

# The Encourager

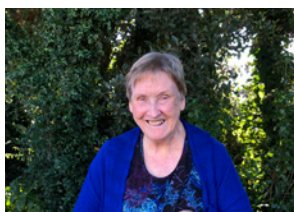
The magazine of Elevate Christian Disability Trust

Issue. 174 | July 2022

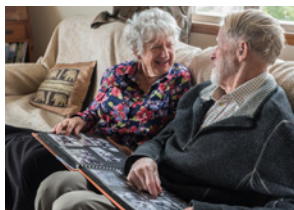




# Contents



## 4 Hawkes Bay's Hallelujah Lady



## 6 46 Years in Ministry: Hugh and Di Willis



## 9 My First Encounter with Jesus

11



## Giving Gifts Glorifies God

10



## Volunteer Spotlight

# Welcome



Our ministry would not exist without people being willing to use their gifts and abilities. Each of us contributing, giving, and serving each other. This has been how we do things since that very first gathering at Hugh and Di's house. It's something that I love about Elevate. We all have something to give, we all have something that is in our hands. And it isn't important if it seems big or insignificant, what matters is that we use it to bless others.

In June we celebrated Disability Awareness Sunday (DAS) and focused on the passage in 1 Corinthians 12 that compares the Church to a body. If you didn't see the series of articles we released in the week leading up to DAS, I would encourage you to read them on the blog section of our website. It was a privilege to have the four authors share their thoughts and wisdom in this way. This theme has also been carried into our National Camp - 'Stronger Together', which will be held online again this year.

I pray that this issue of The Encourager inspires and challenges you to think about how you use your gifts and abilities. We are delighted to have interviewed Hugh and Di Willis (co-founders), Jan Bridgeman (Joy Ministries National Coordinator) and Joan Parker (Hawkes Bay CFFD Chairperson) in this issue. They are all great examples of serving others and using what God has placed in their hand. Our devotion is by Margie Willers (co-founder) who looks at Moses being asked 'What is in your hand?' by God in Exodus 4:2.

Perhaps God is asking you to use your skills for the first time to serve others, or in a new way? Perhaps God is wanting to encourage you to keep serving and not grow weary? I would encourage you to spend some time in prayer with God. Ask Him what you could be doing. Perhaps He will tell you to look at what is in your hand as He did Moses!

**Noho ora mai,**  
**Kirsty Armitage | National Director**

**Have you been encouraged or impacted by one of our articles? We would love to hear from you!**

**Email us at [encourager@elevatecdt.org.nz](mailto:encourager@elevatecdt.org.nz)**  
**Phone us on 09 636 4763**



### Sign Up to our E-Newsletter

If you would like to sign up to receive our monthly E-newsletter you can do so by scanning the QR code or by contacting us at the office.

# Devotion



## What is in your hand?

***So the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." Exodus 4:2 (NKJV)***

God had chosen Moses to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt. But Moses immediately began to enumerate all the reasons why he was not qualified to assume such leadership. Then the Lord asked him, "What is in thine hand?" When Moses looked at his hand, what did he see? A rod – a dead stick. What could be done with it? It was only a rod in Moses' hand, but when it was given to God it became a rod of power to deliver the Israelites.

Through the years God has challenged His people with the same question. "What is in your

hand?" Many have answered and accepted the challenge. An inspiring example is David Livingston who came from the coal mines of Scotland. When God said to him, "What is in your hand?" he offered him his heart of love for Africa and accepted His challenge to missionary service. Through him that continent was opened to the Gospel.

God is saying to you today – What is in your hand? He sees your talents and ability. Placed in God's hand these can be a 'rod of power' for Him to use. Your answer to Him may be "nothing – nothing that you can ever use." But little is much in the Master's hand – He doesn't look at our hands as we do. Lift your seemingly empty hands to Him – He will use you. He uses the weakest instruments to accomplish His mightiest works. When God calls, He enables!

The great violinist Paganini was to give a concert. As he was about to begin his programme, to the horror of those present, he deliberately broke all but one string on his violin. Then as he held up his instrument, he said, "One string and Paganini". What indescribably beautiful music the great musician played on that violin with one string.

What glorious harmonies the Great Musician can bring forth from a life – with its ability and inabilities – when it is completely yielded to Him.

**By Margie Willers**

**(Reprinted from  
Issue 26 Nov 1984)**

*Margie is co-founder of Elevate and lives with cerebral palsy. She has written two books and was a regular guest speaker before retiring.*





# ***Hawkes Bay's Hallelujah Lady***

Joan Parker's first introduction to Elevate was in 1986 when she attended our National Camp. Her church had heard about the camp and felt it would be good for her. It wasn't a typical camp introduction though, as her buddy Ruth Jones (now Beale) had injured her back and Joan stayed with her in their accommodation for most of the camp. Despite this Joan became an avid supporter of National Camp and has only ever missed one since then, when she had her leg amputated.

Following her first National Camp she became involved in the local Hawkes Bay CFFD. The branch started in 1983 with seven families meeting for prayer and praise at the apostolic church, which is now Equippers. When the leaders, Ivan and Betty Northcott, stepped down 8 years after Joan joined, she stepped up and has been leading it with the help of the committee ever since.

Those who have met Joan know how determined, and dare I say fierce, she can be. But not everyone knows her story and the journey that molded her. Born with Cerebral Palsy and Epilepsy, she faced challenges from day one. By nine years of age, she was also dealing with a significant effect on her intellectual development. These challenges were the cause of a lot of frustration for young Joan, who found an outlet in the use of swear words. Her grandmother would not allow her to use these challenges as an excuse and never let Joan say I

can't. This attitude has stuck with her through life and to this day she doesn't allow herself to say I can't.

Her father was given a scripture when she was born that promised she would be healed at the right time. He held onto this and would take Joan to many healing meetings. In 1966 they attended a healing service and while she was being prayed for, she had a major seizure. Miraculously this was to be the last seizure she had. Gradually she noticed her concentration and communication improving. Joan says that she finally felt she didn't need to swear with every sentence. It took 18 months before she began to let herself believe that she was healed from Epilepsy.

One day in 1969, Joan became frustrated with people not listening to her. She left home and took a plane to Auckland, without even telling her family where she was going. Amazingly God's hand was in this, working it for good. One evening from the accommodation she was staying at she could hear modern music coming from St Paul's church next door, so decided to see what was going on. It was there she received the Spirit and became a Christian.

Encouraged to go home and begin attending church, she began a journey of inner transformation. There were those who even





“  
... it's important  
to allow people  
opportunities to  
participate and  
to try things they  
may not have  
before.  
”

called the change in her miraculous. She became very involved in the Catholic Charismatics movement, leading many people to the Lord. The reality of what God had done, and was doing, in her life was something she could never doubt and had to tell others about. She became known as the Hallelujah lady. Such a contrast to the young girl who swore with every sentence!

When she was 30 years old, while singing in a choir, someone noticed she wasn't reading the words of the songs but had memorized them. This began an eight-year journey of learning to read and write, with the help of three school teachers. Joan still memorizes things but now it is purely due to convenience.

1993 was the beginning of her volunteer leadership with CFFD Hawkes Bay. Joan shares that she “wanted to see people with disability equipped not just spiritually but mentally and physically.” Her vision was to educate people to work with people with disability, as well as educate those who were disabled. Although she hadn't had much opportunity to develop leadership skills before this, she was determined to help others, and that determination has taken her far.

Over the years Joan has led and organised many events and meetings with the help of the Hawkes Bay CFFD committee. She says an important part of leadership is not being afraid to ask people for advice and being willing to acknowledge when something is not an area of strength.

A few of the highlights over the years have included a seminar in Hastings for 50-60 church leaders, buying a bus, an operatic concert

fundraiser with Chris Skinner, running two local camps, joint meetings with other branches, a dance outreach, and fundraising for Philippines CFFD (now Hebron Disability Service) run by CBM Philippines. Throughout all the events, meetings and fundraising Joan has always involved others. She feels it's important to allow people opportunities to participate and to try things they may not have before. This is one of the aspects she says is most important about camps.

Joan was very behind the beginning of Hawkes Bay Joy Ministries in 1996, having seen the need for people with intellectual disability to have teaching in a way that worked for them. When the Joy Ministries leaders felt it was time to step down from their leadership roles this year, she didn't want to see the group end so with the support of the CFFD committee they temporarily included the Joy Ministries group in their meetings.

With such rich experience, Joan has learnt a lot about leadership. She shared that patience is key along with learning to delegate, although she admits she isn't always good at that. Another thing she has learnt is that sometimes you need to push ahead with something despite others not seeing the vision but at other times you need to be willing to let ideas go.

Are you interested in volunteering with one of our ministry groups or branches throughout New Zealand? Many of our volunteers find they not only have an opportunity to use their skills but also find a place to belong. Contact us at the National Support Office **09 636 4763** or **info@elevate.org.nz**

**By Kirsty Armitage**



## 46 Years in Ministry: Hugh and Di Willis

Hugh and Di Willis have stepped outside of the spotlights, but don't call it retirement. The couple is still very much part of the ministry. With Kirsty Armitage at the helm in the role as 'National Director' of Elevate Christian Disability Trust, Hugh and Di continue to give her their full support, with all the mana and aroha that this role deserves.

These two co-founders look back at their 46 years in the ministry. We gave them ten words to respond to. In a few lines, otherwise it would become another book.

### The year 1976

"It all started very small. The Lord shared the vision with me (Di) to start a ministry with people with disabilities. A little later I connected again with my friend Margie Willers, who had just returned from a healing conference with Kathryn Kuhlman in the United States. Margie came with the hope of being healed from her Cerebral Palsy, but instead God showed Margie she should use her talents, just the way she was."

The vision was to invite people with disabilities to come together, to run camps, to grow closer to God, and to be included into whatever churches were doing. "It all started here in our living room in Torbay on Auckland's North Shore, in the same house where we still live."

### 1 Samuel 16:7b

"This Bible verse is the absolute key of our ministry. That is what we always quote to new visitors. The Lord told Samuel: 'The Lord does not look at the things

people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'. It's an amazing scripture. God gives skills and talents to everyone, even if it is just the skill to smile at someone. There are no excuses not to use what you have for God."

### Elevate Christian Disability Trust

"It used to be Christian Fellowship For Disabled (CFFD), later Christian Ministries With Disabled Trust (CMWDT), as an umbrella organisation for all the different branches and ministries we do. People found that a difficult name to pronounce. So back in 2012 we were looking for a better name. One of the helpers mentioned how our ministry was about 'elevating people into knowing Jesus and celebrating life'. That was well said and the verb 'to elevate' stuck."

Evangelize, Equip, Educate, and Encourage, "those are 'The four E's of Elevate CDT'. Evangelize comes first. We talk about Jesus a lot. We love to see people grow in their faith. For many of our folks I think that encouragement is the most important. We all have the need to feel included in the Body of Christ, and sometimes churches and families find that difficult. We expect our folks to live their lives according to their capacities. That is where the education and equipping comes in. If I talk to one person, or to hundreds, I just ask God what it is He wants me to say. Sometimes we get new volunteers, who have no clue how to be around people with a disability, at the start. Their eyes are opened, and their hearts."



## The Elevate whānau

“The ministry is like family. We have met thousands of people over the many years. We loved their stories. Yes, it is all about people with disabilities, but in addition, so many other lives were touched. It is amazing, how hearts have been changed, how people came to faith. So many people have given towards the ministry, with their love, their time, their finances, it has been amazing. All glory goes to God. Elevate belongs to all of them. Mind you, we have the CFFD branches at eight different cities in the country, and Joy Ministries as well. The local committees are so committed and wonderful, they do deserve acknowledgements for many years of faithful services.”

“Many stories are very personal. We saw people meeting each other at the ministry and getting married. We saw miracles happen, and people receiving healing in other ways than they expected. I don’t use any names, there are too many that God has brought on our path. And yes, we have lost a lot of dear friends over time. What a grace to know that they are all in Heaven, living an eternal life without pain or sorrow.”

## 173 Mt Smart Road

“Our national office in Onehunga, with the Drop In Centre, is a second home

***‘The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’.. 1 Samuel 16:7b***

to us. It was an absolute miracle how God led us to get it, over twenty years ago. God told me He would buy us a building, and He did. So many things happened in that building. We had so many visitors, students, politicians, some from overseas. We once had this guy from Romania. He only came once, but he was so touched that he promised to do something similar in his home country. The building had some alterations done to it, and more needs to be done, but it has been a huge blessing over the years. We couldn’t do our ministry without it, and God knew that from the start.”

## The Knife Edge of Faith

“That book tells our story. It is such a testimony of how people made the ministry of Elevate to what it is today. The book is about faith, about perseverance, about not giving up, about trusting God to provide. We made lots of mistakes over the years, but despite that, God used our work. We just tried to do what we thought God showed us to do. Yes, we had





to live our life with a faith that was on the knife edge sometimes. This is a ministry that totally relies on God, and on its financial supporters. That is not always easy. We experienced that even on the day that the book was launched at Elevate's 30th Anniversary. We had a bit of a celebration organised, but up to minutes before the meeting would start, we still had not received any copies! Again, it was a last minute thing. We thought, God, do you really have to go to those extremes?"

### **Elevate National Camp**

"Our camps are maybe the biggest blessing of all. Well, no, you can't say that of course, but sometimes it feels like that. Words can't describe how important camp is. People love to come. They make new friends and catch up with old ones. They learn more about how to live out their faith. People get saved, some get baptised, and lots of volunteers have an amazing experience in serving someone with a disability. New helpers often say how they learned that camp was not about themselves, it was about serving. So the camp is about learning, about acceptance, about fellowship and encouragement. It's our favourite weekend of the year. Jesus is there."

### **Encourager Magazine**

"It started in 1977 as a two-sided letter; 40 copies, that Margie typed with her mouth. Look at it now. We print 5,800 copies; and they get sent to 40 different countries. It is amazing how it came together. We asked many people to come up with a name for our newsletter, and the name Encourager is really suited. That is our main purpose. The magazine has encouraged its readers tremendously. It is often

received at the exact right time. Other readers are inspired, as the magazine educates them how to engage. The magazine has been God's work from the beginning. We remember the days we had 30 people coming to our home to fold and collate the pages. The electric stapler would go on for hours. Our dear neighbour heard that sound continue until the early hours of the morning. Rest assured, that work is now all done professionally, at the printer."

### **Kirsty Armitage**

"We are very, very proud of Kirsty. She is a God ordained person, very capable, very talented, the ideal person to take the helm. Kirsty has been around with Elevate for nine years now, and many people will know her from the camps and our communications."

Di loves it that Kirsty is also an Occupational Therapist, just like herself. Di realises of course she is a different personality. "Kirsty is probably more orderly, a bit of a perfectionist. Her husband Brent will support her all the way."

"The best advice we can give her is to put God first. He is still the centre of this ministry. Keep close to Him in prayer, and reading the Word. But also, stay in touch with the different ministries, enjoy the company of all these good people. Have fun doing the role. A sense of humour is essential, but Kirsty has plenty of that."

Have you read Hugh's book 'On the Knife Edge of Faith: Stories Behind the Ministry'? Copies are available for purchase from the National Support Office.

**By Onne Hiemstra**



# My First Encounter with Jesus

By Manuele Teofilo



I was about 10 years old when I went to National Camp. My reading teacher, Cherry at my school in Auckland offered to take students to camp. I leaped at the opportunity to go on a weekend trip.

My best friend in primary school, Hudson, was one of the other students who went. That made me even more interested in going. It wasn't just an opportunity to go on a long trip, but now I got to hang out with my best friend all weekend. There are many people that go to National Camp, and I didn't know anyone. So going with someone I knew was better.

I was young and was still learning what it means to be a Christian. Going to National Camp felt like entering into a different world. I'd never seen so many people with disabilities who loved Jesus. Being in a Christian environment and listening to Bible teachings for a whole weekend was a new experience for me.

Meeting new people and having a buddy caring for me was great. I really enjoyed all the cool activities, especially the quad bikes, and spending time with my friend. It was also the first time experiencing the frequency of camp food!

I'd been to church, but Christian camps give you more time to really open your heart to learn. Over the weekend I got to witness the love of Jesus through the people there. People who knew that Jesus loved them. Through seeing other people in wheelchairs who were Christians, I began to realise that Jesus can love me just as I am.

They had ministry time following the message on Sunday night and people were invited to come up for prayer. I asked for healing in my legs to be able to

walk. I really wanted to walk. That was when I experienced Jesus' healing power for the first time. I felt a surge of heat and new strength in my legs that Sunday night at camp.

I always knew God as a child, but I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus. Before that year I thought being a Christian only meant going to church on Sundays. I couldn't go to church for most of my childhood until earlier that same year. Going to church taught me more about God. Then this experience of the Holy Spirit made God real to me. Even though I didn't get the miracle I hoped for that night, something shifted in my heart. It was in that moment that I gave my life to Christ.



***That was when I experienced Jesus' healing power for the first time...***

At breakfast the next morning, I was sharing the amazing experience I had with the people at my table. Across the table was a man with blond hair and glasses. In later years I learned it was Dave. He encouraged me that maybe one day God will heal me completely in this life. Or alternatively, I will definitely be walking and fully healed in heaven. This gave me hope.

Camp began my journey of discovering that God loves me and that He can use me even when I use a wheelchair.

*Manuele Teofilo is Communications Coordinator at the Elevate National Support Office. He attends Gracecity Church in Auckland and lives with Cerebral Palsy.*





# Volunteer Spotlight

## Jan Bridgeman, Joy Ministries National Coordinator

Jan Bridgeman shares how 'looking neither to the right nor the left' has led to her remarkable 27-year involvement with Joy Ministries.

My husband and I were at Bible college. We didn't know why we were at Bible college; God had just sent us there. At the end of the first year, Di Willis came to speak to us about disabilities. Kevin and I both knew then that this was the work God was going to send us to do.

He said not to look to the right or the left, but to focus on His ministry that He had given to us. My husband has since passed away, but that focus is still there, and I know God wants Joy Ministries to continue.

The idea for Joy Ministries came from Joy Fellowship in Canada. This is a church primarily set up for people with disabilities. A lady named Debbie Kennedy did an internship there and came back with a vision for starting something similar in New Zealand. She spoke about it to Emmanuel Support group, and we took it from there.

The first meeting we wondered how many people would turn up and 35 came! We realised we would need to have more than one branch for Auckland. So, Kevin and I started the group in Central West Auckland and ran a group on the North Shore as well. That was 27 years ago.

Besides the Central West group, we now have branches in South Auckland, East Auckland, Hamilton, Whakatane, Hawke's Bay, Taupo, Masterton and Blenheim.

Joy Ministries started off like a church service. It has basically continued like that. We begin with songs. We still use a lot of Scripture in Song because many of our people can't read. This way the Word is getting into their hearts. I will say, "You know this song?" and they will say, "Yes," and I will tell them



where it comes from in the Bible. "Oh, we know some Scripture!"

We celebrate birthdays and people can share about what they have been doing over the month. Then we have a speaker for about 10 minutes. We always close the service with communion, which usually one of our folk will help with. Then we have afternoon tea.

You can't help but be moved when you come to help at Joy Ministries. There is this air of excitement. Everybody loves you; everybody hugs you. It must have impacted our helpers because most of them have been there since day one.

You go into this type of ministry thinking you are going to be the servant. But you get so much more from the people you are serving. They bless you every time you meet. They have got the most simplistic wonderful faith. We have made everything complicated. Their love of Jesus is simple and that's the way we should be.

How do I know Joy Ministries is God's work? Let me tell you a story. We were ministering over on the North Shore at the time. We were feeling so tired and thinking we weren't making an impact on anybody. There was this man who was essentially non-verbal. Rod, our musician, got up to play a guitar. This guy walked forward, put his head on Rod's shoulder and said, "Jesus loves me." To me that was fabulous. I thought, "Yes, Lord, this is where we are meant to be."



# ***Giving Gifts Glorifies God***

***By Carol Westerlund***

Sometimes we think too easily about our inabilities, when actually God has given us so many abilities and gifts. If we leave them on the shelf we are not glorifying God. By taking them down and putting them to use we give Him praise. When we use our gifts we honor God, the One who gave us the gifts in the first place.

It is so easy to think that we don't have any gifts or talents, but God has given everyone some gifts. But before using them you need first to identify them. Don't expect to be good at what your neighbor is. The Bible says that the head cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of you." (see 1 Cor. 12:21) Different parts work together in different ways for the operation of the body. Just what is it that you enjoy doing?

The number of gifts is endless. Take, for example, the gift of encouragement. You can call someone up and lift their spirits by saying something nice to them. Even by just smiling at someone you can make another person feel better. Encouragement is a significant gift. Then there's the gift of hospitality. Maybe you can invite someone over for lunch or coffee. Or you can ask someone out to a cafe. That's a fun way to serve God.

The gift of prayer is essential to the body of Christ. Pray for your family and friends, for your church and your country's leaders. Prayer is dialogue with God and really matters. The gift of helping finds expression in so many ways. You can offer a person a ride. You can become a friend to a lonely person. Or you can teach Sunday School. Serve the Lord by serving others.

The gift of music is a lovely way to share the love of Christ. If you can play an instrument you can share your talent in a praise group. Or if you can sing you can join the church choir. And people are always needed to help with the sound system.

And then there's the gift of listening. Often people in need are not looking for advice--they just need someone to be there and listen. In this way you show another person that she or he matters.

These are only a few of the innumerable ways you can share your talents and abilities. You can do so many things. Take your gifts off the shelf and start honoring God with all that He has given you!

*Carol Westerlund is an author and journalist, living in Finland. Her writing is influenced by her faith and living with epilepsy.*





# 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. I want to live for you, and live life with you, every day. Thank you for loving me. I receive your love. Amen*

**Did you pray this prayer?** We would love to connect with you and help you find a church to connect with. Feel free to email us at [prayer@elevate.org.nz](mailto:prayer@elevate.org.nz) or phone us on **09 636 4763**.

## 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.

"We  
welcome  
your  
enquiry"

### NATIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE

173 Mt Smart Road, Onehunga, Auckland • PO Box 13-322, Onehunga, Auckland, 1643

Ph: +64 9 636 4763 • Email: [info@elevatecdt.org.nz](mailto:info@elevatecdt.org.nz) • Website: [www.elevatecdt.org.nz](http://www.elevatecdt.org.nz)

