

The Encourager

The magazine of Elevate Christian Disability Trust

Issue. 178 | Dec 2023



Welcome

Recently, I have been thinking about the significance of this season we are in as an organisation. We have an amazing opportunity to honour the rich history of Elevate and prepare for the next forty plus years. Celebrating forty years of Elevate National Camp at Totara Springs Christian Centre highlighted this again to me.

Our National Camp this year was a time of remembering and celebrating. Both Ps Geoff Wiklund and Ps Bruce McDonald brought messages of hope, exploring God's promises and the biblical significance of forty. We heard many stories throughout the weekend of how camp has been the catalyst for change in people's lives, for the cherished place of acceptance and belonging that it is, and for many significant moments in people's relationship with God. Such as Bonnie who experienced a life changing moment while being prayed for at National Camp. You can read her testimony on page 4. Our other article this issue is from Jack Oppenhuizen, who while attending as a speaker was changed both personally and professionally by his experience at National Camp.

At a special banquet celebration on Saturday night, which the Totara Springs staff went all out for, we had the opportunity to honour Totara Springs. They have partnered with us and provided such generous support.

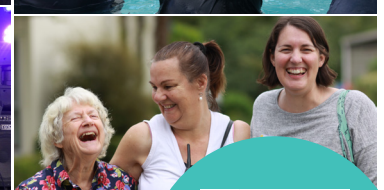
There are two changes happening next year I wanted to let you know about. Many of you will already have heard that we won't be holding our National Camp next year. This camp has been significant in many people's lives, and we believe this next year we need to seek God and gather thoughts from those involved. What does National Camp need to look like to continue to have a significant impact on many more people's lives?

The second thing is that The Encourager magazine will only have one issue next year. As a small team who all work part-time, producing three issues a year is a big time commitment. There is also the reality of increased postage, the impact of which you will have seen for many other organisations. We know that for some of you online isn't accessible which is why we will still produce one issue and the team will continue to look at ways we can communicate with you all.

As we move forward into the next 40 plus years of ministry, we remain committed to seeing people with disability and their whānau (family), leading, contributing, growing and belonging in Christian community and wider society.

Please join us in praying for this ministry, for those involved (campers, attendees, volunteers, leaders, supporters, staff, trustees), for God's guidance and provision, and mostly for God's presence.

Ngā mihi nui,
Kirsty Armitage | Director



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.



FOUNDERS STORY

Elevate



Di's Video

We are delighted to let you know that the video of Di Willis' story is now online! It was great to work with Joy Inc. again to produce this high-quality short film titled, 'Founders Story: Elevate'. Throughout the process people have been touched by Di's story. It is clear to see the significance of people with disabilities throughout her whole life. Her school years in a boarding school for special needs children; working as an Occupational Therapist; meeting Margie Willers (co-founder of Elevate) and Bev Everton (founding member) who both prayed for Di's salvation, and of course co-founding Elevate Christian Disability Trust. Di also recalls many special memories of the ministry, some rather incredible, within the film.

At our recent National Camp, we were able to show Di's story and many people were deeply moved by the video of Di Willis' story, including a number of the Totara Springs staff who were seen with tears in their eyes. Thank you for your support and prayers for the recording of Di's story earlier this year. It is our prayer that her story will have an impact on many people.

We would love you to be able to watch this special video. You can view it by scanning the QR code to your right or email us for a direct link if you are unsure how to scan this.



SCAN ME

'Can I Come Too' Resource

Is a new Christian Camping Resource that Elevate is creating. But we need your stories...

Have you or your child with a disability had an experience with attending or not being able to attend a mainstream camp that you'd be willing to share?

People's stories are vital in creating awareness and can be the catalyst for change. They can help challenge, inspire and motivate others. Your story could be what motivates a person to make a change!

Please tell us your story online using the QR code or email it to info@elevate.org.nz



SCAN ME





National Camp 2023

Elevate Literally Saved Me

By Bonnie Pascoe

I attended the 40th Elevate Christian Disability Trust National Camp. Since 40 years is such a significant milestone, I thought now would be a great time to share with everyone the impact this organisation has had on my life.

I was first introduced to Christianity at 7 years old. My neighbours at the time took me to my first ever church service, where I felt nothing but love and acceptance. I was also invited to a second church a few years later, by some people that helped my dad through his drug addiction. This church also gave me the exact same feelings as the first; I'll always be grateful to these churches and the people in them for making me feel so welcome.

Unfortunately, in 2007 when I was twelve, my faith took a turn for the absolute worst. My sister invited me to stay for the night claiming she had a surprise for me. Every little bit of intuition I had was telling me that this situation felt unsafe, as it was the first time that my sister had ever asked me to stay over. I went anyway though, as my dad said I had to and I thought it would be nice to spend time with her as we'd never been that close. When I got to her house, we got straight into the car. I waited in great anticipation and excitement as, like most twelve-year-olds, I loved surprises. Little did I know that what was waiting for me on the other side of the car journey was, and still is to this day, the most traumatising night of my life.

It was what is known as a healing meeting. Being so young at the time, I couldn't truly get a grip on what this was. I just remember being surrounded by disabled people, and one main person on stage doing a lot of shouting. At first, I was only anxious, but that anxiety turned into pure fear and uncertainty when someone came up to me and said, "you're going to hell because you can't walk". After hearing that I couldn't stop crying and begged my sister to take me home. She only agreed to do this when the meeting was over and letting the preacher pray for healing of my disability. Which she had told me just seconds before that she wouldn't let him do so. As we left, I promised myself that I was going to be an atheist for the rest of my life.

Three years later, a school teacher invited me to attend a presentation about Elevate. Having not heard of it before, I asked "what's Elevate?" she replied, "it's a Christian organisation". As you could imagine, I was more than hesitant to go, but, for some reason, I wasn't completely opposed to the idea. I comforted myself, by saying that I wouldn't be talked into becoming a Christian again and so I agreed to attend.

As I was watching the presentation, I saw how Elevate had lead people with disabilities to and helped maintain their faith. It made me happy seeing how included and loved people seemed to be feeling while attending National Camp. I also remember thinking how much I missed



National Camp 2014

feeling connected to a church and accepted in the way that I was when I attended church at 7. After the presentation had finished, I decided to take a chance and attend my first ever National Camp (2011).

As camp approached, to say that I was nervous and scared is an understatement. I was a shy, timid 16-year-old who had no identity in God. That all changed when I attended my first praise and worship session there. As I was singing, I was completely overcome with emotion, suddenly remembering the awful words that were said to me the night I stayed with my sister. I sat there crying for a while with my head buried in my arms and then I heard someone encourage me to go up for prayer, so I did. I slowly drove up to pastor Geoff Wiklund with tears streaming down my face. I still remember the kind words he



Bonnie's baptism in 2011

prayed over me all those years ago and how he accepted my then truly broken soul wholeheartedly. While he was praying, I could literally feel the lies that were spoken over me as a young child, break free from my spirit like shackled chains, quickly losing their hold over my life. In that moment, I realised that I am and always will be a perfect child of God, free to live the life that He has called me to live, WITH my disability intact. After this I decided to get baptised and fully commit my life to Christ, and I don't ever plan on looking back!

To the founders of Elevate, and everyone else involved, each of you are absolute legends. Thank you for working tirelessly over the years to make Elevate the truly incredible organisation that it is. I just want you all to



Bonnie with Ps Bruce at National Camp 2014

know that apart from Jesus, Elevate literally saved me. It is the sole reason why the faith I have today is undying. Thank you for making it the one place where I feel as if my disability isn't the first thing that people notice. Despite this long story, I'll never have enough words to describe how truly thankful I am. Here's to another 40 years and infinity!

From A Mountain Climbing Accident to The Power of Vulnerability

I was born into the tribal culture of the indigenous Native American people. My parents taught me the indigenous plants, how to catch a wild horse, and the value of Creation Care. My grandparents immigrated 100 years ago from the Netherlands to the Navajo Reservation. They were beloved cross-cultural bridges to the Navajo and Zuni tribes and embodied the love of the Great Shepherd. My story does not begin with me. I was blessed by a multi-generational family that practiced the love of God and who intentionally built bridges of hope across cultural divides. I learned to see vulnerability as an essential ingredient to courageous leadership. Those values set a foundation for my life and call.

During university, I took a biblical archaeology course in the Middle East just after the First Lebanese War. Whilst there, I went on a mountain climb in the Golan. I was on the face of the cliff when suddenly it sloughed off. I fell 80 feet. Upon impact, four vertebrae in my back exploded. The pain that shot through my body cannot be described with human words. The next 3 months were spent in a military hospital with wounded soldiers from fox holes on the front lines. I was paralyzed from the waist down. My ward became a vulnerable community of 18 bloody soldiers with arms and legs blown off, bullet holes through their heads and gangrene. Tragic stories can become redemptive ones of healing when we courageously choose to be vulnerable with God and others. My disability inducted me into a new tribe! People with disabilities are a tribe that is



often unseen, forgotten, or traumatized in many global communities. That is where God has called me.

One of the most life-altering pivots in my own life happened at Elevate's National Camp in 2005. People with disabilities, along with their families, friends and caregivers, participated from New Zealand, Australia, China, Fiji, and the Cook Islands. There was almost a tangible sense of God's presence in our midst. The love of God communicated what human words could not express. There was mystery in the experience, but it was clear what was going on. The presence of the Father was brooding over His beloved children.

On the last night of the camp, as I was beginning to close my talk, I heard God say, "Son, you are not done here. I want you to invite them into global mission." I spoke out what God burned into my heart, "You have positions in the Kingdom of God. You have rank and file in the Mission of Jesus globally." There are times when the veil between this world and the next is very thin. It was that kind of moment. The front of the auditorium was packed tight. The outcome of that night was the emergence of four cross cultural missionary teams. They were organized by the participants





people with disabilities to fulfil a vocation call in cross-cultural work.

The question that stands out is, “Why are we not adequately recruiting, training, sending, and supporting people with disabilities whom God is already calling and sending?” God is calling up shock troopers for the Mission of Jesus. They have God-given roles to fulfil in cross-cultural Kingdom work that will dismantle shame and honour cultures address injustice, speak truth to abusive hierarchies of power and bring a fresh sense of hope to broken humanity. Vulnerability is one of the most powerful tools that God uses to express Himself.

By Jack S. Oppenhuizen

Jack Oppenhuizen is a cross-cultural mission strategist with the lived experience of having a disability. While in the Middle East, he had an 80’ mountain climbing accident and became an incomplete paraplegic.

themselves. Within 6 months, people with significant disabilities led each of the teams to India, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

That camp experience changed me in two ways: 1) God’s Fatherly love was over the top for people with disabilities. That weekend, I stopped running from my disability and received His love. 2) I decided to be faithful to empower and equip

Are you a leader? Are you equipping and empowering people with disability in your church, community or organisation? Not sure how to?

Sign up to our Leaders articles here



Get involved!

How can you be involved with Elevate?

There are many ways that you can become involved with Elevate Christian Disability Trust.

Prayer - Pray for the ministry, the people, the provision, the opportunities!

Promotion - Let others know about us! Give The Encourager magazine to someone who needs it today. Like and share our different Facebook pages and posts. Read our blog articles and share them with your church, friends and whānau.

Practical - Come and volunteer at the Drop-in centre, regional branches, national or regional camps or at the national support office in Onehunga.

Provision - by donation, automatic payment, sponsorship, bequest, or through goods and services.

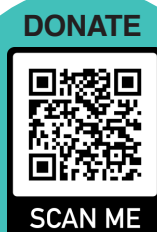
Contact us at info@elevate.org.nz to find out more or to register your skills/abilities so we can link you in to our next suitable project or event. Also, get in contact to find out where we have regional branches around New Zealand.

Donate

To make a donation to Elevate Christian Disability Trust using a Credit Card please visit <https://elevate.org.nz/support-us/> or Internet Banking.

Our bank account details are:

Elevate Christian Disability Trust
Account: 01-0142-0029706-00 (ANZ).
Please include your name and the word “DONATION” as a reference.



We would love to hear from you!

Have you been encouraged or impacted by one of our articles? Do you know someone whose story would encourage others?

Email us at encourager@elevate.org.nz | Phone us on **09 636 4763**

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 or phone us on **09 636 4763**.

Elevate Christian Disability Trust

For over 40 years we have been working to create places of belonging, hope and encouragement, to empower people with disability to live to their full potential in Christ.

Our Ministries:

- **CFFD** (Christian Fellowship for Disabled) mainly for people with physical disabilities
- **Joy Ministries** mainly for those with intellectual disabilities
- **Emmanuel Support** for families with children who have disabilities
- **Torch** for those who are blind or visually impaired
- **Drop-in Centre** in Auckland where we run a day programme for people with disabilities

“We
welcome
your
enquiry”



CFFD



JOY
MINISTRY



EMMANUEL



TORCH
MINISTRY



DROP IN
CENTRE

NATIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE

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

Ph: +64 9 636 4763 • Email: info@elevate.org.nz • Website: www.elevate.org.nz

