

StrongVoices

EMPOWERED LIVES

Winter 2026

2026: International
Volunteer Year





Guest Kōrero

Clare Nash

The United Nations has declared 2026 as “The Year of the Volunteer”. For IHC, this is a timely reminder that volunteering is part of our identity. IHC was started by volunteers 77 years ago and volunteering remains at the heart of what we do.

Over the decades, people have shown up for our organisation in many ways: building friendships, sharing skills, supporting events, advocating, mentoring, raising money, running op shops, providing office and administration support, being present – face to face and online – and many more. Each role looks different, but every contribution matters as it all comes back to the people we support and the connections we build.

I have the privilege of leading IHC’s Volunteer Programme across Aotearoa. I’ve been with IHC for four years, beginning as a Volunteer Coordinator before moving into this role just over a year ago. The work we do includes friendships, skills-based and group volunteering opportunities and, more recently, creating new pathways so more people volunteer. One of the most significant shifts has been seeing more people with intellectual disabilities stepping into the volunteering space themselves – contributing, leading and helping to shape what community looks like. Read about Hamish’s journey on page 14.

What drives this work is understanding the ‘why’. People don’t volunteer just to fill time. They do it because they want to belong, to contribute and to make a difference in ways that feel real. The Volunteering team’s role is to honour and support that kaupapa by building a programme that creates a place for meaningful relationships to grow.

Volunteering is not always easy. Life is busy and time is precious, and volunteering is literally giving your time. But the impact is lasting, and often in ways you don’t immediately see: many of the volunteers I have the privilege of working with talk about how much they gain through giving away.

People like Sara, whose warmth and consistency foster genuine connection, and Josie, whose quiet reliability and leadership create stability for others, remind me daily of the strengths volunteers bring. You can read more about their contributions in this issue.

Volunteering with IHC isn’t about big gestures. It’s about respect, consistency and choosing to stand alongside one another. That’s what has carried IHC for 77 years – and it’s what will carry us forward.

Clare Nash is National Manager, IHC Volunteering and Community Engagement

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Cover image: Long-serving IHC Volunteer Sara Hillier-Jones with friend David Miller. Read their story on page 19.



“A friend is one of the best things you can be, and the greatest things you can have”

– Winnie-the-Pooh

IHC

Josie and Robyn’s friendship has stood the test of time – nearly two decades now.

Volunteers with the IHC Friendship Programme are matched with people with an intellectual disability who share their interests, in the hope that they can spend quality time together.

But seventeen years ago, when Josie and Robyn met for the first time, things were a little different. The friendship began when they met at a local day service. “I’d seen Robyn there and thought we’d get along,” recalls Josie. And she was right.

From the very beginning, the two clicked and have gone on to share all sorts of experiences

over the years – amongst them walks, movies, drives, cooking and sewing.

“Robyn’s always got a lot of satisfaction from doing normal things,” Josie says. “Like paying for her drink at a café or buying wine at the supermarket.”

Now, as Robyn has grown older and lives with dementia, things have naturally changed. But the heart of their friendship remains the same.

“Even though she can’t do quite as much now, making her happy is really rewarding for me”, says Josie.

“Coffee shops are always a hit – coffee and a muffin, and she’s good to go. And sometimes we visit a salon for Robyn to get her

nails done. She’s always loved to look good.”

Josie living nearby has made a real difference too. With Robyn’s close family overseas, having someone who can easily drop in and enjoy outings with her has been invaluable.

Over the years, Josie has learned that understanding your friend – and being realistic about your own expectations – is key.

At the end of the day, it’s a simple but lovely connection. As Josie puts it, “I really like making Robyn happy.”

Above: Old friends Josie (left) and Robyn.

What happens when you receive a New Zealand Order of Merit?

By David Corner



IHC

In April, IHC National Self Advocacy Advisor David Corner was presented with a New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for his dedication to advocating for the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

David says he hopes his ONZM will open new doors to further help him get things done.

For those of us who may never receive such an honour, David gives us an inside glimpse into what happens on the day.

New Zealand Honours are presented by the Governor-General, so on Thursday 9 April I went to Government House in Auckland.

Every person was allowed only five guests. I went with my sister and brother-in-law. When we arrived, we met my other sister, my other brother-in-law and my niece.

We went into Government House with everyone else at 9.30 am and were assigned our table and had a drink.

One of the Governor-General's staff then chose one of the other people who were receiving honours to come up and show us what we were to do. I think the person had received an honour before.

At 10 am, one of the Governor-General's staff called out the names of the people who were receiving an honour and asked us to assemble in the hall.

They pinned a bar on our lapels to hold our honours and we all introduced ourselves. We were asked if we had any questions.

I asked: "What do we call the Governor-General?"

I was told that the staff called her "ma'am".

At 10.30 am the Governor-General Dame Cindy Kiro arrived and

everyone stood up to sing the national anthem. She welcomed us and then the official part happened.

People were called in order from the highest honour downwards.

When called I had to stand up behind my chair until Dame Cindy signalled for me to come forward. Then she pinned on my honour and we had a few photos taken. I was also given a certificate.

At about 11 am Dame Cindy left and we had a high tea and got to mingle with others who had received honours.

At 11.30 am our ceremony finished and we all went off wearing our honours.

Above: David Corner with Governor-General Dame Cindy Kiro at his investiture into the New Zealand Order of Merit at Government House in April 2026.

Forty years of advocacy acknowledged in King's Birthday Honours

Choices NZ

Hamish Taverner has been made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to people with learning disabilities in the King's Birthday Honours 2026.

Hamish Taverner's involvement with IHC goes back decades. After being mainstreamed in school until the age of 15 before entering IHC, Hamish has gone on to build a life centred on independence, leadership, and creating change for others.

The Palmerston North resident is a member of the IHC Rangitikei Association Committee and was the first person with an intellectual disability to hold the role of Chair of the Association. Hamish is also part of the IHC Chief Executive Advisory Group.

A dedicated and passionate advocate, Hamish has worked as an evaluator helping assess care homes for disabled people, he's delivered Disability Equality Training, participated in research projects involving people with intellectual disabilities, and held leadership roles with IHC, People First New Zealand, Standards and Monitoring Services (SAMS), the Disabled Persons Assembly, Special Olympics, and the Australasian Society for Intellectual Disability (ASID).

"I like to help people to make sure they have a voice and can have a fair and equal life in New Zealand," Hamish says.

His appointment as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit recognises a lifetime spent championing inclusion, equity, independence, and the rights of people with learning disabilities to be heard, respected, and fully included in society.

Congratulations Hamish!



Hamish has also contributed to national advisory and policy work. His input has helped to shape the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 and the development of family violence and sexual violence policy and strategy for disabled people.

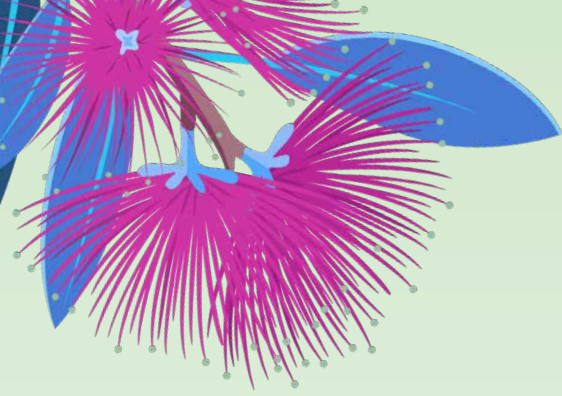
But Hamish's work isn't all about meetings and emails. He's had a 40-year involvement with the Special Olympics as an athlete, leader and, of course, as an advocate. This long association included becoming an inaugural member of the National Athlete Leadership Congress and Global Messenger Congress in 2012.

“

I like to help people to make sure they have a voice and can have a fair and equal life in New Zealand.

”

Above: Hamish Taverner.



Four talented rangatahi win with stunning bookmarks

By Piper Kilmister, IHC Library Community Engagement Librarian

IHC

The IHC Library has announced the winners of its very first bookmark competition held over the Easter school holidays. With over 100 incredible entries, the judges had a tough job selecting just four winners.

The competition was open to rangatahi (young people) with an intellectual disability and/or autism across Aotearoa, and invited participants to design a bookmark for the library.

This year's theme was Nature. Illustrator and designer Josh Morgan joined IHC Media contributor Chardonnay Kyle and children's book illustrator and author Kat Quin as judges.

Four winners were selected across four age categories:

Zoe Beckett from Invercargill (7 years and under) created a delightful bookmark featuring her favourite animal – a guinea pig. Zoe is very creative and loves animals; she hopes to become a vet one day.

James Brittain from Auckland (8–12 years) impressed the judges with his colourful design of Rangitoto. He climbed Rangitoto this year and has been learning all about volcanoes. His favourite is Mt Ruapehu, and he also loves reading and writing – especially about the Warriors series!

Lily Kuzma from Dunedin (13–17 years) won with her stunning nature-themed artwork. Her favourite things are singing in a choir, reading, building Lego and, of course, art!

Caleb Nathan from Wellington (18–21 years) created a striking whale design as part of his printmaking class. Caleb is a Year 14 student at Wellington High School, where his favourite subject is photography. He loves being in nature and exploring the

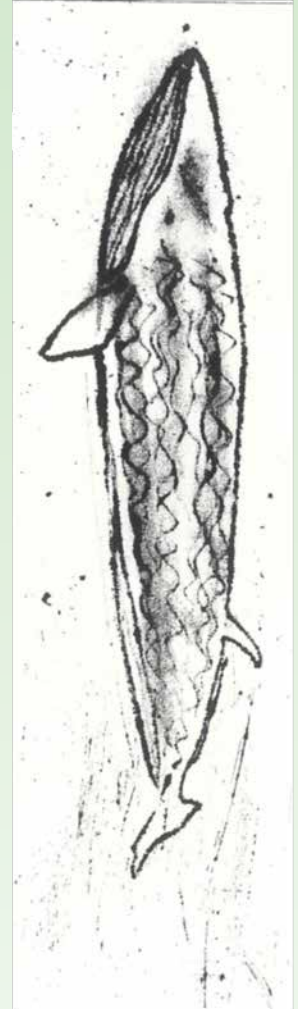
outdoors, especially the bush and the beach.

The winning designs will be printed as the IHC Library's official bookmarks. Library members can look forward to receiving one of these awesome creations each time they borrow from the library.

You can view the the winning and runner-up entries at www.ihc.org.nz/bookmarkcomp

The IHC Library would like to thank all participants for sharing their artwork – it has been incredibly special to experience everyone's beautiful designs.

The bookmark competition will return in 2027.



First place winners, from left:
Zoe Beckett 7 years and under,
James Brittain 8-12 years, Lily
Kuzma 13-17 years, Caleb Nathan
18-21 years.

“

I found this the hardest
judging that I have done...
I am genuinely impressed
with the artistic talent
and passion!

”

- Kat Quin,
IHC Bookmark competition judge



“We meet the best people”

IHC

Cath Jeffares believes everyone deserves good food on their plate. Food that is healthy, affordable and easy to cook. But when Cath read the findings in the 2025 IHC Data to Dignity report, she was deeply troubled.

The report showed people with intellectual disabilities were four times more likely to say they couldn't afford a meal with meat or a vegetarian protein equivalent every second day. They were also three times more likely to cut back on fresh fruit and vegetables because of cost. For Cath, these were not just numbers. They reflected stories she had been hearing.

Cath's life mission these days is to support people in cooking their own simple, affordable meals. Alongside her husband Shayne, she travels the country delivering Happy Healthy Me and Cooking with Cath workshops funded by IHC. These free workshops focus on healthy cooking for people with intellectual disabilities and the people who support them. They are practical, fun and always full.

“We meet the best people,” Cath says.

Still, Cath and Shayne felt there was an ongoing challenge. At the end of each workshop, people would say goodbye feeling excited and motivated. “They'd say, ‘See you tomorrow!’” Cath explains. “And that's when it hit us. We couldn't just drive away. We weren't reaching enough people.”

That feeling, combined with the Data to Dignity report, pushed Cath and Shayne to take the next step. With Shayne's skills as a photographer and designer and with further IHC funding, they launched “The Happy Healthy Kitchen”, an online community cooking school.

The Happy Healthy Kitchen makes cooking as easy as possible. The website offers simple recipes with clear instructions, photos and videos to follow along with. Each recipe shows the utensils and ingredients needed and can be printed out for easy use. There are also cooking tips and techniques to help build confidence in the kitchen.

While the platform prioritises people with disabilities and their support networks, Cath is clear that it is for everyone. “It's about building skills and confidence,” she says. “Anyone can cook. Anyone can eat well.”

Cath's own health journey, including switching to a largely plant-based diet, strengthened her belief that good food should be accessible to all. The Happy Healthy Kitchen isn't strictly vegetarian, but it gently encourages people to add more plants to their plates. “It's not about taking things away,” Cath says. “It's about adding.”

When we speak with Cath and Shayne, they're enjoying a rare day off in their camper van with their two dogs, Lulu, the chihuahua, and George, the labradoodle. They've been criss-crossing the country delivering

workshops, from home in Hawke's Bay to Auckland, Whangārei and beyond.

And with plans to reach 100 recipes and grow a supportive cooking community, The Happy Healthy Kitchen is just getting started. And Cath is determined to make sure no one gets left behind.

Above: Cath Jeffares and friends cooking up a storm: L-R California Poipoi, Cath, Timoti Schweizer-Marunui, Eddie Stalker and Scott Taare.

Join The Happy Healthy Kitchen community





“I would love to see more people helping in their community”

By Meredith Jones

IHC

Meredith Jones from Blenheim recently earned a Student Volunteer Army Service Award. She tells us what volunteering means to her.

My name is Meredith, and I enjoy keeping busy and doing the things that make me happy. I love swimming, watching movies, dancing, listening to music, and spending time with my family. Sunny days make me feel especially happy, and I enjoy getting out and being active.

Volunteering is an important part of my life. I volunteer at Plunket and at the soup kitchen, where I help in different ways. At Plunket, I put away donations, help with sales, and sort baby clothes into

sizes. At the soup kitchen, I help with cleaning.

I enjoy volunteering because I like being busy, making new friends, and meeting lots of new people. It feels good to know that I am helping others and supporting organisations in my community.

When I received my Student Volunteer Army Service Award pin, I felt very happy and proud. It was a real motivation for me to keep helping.

One of my favourite memories from volunteering is meeting new friends along the way. I have also learned new skills, like organising stock, handling donations, processing cash and online payments, and I feel very

confident in the tasks I have learned.

Being part of my community makes me feel proud, because I like helping and raising money for organisations that make a difference.

If someone wanted to try volunteering, I would tell them it is an enjoyable experience where you can learn new things and meet new people.

At the moment I am volunteering three days a week, I would love to see more people helping in their community too.

Above (L-R): Dianne Pelvin SVA Ambassador, Camilla Nilsson Service Manager with Meredith Jones.

Zumba is life!



“ Disability
doesn't mean
people can't
achieve ”



Hope Johnstone is one of only a few people in the world with Down syndrome who is a certified Zumba instructor.

For Hope Johnstone, Zumba is life! The 32-year-old from Invercargill has been attending Zumba classes for more than a decade and last year qualified as a registered instructor with a worldwide certificate.

Her reason was straightforward: “I wanted to be a Zumba instructor to make people happy and feel good,” she says.

And when Hope says “people”, she means everyone. The two *Zumba with Hope* classes she leads each week as an IHC volunteer are inclusive, free and open to all.

There are usually between seven and ten people at each class. There’s upbeat music (Miley Cyrus is a favourite) and plenty of room to move, as well as a few extra touches – disco lights, lasers and, on one memorable occasion, a smoke machine operated by her mum Darlene.

“It set the fire alarm off,” Hope laughs.

Darlene helps with music, effects

and has produced a range of merchandise – all proudly branded “Zumba with Hope”.

“We wanted these classes to be free – to be accessible for everybody,” says Darlene. “Apart from the room’s capacity, we don’t want any barriers.”

Becoming a Zumba instructor was no easy feat. Super-fit Hope completed an intensive 12-hour training day and passed an exam.

She was driven by more than just the goal of earning a qualification. For her, it was also about showing that people with disabilities can be leaders in their communities.

Now, with support from local IHC staff, Hope is stepping confidently into a leadership role and demonstrating what inclusive leadership can look like.

“Disability doesn’t mean people can’t achieve,” she says.

“And it’s important for me to show people there’s always something to give back,” she says.

Volunteering has been part of Hope’s life since she was a teenager, helping out at a weekly music programme for young children. She also previously volunteered at a rest home.

“Hope has a lot of empathy,” says Darlene. “She has a special gentleness that makes people feel safe.”

News of Hope’s Zumba classes is spreading, mostly through word-of-mouth, and Hope and Darlene are creating a vibrant online community.

Zumba with Hope brings people together, builds their confidence and makes sure nobody is sidelined. So it looks like, for a growing number of people, Zumba really is life!

Left: Hope Johnstone.

Above (L-R): Hope with Zumba class participants Faith and Jacqui.



Finding purpose with the Student Volunteer Army (SVA)

IDEA Services

On a sunny day in March, Student Volunteer Army (SVA) Service Award members from IDEA Services teamed up with the University of Canterbury SVA club at Climate Action Campus Ōtautahi.

The first of its kind in the country, Climate Action Campus is an environmental movement designed to encourage both understanding and action on climate change. The volunteers learnt about the importance of native trees to the ecosystem. Their task was then to clear large spaces of weeds so more native trees can thrive. It was a big job – but hard work done collaboratively is what SVA is all about.

SVA evolved out of the student-led clean-up operation following the 2010 Christchurch earthquake and is now a network of tens of thousands of volunteers committed to making a difference and building communities. Introduced to the disability sector in an eight-month pilot at IDEA Services centres in Christchurch in March 2022, SVA has now been launched in all 27 sites nationwide.

Philippa Johnson-Alatalo, IDEA Services National Programme Manager – Community Contribution, says it's a meaningful way for people supported by IDEA Services to volunteer their time. "SVA enables people with intellectual disabilities to participate and be valued as an important part of their communities," says Philippa. Since 2022, more than 600 volunteers have clocked up 91,000 hours of service, and over 6,500 hours this year so far.

"The variety of work is diverse – from teaching music or dance, to working in community groups, to supporting environmental causes like Climate Action Campus," says Philippa. "It is all about ensuring people with disabilities feel valued for their contribution right across the community. It fosters a sense of belonging and drives social change through volunteering."

For the team volunteering at Climate Action Campus, there were many highlights to the day:

"I liked helping with the wheelbarrow and getting on the ground, ripping the weeds out with gloves – giving everything a go." – Joshua

"When we were pulling the weeds, they were tough to pull out. I fell on the ground and it made me laugh." – Mark

"I liked meeting new people." – Amanda

Even an accidental broken water pipe (unintentional water feature) added to the fun of the day.

"I liked watching the water pipe burst and helping out in the garden too." – Luke

The sense of belonging, and being part of something meaningful, shines through.

"It makes me feel good and gives me work and real-life experience." – Luke

"It is the right thing to do – I feel happy." – Mark

Perhaps Hayden summed it up best when he said, "it makes me feel like I have done something good with my life, it gives me purpose to use my powers for good."

From left: Sophie, Philippa Johnson-Alatalo, Benette Bernaldez (Support Worker).



Robert at work on the field

By Robert Smith

IDEA Services

My name is Robert Smith. I am Tainui and I live in Leamington, Cambridge. This story is about my job at the Hautapu Rugby Club.

I started last year when Hautapu Rugby Club President David Simes asked me if I was interested in doing the fields and the yard. I said of course I am. He showed me around

and what to do. He asked if I wanted to start the job on Monday, and I said I would.

I do a really big job. I set the pads up and the flags and the ropes for the rugby game, and I take all the bins out. I really love it. I talk to the people I get on well with. I am not shy. I love sports. I love watching the Chiefs and Warriors games. I am a supporter. It

gives me a connection with rugby, because I love rugby, rugby league, and touch rugby.

I meet Club Manager Gemma Gore and David at work. They are my bosses. I ask my boss what I need to do. Emma writes a list of jobs. I finish when I have done all the jobs. It could take until lunchtime or 1 o'clock.

The other guy's name is Buzz. He helps me. We talk about the rugby and the weekend. We have fun together. He uses his car to help me with my job.

My goal has always been to have a job and earn my own money. I get paid for this job. It is good money too. I do my paper run for Cambridge News as well. I get paid for that too. I am saving money to go to Australia with my cousin. I am looking forward to going to the zoo and the dinosaur museum.

I am also on the Waikato King Country leadership group at IDEA Services and help lead Te Roopu O Hauraki ki Poutae kapa haka group in the Waikato King Country area.

Here is my tā moko. That is all my cousins, aunties and uncles, Dad and Mum, Peter and Tony, Anna and Penny.

My advice to other people is to ask the staff for some help if they want to get a job. That has helped me get the job. Work and Income can help too.

“

Here is my tā moko. That is all my cousins, aunties and uncles, Dad and Mum, Peter and Tony, Anna and Penny.

”

Left: Robert Smith shows his tā moko.



Champion Hamish

IHC

Whether it's supporting the elderly or advocating for the disabled or the environment, Hamish Gilbert is determined to show up.

Hamish's weeks are busy. He balances multiple volunteering commitments on top of his job as a Bunnings team member.

Once a week, you'll find Hamish helping people sort their recycling as part of Hawke's Bay Regional Council's programme 'Sustainable Hawke's Bay'. It's an educational role aimed at making sustainability practical and easy.

He also volunteers at the Gracelands Retirement Village in Hastings, where he assists in the café and kitchen and generally lends a hand to the residents when needed.

And, as of January this year, Hamish has added 'Champion' to his volunteering schedule. The Champions Bus Crew is a new initiative run by the Hawke's Bay Regional Council's goBay buses. Volunteer 'Champions' assist

passengers to navigate the new bus routes.

Partly inspired by airline cabin crews, the Champions are easily identifiable by their t-shirts, caps and badges. They can explain timetables, how to top up travel cards and generally make sure passengers get where they need to go.

While the Champions are partly about encouraging public transport use – a definite priority during the current fuel crisis – Hamish says it's also about making public transport easier to navigate, especially for the elderly and the disabled.

Volunteering on the buses doesn't stop at the end of a shift either. Even when he's riding the bus as a passenger himself, the work continues. "People recognise me as one of the Champions and know they can ask me for assistance," says Hamish. "So, I'll help with getting people on or off the bus, especially if someone needs help with the ramp."

Hamish also attends regular Hastings Disability Advisory meetings where

he helps advocate for greater accessibility.

The old adage says, "if you want something done, ask a busy person" and earlier this year, Hamish took on another role: Ambassador for the IHC Online Friendship Programme.

Volunteer Ambassadors work alongside Volunteer Coordinators around the country, sharing their experience to help create a more inclusive Aotearoa.

As the Online Ambassador, Hamish plays an important leadership role in encouraging people to be part of an online community, helping them build safe and meaningful digital connections, and supporting others with intellectual disabilities to feel confident, included and valued online.

He's leading by example and in March he presented at "The Big Connect" an annual online event for World Down Syndrome Day.

For Hamish, there is one common factor in each of his volunteer roles that keeps him energised – the people. Lots of new friendships have grown out of his busy life.

"Volunteering connects me to something bigger," he says. "It makes me feel worthwhile."

When asked what he'd say to others with an intellectual disability thinking about volunteering, his answer is simple: "There are lots of opportunities out there. Get out and do it."

IHC Ambassador-in-Training Leadership Programme

The IHC Ambassador-in-Training Leadership Programme supports people with intellectual disabilities to develop leadership skills, speak up for themselves and others and actively contribute to their communities.

Contact hannah.veryy@ihc.org.nz for more information

Above: Hamish as a goBay bus Champion.



And the beat goes on...

Accessible Properties

For years New Zealand bands and musicians have headed to Los Angeles or London to try their luck. Not many went by ship.

Accessible Properties tenant Maurice Greer did, because it was 1966.

Maurice is the lead singer, drummer and only original member of The Human Instinct, a New Zealand band that has released seven albums and entertained audiences for 60 years.

“When I joined the band we were called The Four Fours,” Maurice says. “A month before we left for England we were on the Rolling Stones tour, playing at the Civic in Auckland and Town Hall in Wellington.”

“On the way to the UK, we decided we needed a new name – and that’s how The Human Instinct was born.”

Maurice’s love of music started early. As a young boy, he would listen to his father playing guitar and singing. He

gave little Maurice a ukulele and there was no stopping him.

“When I was about 10, I went along to the Regent (in Palmerston North) where Johnny Devlin was playing. Took my ukulele and did my own show after Johnny had finished.”

These days, from his place in Pāpāmoa, he’s still doing what he loves.

The Human Instinct did a gig at the New Zealand Blues and BBQ Festival in Rotorua last November and there’s a new album in the works.

Maurice has lived in his Accessible Properties home for nearly 13 years now. “I reckon Pāpāmoa’s the best spot in the world – especially at the moment,” he says.

He moved in with his wife, but sadly she became unwell and passed away not long after.

“I have really appreciated how my tenancy managers worked with me to clear out my place when I got too much stuff.”

“And Accessible Properties has kept the place in good order. I’m really happy.”

Happy in his home and still making music. “Legend” is a label thrown around all too easily. But if the cap fits...

**Above: Maurice Greer.
Colin Lunt Photography/SunLive.**



Spotlight on IHC Associations: North Canterbury Association

IHC

IHC has more than 20 Associations across New Zealand made up of IHC members. While each Association is different, at the heart of all of them is the kaupapa to improve the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their whānau.

IHC Associations are run by volunteers. They are a strong link between IHC and the broader community and are also where a wealth of knowledge sits – both historical and current.

Between the braided channels of the Waimakariri and Conway Rivers, sits a vibrant community. IHC North Canterbury Association is deeply embedded in this community working closely with local schools, the Community College in Rangiora, the Waimakariri District Council, and groups like the Student Volunteer Army. The Association is a familiar presence at expos, forums, and community events.

Valyn Barrett first became involved with IHC around 2016. He joined the Association committee soon after and is currently its Chair. He sees the Association’s purpose as practical: “We advocate for people with disabilities and support initiatives that help our people socially, build skills, and achieve their goals.”

Over the years, the Association has funded cooking and self-defence classes and small ventures like the social enterprise Beauty & Bloom. They’ve even helped with modifying vehicles so people can access training or employment independently. And just as importantly, the Association provides support to families and caregivers. This includes funding for respite care and one-off grants for special projects. Through initiatives like the “Opening Doors” grant and “Just for You” funding, individuals and whānau can take steps that might otherwise be out of reach.

Throughout the year, the Association’s calendar is filled with events: barbecues in Rangiora parks, lively Christmas parties, and regular social gatherings. These are the moments Valyn values most. “It’s the unbridled joy you see at those events,” he says. “That’s what makes it all worthwhile.”

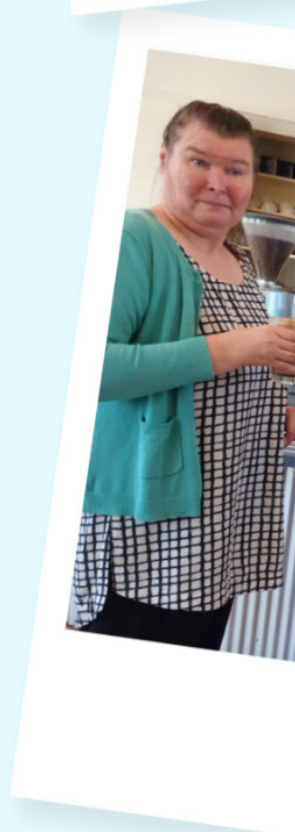
Valyn is clear about the Associations goals. “Firstly, to maintain the Association so it can continue to serve the community. And secondly, to build a younger membership base.” He’s seen other Associations around the country fade due to a lack of succession and is determined that North Canterbury will not follow that path.

For now, there is plenty to look forward to in North Canterbury. Currently, plans are underway to welcome the IHC 75th anniversary exhibition *Nothing About Us Without Us* at the Rangiora Library gallery in October.

Ultimately, the IHC North Canterbury Association is about people coming together and thriving, much like the rivers that define the region.

For further information contact
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www.facebook.com/IHCNorthCanterbury
For IHC membership queries, contact
membership@ihc.org.nz

Opposite page: Some of the events in the IHC North Canterbury Association calendar.







Strong Voices Survey 2026

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who took part in the Strong Voices survey.

The survey has now closed, and we're currently reviewing your feedback.

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Barbara Rocco, ONZM
Tony Shaw

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My Voice

– Sara Hillier-Jones

My Voice is where we get to know some of the people in our community.

Sara Hillier-Jones is a long-serving IHC Volunteer.

Sara first became involved with IHC in 2011 when she joined the IHC Friendship Programme and, before long, she became involved in the Skills-Based Programme as well. Since then, volunteering has remained a constant and meaningful part of her life.

What sort of volunteering do you do?

I currently volunteer with two people on the IHC friendship programme. I visit David about twice a month. We do things like baking and crafts. I see "A" about once a month sometimes more. This initially started as an advocacy role but is now more of a friendship. We do things like going out for lunch or coffee, getting manicures and recently we did a pottery class.

What is the most interesting thing that has ever happened to you?

I suppose moving to New Zealand 22 years ago. It was fascinating moving somewhere that was so similar to the

UK and yet so different. It was hard too. I also found the job I moved to very interesting. I went from working as an Occupational Therapist in adult learning disabilities, by way of adult mental health, in the UK to older adults' mental health in New Zealand. I loved the history and stories of the people I supported here.

Why is volunteering important to you?

It gives me a sense of purpose that I lost when I had to give up work because of my health, and my family had almost grown up. It makes me feel that I am making a difference. It also brings me joy. Volunteering connects me to people who remind me of the importance of the things so many of us take for granted, like

friendships, going out for coffee, sharing food and enjoying things together.

What are some other organisations or work that you have been involved in?

I used to be an occupational therapist. I worked in the UK in mental health and learning disabilities and here in older persons' mental health. I have also been a Beaver scout leader (little ones aged 6 to 8) in the UK and for a short time ran a Brownie pack here.

What does NZ need to do better for people with intellectual disabilities?

Involve people with intellectual disabilities in all aspects of the community. Enable them to be fully part of things – not just on the sidelines – and recognise what they have to give. In an ideal world disability wouldn't exist – just a spectrum of ability.

Who is/are your favourite person(s)?

I don't really do favourites but my two grandchildren, Robbie 4 and Lily 2, have a very special place in my heart. The people I volunteer with bring me joy and remind me of the wonder and magic in the world. And my hubby who is always there quietly getting on with all the things that keep us going day to day.

What are you most proud of?

My kids and all my family. My Mum and Dad have been married 65 years and that is definitely something to be proud of. They are still very much in love and support each other so well.

Why should people volunteer?

Because it brings joy to the giver and the receiver. It broadens the mind. It reminds us to look outside of ourselves and that's a wonderful thing.



Left: Sara with friend David Miller.

IHC ART AWARDS 2026

The IHC Art Awards provide artists with an intellectual disability the opportunity to have their talent recognised, their voices heard and to sell their work.

**Friday 24 July to
Thursday 6 August**

Webb's Wellington
23 Marion Street
Wellington

Gallery hours

Monday to Friday
9:00am to 5:30pm

Saturday to Sunday
11:00am to 3:00pm