That is why this year's Family Works Winter Appeal is focused on children, because no child should be left to navigate adult hardship alone.

References

- 1 Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora SSPA – Survey on the impacts of the fuel crisis on community-based social service providers, May 2026. www.sspa.org.nz
- 2 The Salvation Army – State of the Nation 2026: Foundations of Wellbeing. salvationarmy.org.nz/SOTN2026
- 3 Presbyterian Support Northern – Annual Report 2024/2025. psn.org.nz
- 4 Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey 2025, cited by Ara Taiohi, April 2026.
- 5 New Zealand Police - family violence and cost-of-living drivers, via RNZ, January 2024. rnz.co.nz

Quotes have been provided by Family Works SWiS staff and Family Workers across our northern region. All quotes are used with permission. Some have been lightly edited for clarity.

Our Social Workers in Schools are already making a real difference – but with your support, we can reach even more children who need it most this winter. Your donation helps keep a social worker in their corner, so no child has to face it alone.

WINTER APPEAL



Give today:
helpkids.org.nz



You don't need millions to leave a legacy

Why gifts in Wills are not only for the wealthy

Many people assume leaving a gift in their Will is something only wealthy people do. Others quietly think that if they only leave a modest amount, it won't make much difference. That simply isn't true.

Often modest gifts carry extraordinary kindness

Some will know the story in the Bible of the widow's small offering – two coins that Jesus honoured above far larger gifts, because of the heart behind them (Mark 12:41–44). It's the same with a gift in your Will. It does not need to be large to make a lasting difference. After caring for loved ones, many New Zealanders choose to leave a percentage of their estate, a set amount, or a residual gift to causes they care about. Some gifts are large. Many are not. **All are meaningful.**

At PSN, gifts in Wills help us continue providing practical care, connection and hope for children, families, older people and communities in need of support across the upper North Island. For some, a bequest reflects gratitude; for others, faith, compassion, or a desire to keep helping long after they are gone.

*Most of all, it's a reminder that legacy is not measured in zeros; it is measured in lives touched. **A little or a lot – every gift can make a difference.***

“What matters is the difference it makes.”

“Maybe I could.”

“Perhaps this is something to explore.”

“I can care for family and leave kindness behind.”

“It doesn't have to be millions.”

“Even a small gift could help.”



If you have already chosen to leave a gift in your Will to PSN, please accept our **heartfelt thanks**. Your compassion will live on in others. If you'd like a confidential conversation about leaving a gift in your Will, we'd love to hear from you. **Please contact Vivienne Riddell on 09 520 8628 or 021 329 938.**



Ageing well starts early

How families can plan ahead with confidence

Enliven

Getting older is one of those things many of us avoid talking about – until a health scare, a fall or some sudden change forces decisions that must be made quickly. It doesn't need to be that way. Planning for later life can be less daunting than you might expect.

A few thoughtful conversations now can help create greater confidence, independence and peace of mind for everyone involved. This isn't just about paperwork or care needs – it's about wellbeing, relationships, housing, connection and ensuring your wishes are known and respected.

Start the conversation early

The best time to talk about ageing is before there is a crisis. Families who talk openly and early are far better placed to make calm, informed decisions when the time comes.

Some useful questions to explore:

- Where would you like to live as you get older?
- What helps you feel independent and connected?
- Who would you trust to help make decisions if needed?
- What matters most to you if your health changes?

These conversations can be gradual and ongoing, and don't need to be resolved all at once.

Ageing well means more than good healthcare

Staying well later in life often comes down to the everyday basics – movement, nutrition, connection, purpose and feeling safe at home. Whether it's walking, gardening, kapa haka, tai chi or a regular swim, staying active supports both



physical and emotional wellbeing. Strength, balance and mobility become especially important as we age, helping reduce falls and maintaining confidence. Just as important is social connection. Loneliness and isolation take a real toll on health and happiness – so, staying connected through friends, whānau, faith communities, volunteering, neighbours, marae or local groups can make a significant difference.

Think ahead about home

Many people want to remain in their own home for as long as possible. With the right support, this is often achievable. It's worth thinking early about whether the home is warm, safe and accessible – and whether it's close to transport, services and loved ones. Small changes like grab rails, better lighting, ramps or easier bathroom access can make a real difference to mobility, safety and comfort. Others may prefer shared living with family, downsizing or supported retirement living. There is no one right answer - only what is right for each person's circumstances.

Put key plans in place

Two practical steps are worth putting in place sooner rather than later:

Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPOA): these are two separate documents – one that allows someone you trust to make decisions about personal care and welfare, and another that

covers property and finances. Both should be put in place while you have mental capacity to do so. You can find more information about this on the Family and whānau section of the New Zealand Government website: www.govt.nz

Advance Care Planning: records your wishes for future healthcare, helping loved ones and professionals understand your values and preferences. Putting these in place early can reduce stress and uncertainty for everyone when it matters most.

You do not have to navigate it alone

There is more support available than many people realise. Older people may be eligible for home support services, needs assessments, community programmes, transport help, social groups and wellbeing services. Your GP is often a good first step, along with organisations such as Age Concern New Zealand and local providers who know your community well.

A shared journey

Growing older is not just an individual experience – it is something families and communities walk through together. Planning ahead isn't about expecting the worst; it's about making space for the best possible later life – one with dignity, connection, choice and support.

Enliven

Supporting independence at home

If you or someone you love is ready to explore what support might look like, Enliven offers a range of aged care services designed to help older people live well and stay connected in their own homes and communities across the PSN region. From home support and personal care to social programmes and wellbeing services, Enliven's teams work alongside people and their whānau to find the right fit.

To learn more about Enliven's services or to make a donation, visit:

enlivennorthern.org.nz

Watching children flourish



Pictured: Jessica and Mariska, at Mariska's graduation.

In the Autumn edition of The PSN Post, you may remember reading about Jessica's incredible long-standing and well-respected work as a Social Worker in Schools (SWiS) at Henderson Intermediate.

As a follow-up on this story, we are delighted to share the update below with you – a story that shows just how far-reaching the impact of SWiS support can be.

"Last night I attended the graduation of one of my former students who was in one of my group programmes. I sat with her family who I am close to, and we watched her graduate with a Bachelor of Social Practice. Her name is Mariska, and she invited me as one of her inspirations to pursue a career in social work. She already has a job lined up in youth services at Oranga Tamariki. I think she did this all on her own and really just needed some support – she gives me way too much credit. Her mum first referred her oldest brother to me for support. Through the years, I had Mariska and her two younger sisters come through with the youngest child soon to follow. They have done amazingly well as a family and utilised the service when there was a need. What came from this support was preventing problems from escalating or becoming more complex. Having a bit of support meant they were able to succeed as a family. Mariska's mum, who is an amazing woman, joined our school a few years back as a teacher aide. To sit there with the family last night and watch all the kids flourishing was one of the most incredible moments of my life. We don't often get to see the difference we make and I was so grateful to see them all together – the kids all achieving amazing things." – Jessica

**Familyworks**

A law change that matters

When “attention” becomes stalking

Shine

Before she gets out of the car, she checks the mirrors – left, right, rear-view – just to be sure. She takes a different route home from work each day, just in case. On the drive, she rehearses how she’ll explain to her children why the curtains always have to stay closed...



She’s exhausted. She hasn’t slept properly in months. This is everyday life for women experiencing stalking.

Stalking is a pattern of repeated, unwanted behaviour that creates fear. It can include behaviours like constant messages, showing up uninvited, monitoring movements, or using children and technology to maintain control. It often begins subtly – framed as care or concern – before escalating into something far more dangerous.

On 26 May 2026, stalking became a criminal offence in Aotearoa New Zealand for the first time. It means police will have stronger tools to respond to the different tactics used as part of a pattern of abuse. This is a significant and long-awaited step.

Shine’s advocates see the impact of stalking every day in their work. Women who have had to change their routines, their work and their relationships in order to stay safe. Women who live with constant vigilance – scanning carparks, checking devices,

and managing the ongoing presence of someone who refuses to let go. Women who know fear better than any other feeling.

Stalking doesn’t always stop after a relationship ends – in fact, it often escalates, as the perpetrator tries to regain control. Research shows that most intimate partner homicides are linked to stalking. It is not the beginning of the danger, but a major warning sign that it has already escalated.

Shine supports women experiencing stalking with practical, specialist help. Advocates assist with safety planning, documenting patterns of behaviour, navigating legal options, and connecting women and their children with the support they need. For children impacted by family violence, KIDshine provides free, specialist support to help them process, heal and rebuild.

Each year, Shine directly helps more than 1,000 women and their children to become safer. Behind every statistic is a story – and a family working towards safety and recovery. The law change is an important step forward. But laws don’t always keep pace with real lives. For women living with stalking right now, the fear doesn’t pause while the system catches up.

“If it is not now, then when? We cannot afford to lose another woman. The cost of stalking is more than a statistic – it is a real life, a life just like yours or mine, who deserves to live well and flourish.”

– Shine advocate

Shine’s advocates are ready to respond. But they need your help to keep showing up. Every donation helps fund the specialist support that means women and their children can find safety and start to rebuild their lives.

To learn more about Shine’s work or to make a donation, visit 2shine.org.nz

If you or someone you know is experiencing stalking or family violence, Shine is here.

Call our helpline on 0508 744 633, available 24 hours, 7 days a week.

A Lifeline story

The courage to ask for help

The Lifeline logo features the word "Lifeline" in a white, sans-serif font. Above the letter 'i' in "Lifeline", there is a white curved line resembling a telephone handset or a protective arch.

When *Chris joined Lifeline as a counsellor in 2022, it was meant to be work experience. More than three years later, he's still there – and it's not hard to understand why. He's found a front-row seat to the quiet courage it takes for people to ask for help. We asked him what he's learnt – and what he wants you to know.

Can you tell us a little about yourself? *I was born in Malaysia and moved to Auckland when I was nine. Growing up here as an immigrant had its challenges – but it shaped who I am, and I proudly embrace being a Kiwi Asian. I'm surrounded by a wife who I love deeply, a family I cherish, and incredible friends I call my brothers. I wouldn't trade this life for anything.*

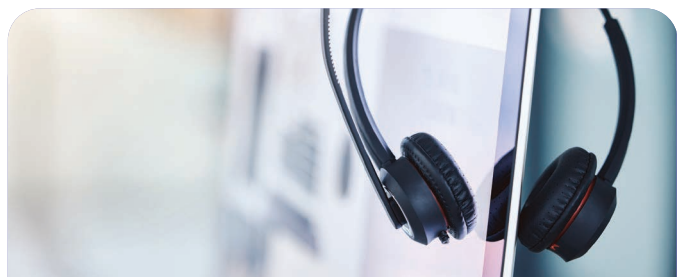
What drew you to work with Lifeline? *For so many psychology students, working with Lifeline is an amazing opportunity, and when I was given the chance, I jumped at it! What has kept me here is realising just how important this work is and how meaningful it can be. It's incredibly rewarding to see how offering genuine empathy to someone who's struggling can make such a profound difference.*

What kinds of things are people calling about most right now? *One thing I've really noticed lately is the rise in people reaching out for help on how they can support their loved ones struggling with their mental wellbeing. I had a call with a mother recently who wanted advice on how her family could support her daughter's best friend. It was an incredible moment of genuine compassion, and it highlighted how our lives can overlap in meaningful ways.*

What does it take to build trust with someone you've never met, in just a few minutes? *It can be really hard, but the ability to convey empathy and be a calming presence can be such an incredible tool. Being able to build rapport with someone you don't know is an extremely underrated strength. Focusing on getting to know the caller, even in small ways, at the start of a session rather than immediately addressing what is weighing on them can be the difference between a meaningful session and a hang-up.*

What would you want people reading this to understand about the impact of Lifeline? *The impact Lifeline has is in our point of difference. Our counsellors begin every interaction from a place of genuine care and compassion, each bringing their own style, and every conversation feels different from the last. Without a script, counsellors are encouraged to be real and human, which can help build trust quickly; normalising experiences for callers and reminding them that they are not alone.*

What does it mean for someone to have the courage to make that call? *I think it means everything! Reaching out is such a courageous step, and for many people it is a moment of determination to take control of whatever struggles are weighing on them. This decision also normalises the act of asking for help, both for the caller and for those in their lives. It is incredibly powerful in breaking down the stigma around seeking support, especially for men and young people.*



Behind every call to Lifeline is a counsellor like Chris – someone who shows up without a script, with genuine care, and with the simple but profound intention of making sure no one feels alone. The generosity of people like you helps make all of this possible.

To learn more about Lifeline's work or to make a donation, please visit:

lifeline.org.nz

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

**name has been changed to protect identity*