



Helen Mason

Healthy, thriving communities, Kia Momoho Te Hāpori Ōranga.

Volunteers

Volunteers and volunteering have a long and proud tradition in New Zealand and it's great when we get a chance to thank those who give so selflessly of their time at our own hospitals. Every year during National Volunteer Week we do exactly that, and some wonderful stories emerge.

Among the stories we learned this year was that of a policeman who volunteers at Tauranga Hospital every week as well as many weekends working as a search and rescue volunteer. Then there are the two women who together have contributed over 50 years of volunteer service to the Children's Ward at Tauranga Hospital. What staggering and humbling efforts from them all.

Matt Ward and Rosco the German Shepherd



Matt Ward and Rosco doing the rounds at Tauranga Hospital

Matt Ward and his red bandanna-clad dog Rosco are a familiar sight at Tauranga Hospital, visiting patients to help brighten their days. Their visits have even brought grown men to tears.

"We've come in and had people break down in tears when they see us," says Matt. "For some reason, [dogs] just seem really emotional for people. There was one guy in particular who was really angry and would not eat or talk to anyone, but when he saw us, he was 'oh, there's a dog, look at that'. It was a complete change of personality."

Matt and Rosco, a 50kg German shepherd, have been visiting patients for 18 months. Matt got the idea from a conversation with a friend who had a therapy dog.

"I thought it would be pretty cool for Rosko to get a job," he says. "We came in and got such fulfilment that first time, and we did it again and again and again. 18 months later, it's still as awesome as the first day."

Matt spends his days as a policeman and also works as a volunteer for Land Search and Rescue, spending many weekends away training or searching.

"It's just cool to give something back," he says.

Doreen Birchfield and Debz Turner

Doreen Birchfield and Debz Turner are the two very special women who have been putting smiles on children's faces for a combined total of over 50 years.

"The kids love asking me how old I am," says 81-year-old mother, grandmother and great-grandmother Doreen. "One little girl asked me once and when I told her she screwed her face up and said: 'Yuck you're nearly 100!'"

Come rain, hail or shine, Doreen has walked from her home to the hospital every Wednesday for her two-hour 'shift' since 1996. On Mondays, Doreen also volunteers to spend time with the 'elderly' at Tauranga's Fraser Manor resthome.

Play Specialist Donna Opie says Doreen emanates warmth, knowledge and kindness. "It's that grandmotherly approach that the children love," she says.



Michael Wenzel (left) with his 7-month-old son Lucas (right) and volunteer Doreen Birchfield (seated centre).

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“What is the essence of life? To serve others and to do good.”

— Aristotle

Debz Turner is the ward's longest serving volunteer and is in her 27th year of service. During that time she has seen some children, whose conditions mean they are regular visitors, grow from babies to teenagers. She says she loves "to see smiles on the children's faces".

In the early 2000s, when Debz lived in Gate Pa, she volunteered up to three days a week. Having moved to Papamoa in 2010, she now commutes via bus one afternoon a week, and helps to maintain the playroom and resources.

"Debz is open and accepting and willing to undertake any task that is required to ensure a welcoming and safe playroom," says Play Specialist Team Leader Debbie McDougall praising her dedication.



Debz Turner is in her 27th year of volunteering at Tauranga Hospital.

Thank you

These are just three of nearly 100 people who regularly volunteer their time at our Tauranga and Whakatāne Hospital sites to help make our patients' days that bit brighter. I'm aware we had a thank you event for our wonderful volunteers from both sites but I would personally like to add my thanks to each and every one of you who give so selflessly of that most precious commodity, your time.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

— Mahatma Gandhi