

Barry and Gay Gibson's Story of Hospice Care

“When our oncologist asked us if we had registered with Hospice, our reaction was “What!”. We had no idea what it actually meant, but we were alarmed.

I have had experience with the building, as I was involved with compliance when the building was built, but I never really understood what it was. I hadn't really appreciated what palliative care meant.

We were referred to the Hospice via our Oncologist. A Community Care Coordinator came around to meet us, and we were given the opportunity to come to the Kowhai Programme. We thought at the time nah, that will be boring and we've got more important things to deal with right now! But on reflection we changed our minds and we are now eight sessions in. We wouldn't miss it for anything; it's proved to be so valuable. Pushing us to think about looking after ourselves in the place we find ourselves in now and also for the rest of our natural lives.

It's not about end of life, it's about looking after ourselves now and thinking about the things we need to know for the journey ahead.

Through Kowhai we have created friendships with staff and others attending as well. Generally people don't tend to talk about their experiences when in this situation; people tend to shy away from it, but Hospice offers many opportunities for that discussion. These sessions help us feel better, rather than feeling isolated and afraid.

Today we talked about spirituality. The question we were asking is why is this happening to us? But there's no real answer to that question. Because of Hospice care, we are thinking instead about coming to peace within ourselves, and not being afraid.

The topics are very practical. Subjects like breathlessness; Tony from WINZ on navigating all the help available, he was amazing, explaining processes we just didn't know existed. It is really wonderful.

And we are very impressed with the community care structure that is operating in the homes. Robyn is our Community Care Coordinator – she's incredibly helpful. Right on day one she helped Gay get her meds sorted. Gay hadn't been able to move, she hadn't had any energy for weeks, and was losing a lot of weight, but Robyn liaised with the doctors and sorted out a new drug for her and it was like a magical wand had been waved over us.

The Hospice got us away from thinking about end of life, and more about how can we live our lives better right now. And then giving us the support to live our lives better.

At Hospital you are just an appointment, with Hospice you feel like part of a wider family.”