

THE

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ENCOURAGER

The magazine of Elevate Christian Disability Trust

The Importance of Friendship

Trusting in God

Shining our Light





Thank goodness for technology. These last three months we have relied on technology to keep us connected. I know for many of us, it's been a bit of a rollercoaster ride; with all the uncertainty and changes; with all the differing; opinions and voices coming at us whenever we turn on our phone, the TV or our computers.

I have been reflecting on what is important for us to focus on and one thing that has been continuing to resurface is the importance of listening to and prioritising God's voice. It is God's opinion and what He is asking us to do, that needs to matter most to us. I have been reading Hebrews, and found chapter ten summed up many of the thoughts I have had about this current season.

Hebrews 10:19-25 "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

As we navigate this season and all its complexities, I feel this passage can guide us in what is important. Draw near to God each day and treasure His Word. Hold onto our hope, grasp it with both hands. Let's get creative with how we show love and do good for each other. And inspire others to as well. Loving each other, no matter what. Continue to meet together, however that needs to look right now. Whether its online, in small groups, at the park, or on the phone. And continue encouraging each other. We all need encouragement, every day. Let's look for ways to encourage each other. Both people we do life with and people we only briefly meet.

May God's Peace be with you.

The articles in this issue are all written by people involved in our ministry and the interviews are all of people in New Zealand. It's great to have such good local content to share with you. Each article and the devotion will encourage you in different ways; reminding you of the importance of friendship, of encouraging each other and trusting in God. I pray that you are encouraged by them.

Noho ora mai,

Kirsty Armitage
National Director

Email us at encourager@elevatedcdt.org.nz

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THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

By Sarah Houston

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Sometimes it's hard to show God's love to others when it seems like you're the only one with the light. The good news is that you're not alone. One candle might not seem to make much of a difference, but hundreds of candles definitely do. You may only have a little light but keep on shining for Jesus. When your light joins with everyone else's, it makes a blazing beacon of light, pointing the way to God.

Don't hide your light. Don't hide what God has done for you, share it with others, so they will see how much God loves them too.

Something to think about:

Maybe there is someone in your neighbourhood who nobody talks to. Be that shining light, by being their friend. Maybe there's someone you know who's not the nicest person. Shine your light, do something kind. Remember, you can be the hands and feet of Jesus today.

Sarah is one of the staff at the Elevate Drop-in Centre in Auckland. During lockdown she has been running Zoom meetings for the Drop-in Centre attendees, which has been a lifeline for many of them. Sarah enjoys studying scripture and can regularly be found walking in Auckland's Cornwall Park, which is not far from her home.

Has there been a time in your life when you felt like you were clearly shining God's light to those around you? Or, has there been a time when you witnessed someone clearly shining God's light for others to see?

When we accept Jesus into our hearts, we become a "light for God." Our lives change because of Jesus. When He is living in us, we can shine like lights to those around us. So many people around us live in darkness, you could be that candle of light to them today.

When you were young and received a brand-new toy that you were very excited about, did you hide it? I bet you didn't! You probably showed it to all your friends. In the same way, God wants us to show His light, God's love, to others.



Running the Race.

By Jean Griffiths

My race has been a relay, with a bunch of real friends whom God has given me, ready to give and to receive the baton of encouragement. Support is so necessary in life. Think about a rope. A single strand couldn't tow much, but by twisting and binding many strands together and making a rope, there's enough strength to tow a car. "... a threefold cord is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Have you seen the Redwoods Forest in Rotorua? The Redwoods grow very, very tall even though they have shallow root systems that go down only about a metre. They're planted close to each other for a reason; so that their root systems, which extend over thirty metres from the base, intertwine with those of the other redwoods. This increases their stability during strong winds and floods and keeps them upright. So, even trees need one another for support!

And then we have the friends of the paralyzed man in Mark 2:1-9 who were desperate to get him to see Jesus, but there was no way because of the crowds. He would probably have led a hard life, perhaps having had a sense of worthlessness and rejection, but there was faith present that Jesus could heal him as his friends carried him up to the roof and then lowered him down to Jesus' feet. Without them he may never have met Jesus; but because of their love and commitment his life took on a whole new turn. These friends had run the race with him.

Now for my own testimony. I started my race on my own. Some of you may not have realized that I got my disability at the age of 17. Prior to that I lived very much for myself; loving the outdoor life with running, tramping, swimming, gymnastics, netball, water skiing, and playing the clarinet in two orchestras. They were fun days, free and easy, lived with carefree independence. Then one morning I woke up stricken with very sore, swollen fingers and knee joints. After two weeks I was diagnosed with RA (rheumatoid arthritis) and my life was changed in an instant. I found I couldn't run anymore, and so I had to give



up netball and all my other outdoor pursuits. That was what I had lived for! I found it incredibly hard to adjust to another life, but over time I realised I had to focus on what I could do.

I studied to be a draughtsperson and I traveled overseas, having real determination that I wasn't going to be beaten. I enjoyed discovering new cultures, different foods and learning much history as I busied through Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Scandinavia, and lived in England for a year. I really loved my time away, eventually settling in Sydney at the age of 23. They were my best years of fun and laughter with such great friends. Then unfortunately at the age of 26 I became very unwell. By now I was living on my own, and I struggled to climb the two flights of stairs at work and then to walk down the other side of the room to my desk. But you know what? Just like the lame man had his friends to carry him up to the top of the roof, I had my workmates to carry me to the top of those stairs. Then they carried me back down the two flights at the end of the day. Oh boy, do we need friends at a time like that!

Pain and limitations took over as I couldn't fend for myself, not even being able to cook my food. It was all I could do to conserve my strength to continue working. I found it such a struggle, as I continued trying to be independent. But what would I have done without my faithful friends? They came over with meals, they did my housework, they encouraged me, and they supported me. They were there for me so I could continue my nine-hour-a-day job. They helped me to persevere; they helped me to keep my sanity. Eventually after surgery for my hips and knee, I came back home to New Zealand. My last year before coming home was when I met Jesus. Praise God!

I found a great church full of young people in Auckland who helped me grow in my faith. God had brought me a new set of fantastic friends to build me up in the Word and to get my confidence back. But somehow, I knew I wasn't on the same track as before, with my sensing that working as a draughtsperson wasn't where I wanted to be anymore. In my spirit I was feeling quite unsettled. At this time I was praying for a new direction ... and guess where that led me to? Yep, to Elevate! This was where I really found my calling. This was where I discovered myself and the potential I never knew I had. God brought me amongst new friends again. These new friends picked up the baton, and this time they really spurred me on. They encouraged me, they saw value in me, they believed in me as I began to reach new heights that I had never imagined. I discovered I had leadership qualities and creative skills. My ideas and suggestions were being listened to. Yay!

... a threefold cord is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Walking funny and having deformed joints had set back my self-esteem, but being at Elevate I realised nobody stared at how I looked. I was buoyed by acceptance, uplifted by the encouragement and enthusiasm of others, as walls of feeling unworthy were broken down. I began to take on new challenges as once again God brought along amazing new friendships to help me run the race, to

help me see what was around the next corner. There seemed to be so many corners, but having friends backing me I could always pick up the baton and continue on.

As I write this, we've just had the Olympic Games. The one thing I kept hearing was that "I couldn't have done it without my family ... without my trainer ... without my friends ... they believed in me ... they affirmed me ... they were there with me right to the end." We, as Christians, especially need to know God made us to not run the race alone. Just like the redwoods and the rope strands needing their companions, the same goes for us. My race has been defined by the intertwining and support of friends who have walked the journey with me, and who have helped me achieve the goals that God has set before me. And most importantly, it's through Christ who strengthens me that I can stay on course.

Thank you, Lord, for the wonderful gift of friendship, and thank you my Elevate friends for joining me in my race. I would like to conclude with a reminder of Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." This means that we build each other up, so let's continue to do this, especially during this present time of challenge.

Jean has been involved in Elevate for many years, including the Auckland CFFD committee. She currently coordinates the Auckland Central and Northshore area groups, as well as regularly attending the Drop-in Centre when she is not busy with clients. Jean is also an avid card maker.



It was God Talking to Me

by Yung Chen, with assistance from Cherry Lewis.



When I was born, I was born with Cerebral Palsy. I had a lack of oxygen which caused my condition. One half of my brain had a lack of oxygen. If I was able to walk, I would love to go everywhere. If I was able to walk nobody could find me because I would be everywhere! But I wouldn't have it any other way because I look at my life now. The reason why I share that, is so you can have some understanding of what other people go through.

John 3:16 says, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life.' Don't look back at what is done in the past. You've got to look at what you've got now. I am looking forward not backwards, because if you look backwards, if you keep on looking at your disability, you are not able to carry on with your adult life.

My teacher aide at Rotorua High School, her name is Tania, worked with me in the classroom, and she was helping me with my schoolwork. At that time, I didn't have home care. Mum didn't know how to organise home care or where I could go for respite care. She asked the teacher aide if she knew anybody who could care for me, like respite care. That's how she put her hand up and she said, "I can do it". I went to stay with her when Mum was working.

Tania always prayed with me before I went to sleep. One night when I was in my bed, I was going into my deep sleep. Suddenly, I heard a voice calling me. I was thinking, who is calling me. The next morning I woke up from my sleep. On the Sunday I went to church with my teacher aide. I went with her every Sunday. I told her what I heard in the night, and she told me a bit more. I asked her if she was a Christian and she said yes.

When I went to church with Tania, I heard the Pastor say the same thing I had heard in the night. That's how I knew it was God talking

to me because I had a second confirmation. I needed to have a confirmation if it was Him or not, because sometimes you should be very careful and aware of who is talking to you. Then the pastor, Brian Tamaki, asked if anyone wants to give their heart to the Lord. I put my hand up and Tania pushed me up there. She was with me when I gave my heart to the Lord.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son

Ever since that, I never look back at all. Di Willis got me involved with Elevate and I got baptised at Totara Springs by Pastor Geoff Wiklund, at the Elevate National Camp. I hope that my story will be a valuable story for anyone who goes through what I went through. I hope that is helpful for you. That you can understand how it's quite hard for me to say what I want to say, because of the way that I am, but I have no regrets the way I am today.

Yung is a regular at the Elevate Drop-in Centre, Auckland CFFD events, and Elevate National Camp. He is also an artist with M pura Studios. Yung enjoys sharing his thoughts, his faith and his art by video on Facebook.

Gratitude, Friendship, and Other Encouraging Thoughts

David Vincent

This article was written by David in 2001, but the thoughts it contains are very relevant today. Having Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy meant that at 27 he wasn't able to do very much for himself. His increasing weakness over the years eventually caused his heart and lungs to be affected, so breathing became difficult. Sadly, he passed away in September 2002, a year after this article was written. But we treasure his memory and thank God for his inspiring life.

Hi everyone. My name is David Vincent. I am 27 years old and I have Duchene Muscular Dystrophy. I thought it might be helpful to write down some encouraging thoughts about things that have helped me through life.

One of my favourite proverbs is this, "A cheerful heart does good like a medicine but a crushed spirit dries up the bones". In other words when we have a more positive outlook we tend to be healthier. When we have good friends they can help too, they can pick us up when we are down and they can encourage us. But most of my strength comes from trusting my best friend, my God and Saviour Jesus Christ. I know some of you out there think that this is silly but for me it is how I survive. I also try to take one day at a time. I've found this verse from the Bible has helped me a lot:

Isaiah 40:27-31 "How can you say the LORD does not see your troubles? How can you say God refuses to hear your case? Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know that the LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of His understanding. He gives power to those who are tired and worn out;



He offers strength to the weak. Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the LORD will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint."

Some of my other interests include drawing on my computer, TV, playing computer games, surfing the net or reading car magazines. Other things that have helped me through life are listening to soothing music, reading a good book and going for walks (rolls). These help you to relax and provide a distraction to life's troubles. Jesus said not to worry when you are His. The God of the universe cares for His own. He does not want to see you suffer. That doesn't mean no pain at all but it does mean He helps me through it. So, what I say is, hang in there, don't worry. Give Jesus a try - He won't let you down.

If you want to know more about giving Jesus a try, start with the gospel of John in the Bible.

Written by David Vincent. Shared by his mother Heather Vincent. The Vincent family have been involved in Elevate for many years. Heather wrote David's story in the book "It's All Right Mum!" which was published in 2004 by Daystar. If you'd like a copy of the book, you can contact Heather at hebron716@gmail.com

Do You Want to Hear Some Good News?

God loves you dearly! John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

He offers you salvation from the wrong things you have done! Ephesians 2:8 "God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift from God."

You can belong to His family and have a fresh start! 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new."

God wants you to have hope! Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

If you would like to become a Christian (a follower of Christ) you could pray something like the following. Lord, I admit that I have done things that are wrong. Thank you that you have died to take away all my sins. Please forgive me. I receive your forgiveness now and declare that I want to live for you.



Isaac and his Dad

Trusting in God: A Miraculous Survival

by Manuele Teofilo

19-year-old Isaac Cairns is studying at Carey Baptist College in Auckland, New Zealand. This year he has been a part of Intermission, a one-year discipleship training experience program for recent school leavers. The Gospel, the Bible and the world are a few things that they reflect on in a small group.

Isaac, his sister Emily, and their parents moved to Hong Kong when he was little. Their dad, Greg had a job offer to fly planes for an airline over there. They loved living in Hong Kong! Isaac and Emily went to school there and Greg's job really blessed their family. When Isaac shared his testimony at the Elevate Drop-in Centre, he said their time in Hong Kong "was fantastic!"

While living in Hong Kong, 11 years ago the Cairns family went through an experience that changed their lives. It began when Isaac was eight years old. The date was May 25th 2010. "The night before I had mentioned to my mum that I had trouble

reading before I went to bed." He woke up early in the morning with a throbbing headache and ran to his parents' room.

As he was getting to his parents, Isaac "started vomiting profusely. [Then] They nurtured me for the next while as good parents do." They were perplexed, annoyed and worried about their child who looked terribly ill. Isaac's parents waited a while to see if the vomiting would stop.

However, Isaac continued throwing up and the vomiting was worsening. That's when they decided to take him to the hospital. Shortly after arriving there, Isaac had an MRI scan to determine what was wrong with him. He was probably too young to comprehend the procedure and the news that followed. The scan result showed that there was a brain tumour in this young boy's head. Things had suddenly gone drastically downhill for this happy Christian family.



The surgeons in Hong Kong immediately operated. He made it out of the 13-hour operation, but his parents received what they described as "the worst possible news". The surgeons only managed to remove just over half of the tumour from Isaac's head. His parents were "devastated."

This was the beginning of the long journey of recovery. Isaac said he felt like a "new-born" baby unable to move a single finger or speak. He had to learn to walk and talk again. In the midst of this brutal reality his family held to Proverbs 3:5-6. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding but in all your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight.' Isaac says, "It was an ugly recovery, just as any cancer to be fair... when you're fighting cancer you are really dancing with the devil and you don't necessarily have any other options than to trust in the Lord with all your heart."

A significant moment that impacted Isaac happened one evening when he was alone in his hospital room. "My parents had gone home, as they were not allowed to stay the night in hospital in Hong Kong. Just before I went to bed and I was listening to the noisy and half broken air-conditioner, the room went quiet or I deafened out all exterior noise. From the corner of the room came a voice. A voice not dissimilar to a normal conversation that was on the louder side. I knew it was God". Isaac, unable to speak, couldn't tell

anyone but all his visitors could tell something changed. His father has even said to him, "I knew that something in you had changed and I knew that it was going to be alright".

Isaac's second operation took place a few months later. Leading up to the operation there was word that Professor Dachling Pang was in Asia. Holding an exhaustive list of achievements Professor Pang was regarded as the top neurosurgeon for children. He "wrote the textbook that my Hong Kong doctors [who did the first operation] studied out of," said Isaac. Amazingly, the Professor found out about Isaac and offered to do his operation. The second operation took half the time and Professor Pang discovered something that the other doctors missed. Isaac explains that "the thing that the rest of the doctors deemed as scar tissue was actually residual tumour under Pang's careful eye. Failure to remove this would have resulted in the regrowing of the tumour."

After Professor Pang removed the remainder of the brain tumour Isaac continued his recovery. It was still a "dark and terrible time", but the Cairns "couldn't help feeling that the worst of it was over." The doctors expected Isaac's recovery in hospital would take two years. However, six months in, the doctors saw rapid and major improvements in his progress. Isaac credits God for this. At that point, Isaac came out of hospital and continued his rehabilitation at home.

..trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Today, Isaac leads an active life and is coming to terms with what the doctors couldn't completely fix. On top of studying full-time he is involved as a leader in various ministries at his church, as well as having 2 part-time jobs, one of which is supporting a child with a disability. Despite the brutal reality of this experience, Isaac says this has made him an empathetic person. He's able to relate to people in ways he wouldn't have without this experience. Isaac loves to tell his miraculous story of surviving cancer.

The author, Manuele, became a Christian as a teenager while attending Elevate National Camp. After completing his studies, he volunteered at the Support Office before beginning an MSD employment placement with us. In his spare time, he loves to take part in marathons, spend time with friends and is exploring writing poetry.

Volunteer Spotlight

Kevin Falconer volunteer in Christchurch

By Onne Hiemstra

Even in times of Covid restrictions, still a lot is happening under the umbrella of the Elevate Christian Disability Trust. Physical gatherings have not been possible, so the eight branches of the Christian Fellowship for the Disabled (CFFD) have had to improvise. Some groups use technology like Zoom, so they can meet online, others just use the phone to stay in contact with each other.

"That has made National Camp so special this year", jokes Kevin Falconer. "It was a great way to learn how to use a platform like Zoom. None of us could come to Totara Springs during Labour Weekend, but we could still catch up with the other campers on our computer at home."

Kevin is a key volunteer at the CFFD branch in Christchurch. "It is always hard for our group to make the trip to Matamata. National Camp is not easy to reach for most people in our group. However, the Canterbury region always seems to be represented". Kevin has been to camp once himself. Zoom might be the future too for branches like his. "The problem of course is that we do not yet really know if all our folks do have access to a computer. It will need some education to get everybody ready to use Zoom, and some people will need help at their home to be able to connect on the day."

Each branch needs a super-volunteer (preferable more than one). Kevin is one of them. At the Christchurch branch he serves as the Secretary of the Committee. "I seemed to be quite handy with the computer, the others noticed. So, they like me to do the database and the emails." Kevin helps out with transport and does the technical set-up of data-projectors and sound desks. He also designs, prints and posts the paper and e-mail notices for the bi-monthly meetings and extra events in between.

Until lockdown the CFFD group had a great home base at the South West Baptist Church. Normally the group with around 25-30 members would meet once every two months and have outings



Dave Palmer, John Neill, and Kevin Falconer watch entertainment at a Christchurch CFFD camp. Kevin has his lap top; he is our technology man.



Kevin at Elevate National Camp in 2010

in between. "We've been to places like the Art Gallery and the Christchurch Central library. Other highlights we had were our Day Camps. We would have a full day for study, worship and fellowship. That is probably what our folks have missed the most because of the Covid restrictions."

Kevin has been involved with the group for over 15 years.

"I knew Maria Zittersteijn in my church. One day she asked me if I could give her a ride to this group. I kind of hung around that afternoon until Maria was ready to go home again. Somehow, I'm still here, and so is Maria. You could see her in the Camp meetings on Zoom, that was awesome. The disability group was a new community for me, it had a huge impact. The Christian input makes the group really special."

Covid restrictions will not dampen the atmosphere. Christchurch has been through a lot. The earthquakes have not stopped them, and neither will Covid.

Onne is currently volunteering in the evenings while we look for a new Finance Administrator. He has volunteered at many of our camps and has been very involved in the Waikato CFFD group. Although he can't attend their fortnightly meetings due to his new work, he is still connected with many of the people there.

National Camp Online

For a second year in a row, we have had to go online with our National Camp. Although this was disappointing, we still had an amazing weekend as together we learned to 'Take Hold of Hope'. It was a special time of encouraging each other and building each other up. Here are some comments from people who attended.

"Good participation and good question time, good friends"

"Speakers were fantastic"

"Workshops were great, topic was really good to hear, especially for the time we are in."

"...the word spoken has really stuck with me and have been putting what was said into practice."

The interactive games were "heaps of fun, a good laugh"

"Content was just what we needed to hear to get through this time."

"...very good content and very encouraging"

"...lovely to see familiar faces and hear familiar voices."

"...knowing I'm not alone going through this time."

"...it opened up a way for people to attend who might not normally be able to"

Will You Join With Us?

Your support enables us to continue to serve people living with disability in New Zealand. We have found many people are feeling very isolated. They are unable to physically go out, many in group homes and rest homes are under more restrictions, but also many have restricted access to the internet or devices. Your donations help us to continue to provide and develop more, resources like The Encourager in a variety of formats.

Bank Transfer/Deposit: ANZ 01-0142-0029706-00

Online Payments and regular donations: <https://elevatedcdt.org.nz/support-us/>

Ministry Leaders Support

Our volunteer ministry leaders carry a lot of responsibility and many look forward to our three yearly leadership retreat, due next year. Whatever this looks like, we will still be holding something to encourage and equip them. Would you consider donating to help us further support our volunteer leaders?

For these online donations please include LEADER in the comments section of the online donation form.

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Torch

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Other ministries around the country

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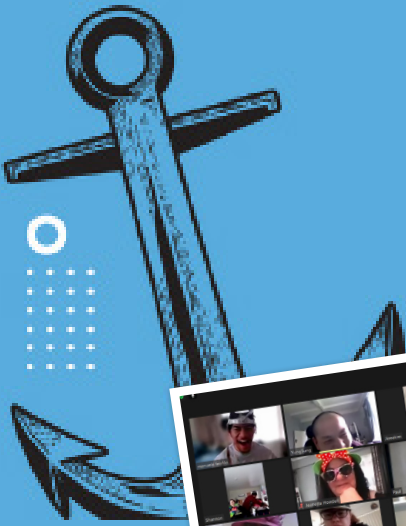
Kumbayah - St David's Presbyterian Church - Palmerston North	Ann Bennett		06 355 2818
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Bible Friends - Wanganui	Louise Rostron	rostrons@xtra.co.nz	06 344 5955
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THRIVE - Greerton Bible Church, Tauranga	Ron Raikes	thrive@gbc.org.nz	021 032 9660
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TAKE HOLD OF HOPE

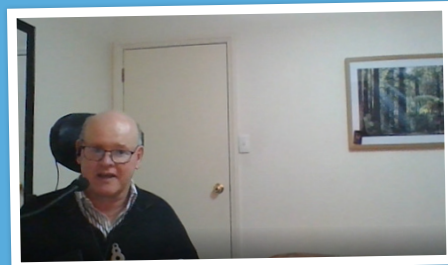
This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls (Hebrews 6:19)



Crazy Hat Competition



Ps Timothy Lee was our main speaker. His workshop 'Why does God allow suffering?' was such a relevant topic for so many people.



There were many great practical applications in Jenny Lee's workshop - 'What does it mean to have well-being in your life?'



Both workshops led by Ps Geoff Wiklund had plenty of humour and scripture, as he explored 'Faith and Friends' and '7 Steps to Happiness'.



Kylee and Olivia were our main meeting hosts. They did a great job letting us know what was coming up and even got in on the hat competition!

WHAT IS ELEVATE CHRISTIAN DISABILITY TRUST ALL ABOUT?

We are an interdenominational parachurch organisation.
We run meetings and camps throughout NZ.
We have four groups:

- **CFFD** (Christian Fellowship for Disabled) mainly for folk with physical disabilities.
- **Joy Ministries** mainly for those with intellectual disabilities.
- **Emmanuel** for families with children with disabilities.
- **Torch** for those who are blind or visually impaired.

We have a Centre in Auckland which is our main office, and where we also run a **Drop In Centre** three days a week. We welcome people with disabilities, volunteers and family members.



NATIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE

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