

The Encourager

The magazine of Elevate Christian Disability Trust

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Welcome to this annual issue of 'The Encourager Magazine'!

This issue feels especially close to my heart because I'm still new here. Reading past editions was encouraging, but being part of the planning and writing has helped me feel like I truly belong. It's one thing to read stories; it's another to help tell them.

Stepping into a new community always makes me a little nervous. Maybe you know that feeling too, that quiet wondering in the back of your mind: Will I fit? Does my story matter? From the first day I walked in, I was welcomed with open arms. That's what I love most about the Elevate community: it's built on Christ's love, the kind that doesn't require us to have it all together but makes room for us just as we are.

I see that same heart reflected in this magazine. It's about real stories filled with hope and purpose, where Christ's love meets us exactly where we are, and calls us to live for Him—together, bringing honour and glory to His Kingdom. As 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, ***"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*** We walk alongside one another, not to fix, but to reflect His grace and remind each other that, no matter where we are in the journey, we're not alone. As we serve together, it's not because we have it all figured out, but because His love moves us to make space for others. We all have something to offer, and each of us gets to play a part in God's big story.

In the belonging we find in the Body of Christ, may our hope grow, and our hearts be drawn closer to the One who makes all things new.

As you read, I hope you feel encouraged, empowered, and reminded that we are in this together; journeying, serving, respecting, and welcoming each other every step of the way.

May Elevate's values of respect, welcome, come alongside, and serve, continue to guide us, bring strength, healing, and courage as we move forward together in the love of Christ.

Thank you for being part of this family. We're so glad you're here.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqui Sua

Elevate Christian Disability Trust

Bold Living with Ruth Beale: Celebrating Her 30 Years of Ministry

Written by Ella Lander

One of my first impressions of Ruth, was that she speaks with such confidence and boldness. I have learned her boldness and deep trust comes from navigating the windy road of life, by God's lamp to her feet.

You may know Ruth from her work with Wellington Christian Fellowship for the Disabled (CFFD), Manuwatū CFFD, her involvement in the All Saints Disability group, the Salvation Army disability group in Palmerston North, or her leadership of the Elevate Philippines Sponsorship Programme. You'd also then know her for the depth of character, and commitment to walking life with Christ.

I have had the privilege of spending time with Ruth in preparation for this article and to honour her service to Elevate. In talking with Ruth, she speaks of His work in her life; stories of provision, divine appointments, God's hand of protection, love and guiding light in all her decisions.

As a student nurse, Ruth dismissed on medical grounds from her nursing training after a severe accident. One of her core passions to serve others was torn away from her by physical pain and disability. Time passed. Day after day, for strength to endure, Ruth persevered and sought out what God had for her life. Ruth continued walking her road with God in faith that God had her in His hands.



Ruth first came to know Wellington CFFD in 1985, and was involved for the following ten years, and five of which she spent as the Chairperson. Stepping out in faith, she followed what God put on her heart to go to Bible College and then head to the Philippines in 1995, as the first Christian Ministries with Disabled Trust, as Elevate was known then. Ruth then faced enormous health challenges after catching amebic dysentery which resulted in surgery, a long stay in a Filipino in a developing-world hospital which was terrifying for Ruth with her nursing experience, and returned to New Zealand after only eight months.

Ruth's life looked very different following her illness, with numerous hospital visits and needing to limit her involvement in the community to what her health would allow.

Throughout the past forty years, Ruth has been involved in Elevate Christian Disability Trust and elevating Christian disability in various capacities. In her and her husband's (Paul Beale) long-service come across many challenges. Both personally and in leadership. Ruth's advice to new leaders and volunteers looking to step up, and become involved in Elevate or other causes is this:

"Persevere. There are going to be hard times. Even Christian organisations there are times where you will be dejected and misunderstood. Find a group of friends who you can connect with, pray with, and that will encourage you. Because if you're disheartened and despondent, you need encouragement not to work harder. Don't relinquish your leadership position if it is hard, take a break. Get someone to cover for you for a few weeks. Go away on holiday. Turn your phone off. We always think that we are totally indispensable, but we are not... somebody else would pick it up and do it... God does not work through one person alone."

If you were to wander into Ruth's living room now, you'd notice two things:

1. She lives in a converted Church, so the living room is huge as it was the youth hall of the church.
2. There is knitting everywhere.

Ruth and her husband continue to generously donate their home and time to support an initiative she was "volun-given" (not quite "volun-told"). They currently use their home to act as a base for 'Operation Cover-up', sending blankets and knitted items to Eastern Europe and Ukraine. They fill their large lounge, box it all up, and ship it all overseas. Quite the job.

Her calendar is still full, despite being semi-retired, with Church activities, running rest home church services and the Missions Without Borders work. She's still involved with Christian Fellowship for the Disabled.

Time passes, and Ruth continues giving.

Whether it be career, relationships, or pursuing God's call for her life. Ruth is a testament to the power of inviting Christ into every moment; the pain, the heartbreak, the loss, the grief, the joy, the adventure, the challenge, and the fear.



Persevere. There are going to be hard times. Even Christian organisations there are times where you will be dejected and misunderstood...

So, if, you have had the privilege of knowing Ruth, listening to her speak, or meeting her at an event, or for lunch; you can know she has something to catch ahold of. An everlasting love for her Father, with a deep understanding of her Father's love for her. This article, we hope, has shone a light on some of the journey and leadership of Ruth Beale.

To Ruth - We wish you all the best for everything each week brings, thank you for gift of over thirty years of service to Elevate Christian Disability Trust. It is an honour to have you as one of the leaders who make Elevate, Elevate.

Creating a Place for Everyone: Mark's Story of Belonging and Advocacy

The first time I attended the Drop in Centre, I felt out of place. Walking into a new environment, not knowing anyone, made me feel nervous and vulnerable. It's always awkward trying to find your footing in a new space, but then I met Mark.

Mark is someone you cannot miss. His is warm, friendly and welcoming. More than being friendly, he has a way quietly paying attention to those around him. He had a genuine interest to know who I was and wanted to get to know more.

As we talked, we discovered that we had a mutual friend, Andrew. Andrew had been Mark's youth group leader back in Wellington. He was a significant and positive influence in Mark's life and had helped him along his journey of faith. From then on, when Mark saw me he would always ask, "how is Andrew doing?" Mark said this as though we had known one another for a long time. That is simply who Mark is, he makes you feel like you belong.

Living with Purpose

Getting to know Mark unfolded his story in encouraging and humbling ways. Mark has a disability but is not limited by this. He gives of himself to serve others with humility and quiet strength.

Since his teenage years, Mark has raised money for World Vision by selling chocolate, a creative alternative to a paper run. It's a small but powerful way he chose to make a difference, grounded in his faith and his desire to reflect God's love.

A Culture of Belonging

Mark has not only found a place to belong at Mount Wellington Community Church. His presence has helped shape a more welcoming community for others too. When Mark started attending his church, they built a wooden ramp to assist him with entering the building in his wheelchair. A small gesture but one with a significant message. You matter. You belong here.



The church has more recently started the process of installing an accessible bathroom. Again, these are practical accommodations, but they are also intentional acts of care and inclusion. Their message is clear: We see you. We're glad you're here. We invite you to contribute and grow.

A Place to Grow and Give

Belonging is about more than accessible. Belonging is about being seen, valued, and invited to share your gifts with others. This is what love looks like when it is lived

Mark appreciates that everyone at his church is encouraged and expected to contribute, no matter their ability. This could be the opportunity leading communion, speaking on Disability Awareness Sunday, or being part of the men's group. With the opportunities provided the church allows all present to share in their gifts..

Relationships That Matter

Mark's story is a reminder that inclusion is about more than ramps and bathrooms. It's about relationship. It's about how we notice, welcome, and support each other. We are relational because God is relational. As Jesus said, "Love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35).

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12 that the church is like a body with many parts, each unique, each essential. We are not supposed to be alone. When each of us brings our gifts, the body grows and flourish. Mark is not just participating; he is learning to be a valued voice that will influence the church to better reflect the love of Christ.

Mark's Encouragement to Others

For any person living with a disability and unsure about church, Mark offers this advise: "Buddy up with someone. Having someone there makes it easier. You do not have to step into a space alone." Through his own journey, Mark has seen the difference a companion can make. Inclusion doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it starts with one person walking alongside another.

A Reminder for Us All

Mark's story is about more than disability or disability programming for the church. It is about what happens when someone chooses not to be defined by what they can't do - instead, they live fully into what they can do. It is about bringing other people along with you on the journey.

Like Mark's dad used to say, "We all have a minor disability of some sort." Mark carries that wisdom with humility and strength. On the tough days, he says, "I may be a wounded soldier, but I wouldn't leave without a fight."

And that resilience and faith remind us to be purposeful in our living and to build communities where we all are supported to grow, lead and belong.



Contributing

Armed with a Canvas: Interview with Artist, Yung Chen

Interview Featuring Yung Chen, Artist, and Ella Lander, Elevate Christian Disability Trust Staff

Ella: When did you start doing your artwork?

Yung: I was drawing my art by hand, and I was able to hold the pen and then my hand got more and more sore. I can still use my hands, and it is not as easy as before. Then came the computer artwork; it makes it a lot easier to do the work and less painful.

Ella: What medium do you use?

Yung: I use an application called Fresh Paint. I can do it myself, and I don't need to ask for help. The cool thing is I can paint anytime and go back to it. I save it all under one folder. Through my business I bought a printer to print copies to take to the market to sell. Having the computer helping me I know where the artwork goes to. If I do it on paper, I don't know where it goes. I know where it is saved and it's easy to go back through and find.

Ella: What do you enjoy the most about creating your artwork?

Yung: I enjoy putting on some music and going for it. When I create, I always have music on.

Ella: Do you have music that helps you create better?

Yung: Sometimes I have Christian or gospel music on, but I like to listen to all kinds of music.

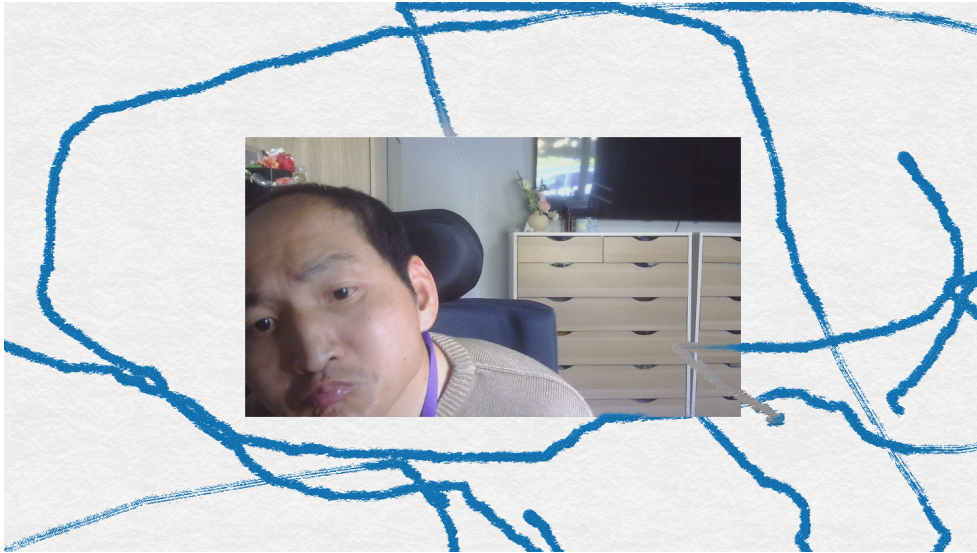
Ella: The weeks can be busy, how do you keep regularly creating art? Do you spend chunks of time painting each week?

Yung: I can create anytime. And I can do it anytime I like. Monday to Friday. You know how you have Monday to Friday with two days off work? I can do any work I like at any time I want, because I have flexible hours.

I see it as my profession. Some people look at the aspect as my artwork is not a career for me. Many people think I can't make art, and that I can't make money off my artwork. I feel like sometimes I need to prove that I can do it. I want to show that it's possible. I have gone through a lot of interviews and looked for work. A lot of people, because I use wheelchair, didn't think I could. So, I thought I can work for myself instead. It allows me to be self-employed and make an income for myself.

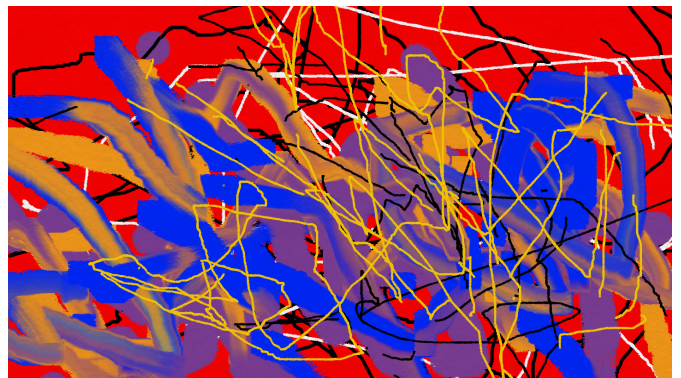
Ella: What have you learned about yourself throughout this process of creating and selling your art?

Yung: What I have learned about myself is: I wanted a job that really worked for me, and that I enjoyed. If you don't enjoy what you do, why do you do it, you know? My motto is: if you do not enjoy what you do, stop, find something else. I enjoy what I do, that is the sole reason why I stepped into art. I see it as a career, not a hobby. Because I don't have to go out looking for work, where nobody wanted to hire me, and I think that I turned that to a motivation to work for myself.



Featured above. Piece five, by Yung Chen.

Artwork not to be copied or distributed without prior consent from the artist.



“If it is of concern to me, it is of concern to him”: Devotional by Cherry Lewis



Do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

(Deuteronomy 4:9)

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God descended on someone for a specific purpose, then lifted. We are partakers of the new covenant; the Spirit of God dwells within us, so He can speak to us as one would speak to a friend. The difference now is that He abides in us. What an unimaginable blessing we have!

The thought came to me a while back that I should make a record of all the wonderful ways in which Father God has spoken to me, rescued and guided me over the years.

It suddenly occurred to me that if I didn't make a record of these treasures, they could remain unknown or lost forever. I really like what Bill Johnson has to say about this:

“God has given us a treasure in each testimony. Each story is priceless and revelatory in that it speaks of the nature of God and His heart for people. The stories contain the record of His DNA. Treating these stories as wonderful gifts pleases Him.”

The basic premise is — God speaks!

So, here goes!

Growing up at home, there was never any talk about God. One day my brother, Blake, had a nasty car accident and I remember Dad saying to me “God must have looked after him”. I said “What?” I had never heard the God word in our family, and wondered if I had heard correctly!

Another time was when I was in the tramping club at university, we were up high in some area of the Southern Alps when suddenly a total fog came down and visibility was virtually nil. I know how dangerous these situations are because we had two or three boys die on these mountains. When the fog came down, I believe God gave me the gift of faith for this situation. I had absolutely no doubt at all that everything would be alright. (Not like my natural panic response!)

Somehow, we got ourselves further down and we met two men (the only time we ever met anyone else in the four years I was doing this). They said they were on a get fit trip for going to the Himalayas, which we thought was very impressive. They were very pleasant and seemed to enjoy being with us. That night we had to sleep in a cave because we couldn't make it to a hut, and I tell you; it is most unpleasant getting into a sleeping bag in the wet and lying down in an equally wet cave. We all settled down for the night, including one of the men. The other man stayed at the mouth of the cave, sitting upright instead of lying down. I felt as if he was guarding us and it made me feel safe. As years have gone by, I have often wondered if these two men were angels, sent to look after us; I wouldn't be surprised.

Another instance that Bryan told me about; he sometimes got sleepy when he was driving late in the day. On this occasion, he must have been about to nod off when he saw someone cross the motorway in front of him, which of course jolted him awake. Then he said-they were wearing white and just disappeared when they got to the other side of the motorway! When he said that, I just knew it was an angel, sent to protect him.

My brother, Blake, has loads of hair-raising stories about situations on the farms where he was working. One time he was going up a plank with a heavy wheelbarrow, when he lost his footing and was heading for a nasty fall when he distinctly felt two hands underneath him, supporting him, and gently lowering him down to the ground (Psalm 91:11-12).

Occasionally while driving, I have had a near miss and felt clearly that an angel had saved me.

Before you fall asleep reading all my favourite stories, I want to close my devotional by sharing my desire for all who read this to be blessed beyond measure,

**With love,
Cherry Lewis**

To read Cherry's full devotional and favourite testimonies from her journey, visit our website at www.elevate.org.nz/articles/.



Growing

Delve Deeper: Resources for Collective Growth



Potential and Podcasting: The Story of Murray Sheard and Mike Crudge's Collaboration

For keen listeners, a fantastic listen for your weekly commute or while you're washing your dishes is "Faith, Church & Disability". A partnership Podcast series between The Baptist NZ Podcast Network and Christian Blind Mission. Hatched by Murray Sheard, the Podcast's host, and Mike Crudge, the Communications Director for Baptist Churches of New Zealand. The 'community which God describes as a body' became the topic bringing people together around a microphone. Now these reflective discussions are available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube, and on the Baptist NZ app and their Baptist NZ website with transcripts. Crudge speaks on the beginnings of the initiative "I heard he (Sheard) was interested in creating a podcast but didn't know where to start. I have been developing a communication platform for the Baptist churches, and had all the mechanism in place to make podcasting happen. It wasn't long before the two of us could see the potential in us working together." Seeing the opportunity to use the popular form of communication, podcasting, to continue the important conversation on "Faith, Church & Disability", the two stepped into the podcasting-world.

Available now to listen or read the transcript at www.baptist.nz/series/faith-church-disability/.



New Resource Alert: Can I Come Too?

Elevate has designed a resource specifically for campsites around New Zealand to have practical tools to better involve young people with disabilities in camps. It contains helpful tips for camp volunteers, staff and management to be able to ask the right questions, better understand behaviours, and ideas on how to support campers. The resource aims to see more young people with disabilities leading, growing, belonging and contributing in mainstream camps.

Visit www.elevate.org.nz to download or share the 'Can I Come Too?' booklet and toolkit.



Celebrating 30 Years of Joy Ministries New Zealand!

A huge congratulations to Joy Ministries New Zealand who celebrated thirty years of ministry in March 2025. Joy Ministries provides a safe and positive environment where they can come and learn about Jesus through prayer, worship and activities. We honour and congratulate each person who has been involved in small and large ways through the past three decades!



Elevate Engineering the Soul Lounge at Festival One

For the second year in a row in January of 2025, Elevate had the opportunity to support festival-goers with access needs to be a part of Festival One, through the Soul Lounge initiative. The Soul Lounge was originally founded by Kylee Black, and Elevate began formally supporting the space in 2024. We are thrilled to announce Elevate will be helping to engineer the Soul Lounge at Festival One in January for 2026 once again.



Belonging



The Beauty of Community: Patricia Harder and leova Elohim Samoan Assembly of God

Imagine having a Pastor who calls you up, to make sure you're coming to this and that event, who performs an item and song for your birthday, who supports you to get to and from church, so you can turn up, Sunday after Sunday and take your seat in the front-row. That's the church experience that Patricia Harder has in being a part of the leova Elohim Samoan Assembly of God under Pastor James' leadership.

Trish describes Pastor James as "just that kind of person; very helpful and really listens, never complains, he gets other people to help me at church." You can find Trish at church on a Sunday dressed in full white, or on weekdays Trish is busy with bocce, gym, and what Trish's friends describe as "the life of a social butterfly". She's out for bible studies and coffee catch-ups. Amongst her week, a foundation for Trish's is the "fantastic" worship with her church family. Worship serves as a great reminder each week for all of us, as Trish says "When you go to church, it's not about us, it's about God; it's about reading the word, and it's about the gospel. That's what the church is. It's not about me, me, me, it's about Jesus." Trish has found a Christian community that she has a strong sense of belonging in, loves to be a part of, and that having a Pastor with a really good sense of humour is just a bonus.

The family of leova church and Trish are working together to apply for a grant for a van to better support Trish to get to and from church gatherings with ease. You can see why she speaks of her experience with leova Elohim Church with fondness and a deep sense of security, despite the congregation being a few hundred people. "We decorate before services... do a lot of prayer work...and sometimes I make sweets to take, just to appreciate them (the church family). Church is our home. That's why I never miss church now, cause it's so important."

Whether it's bible study, a guest speaker on a Sunday, a standard Sunday gathering, worship, farewells, celebrating people, or Samoan food; Patricia Harder's connection to leova Elohim Samoan Assembly of God is a great reminder for us each to keep in community with one another, celebrate each other; be it a birthday or not; to share food and worship alongside family.

To read the full article and a special comment from pastors James and Mile Sialu please visit our website at www.elevate.org.nz/articles/.





Are God and Faith New to You?

I once heard that if we move our hearts the tiniest inch towards Christ, and welcome Him into our lives, He has already travelled the distance to meet us right where we are.

If you've read our magazine, and it has touched your heart or your mind in some way, I pray that is God speaking to you, and inviting you to get to know His character, His heart, and His concern for whatever you are facing.

“May the Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

(Numbers 6:24-26)

I invite you to share in a short prayer;

“Lord, I welcome you into my life, my everyday, and my heart. Please help to strengthen and I guide me. I give my life to you. I repent of my old ways of doing things and I ask you to make me new again. I pray you bring people into my life to champion me and cheer me on in what you have for me. Amen”

From our team at Elevate, and all who have contributed to this issue of our magazine, we are so grateful for you joining us to read or listen to the stories within our 180th edition of the Encourager magazine.

God bless,

Ella Lander

Office and Communications Manager

Elevate Christian Disability Trust

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 hello@elevate.org.nz or phone us on **09 636 4763**.



Elevate Christian Disability Trust

For 49 years we have been working to see people with disabilities and their whānau, leading, contributing, growing and belonging in Christian community.

Connect - Get involved and receive our communications at
<https://elevate.org.nz/contact-us/>.

Donate - To donate to Elevate Christian Disability Trust please visit
<https://elevate.org.nz/support-us/>.

Or you can donate via Internet Banking with the following details:

Account Name: Elevate Christian Disability Trust

Account Number: **01-0142-0029706-00** (ANZ)

Please include your name and the word "DONATION" as a reference.

"We
welcome
your
enquiry"

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