



# YOUNG PEOPLE

## IN PALLIATIVE CARE

## Let's talk about death — openly and honestly

Dear Valued Supporter,

When I joined the Karuna team in 2022, I rarely spoke or even thought about death. I was only 25 years old, and it was a topic that felt intimidating.

Over the last three years, I have had the privilege of connecting with many families in my role as Karuna's Fundraising and Marketing Officer. And if I have learned one thing during this time, it's that talking about death may be hard – **but it's a conversation worth having.**

Welcome to our 2025 Tax Appeal. We know that death and palliative care, come with certain assumptions. Or even taboos. Especially for young people, who may not have experienced a loss before. With this year's Appeal, we want to open up the conversation. And break down the stigma while we're at it.

Our Tax Appeal highlights the different stories of two incredible young people who have a close connection with palliative care, grief, and Karuna. Their stories are a testament to how holistic palliative care can have an impact that lasts beyond the death of the patient. **It can provide a sense of peace – and even a sense of purpose.**

My colleague Dylan – one of our dedicated palliative care nurses – shares how a personal experience during his great-grandfather's terminal illness shaped his passion for palliative care. We also hear from Kim, who cared for her mum at home with the support of our nursing and spiritual care teams. In the face of isolating grief, she built her own community and found a way to give back to Karuna.

A common thread in Dylan and Kim's stories, is the importance of community in palliative care. Community provides essential support and guidance. **And our community would be incomplete without the support of incredible donors like you.**

Your contributions enable our service to not just exist, but also to grow and thrive. Donations cover a wide range of essential services, including tailored care plans, 24/7 nursing support, and counselling sessions for any stage of the end-of-life journey.

**Community is truly the heart of Karuna care.** As we approach the end of the 2024-25 Financial Year, we have set one of our largest fundraising targets yet. Please consider making a donation to support our service and help us reach our goal of raising \$150,000. No amount is too small to make a difference to the families we care for.

I know that talking about death can seem scary. But working at Karuna has helped me to understand that we will all experience grief at some point. Conversation can help to shift perceptions of death away from something "scary" and "tragic", to something that can provide peace, comfort, and dignity at the end of life.



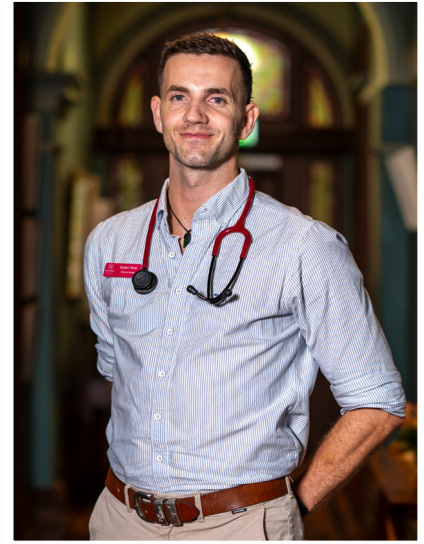
**Shannon**  
Fundraising and Marketing Officer



## How a loved one's terminal illness helped Dylan find his calling

My first experience with palliative care was through my great-grandfather, Ted. When he was nearing the end of his life, he was cared for by the incredible nurses at Hospice Southland (New Zealand). They supported him at home for many months. And their support continued when he transitioned to the palliative care unit.

It was a deeply personal experience for Ted, myself, and our family. I will never forget how surreal and comforting it felt to be surrounded by such warmth and grace. The staff became part of our family. Their care was intimate, safe, and incredibly compassionate. **They didn't just care for Ted. They cared for all of us, individually.**



The care my family received became the foundation of my own commitment to working in palliative care. I wanted to ensure that other people could have the same experience we did. One filled with dignity, peace, and comfort during some of life's most challenging moments.

I started my first palliative care role with Hospice Waikato in 2020. At the same time, I was working in critical care at Waikato Hospital. Over the next five years, I tried many different specialties, including ICU, emergency department, mental health, rural and remote nursing, and more. But palliative care is always the discipline I came back to. **It has always felt like my calling.**

I moved to Australia in early 2022 for a new adventure. After spending some time working rurally across the country, I settled in Brisbane. And in 2023, I started working as a specialist nurse with Karuna.

I was drawn to the service because of its comprehensive, holistic approach to end-of-life care. Their values aligned with my own belief that all aspects of health are deeply interconnected. Emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical.

As part of the team, I work with other specialist nurses to provide holistic and compassionate care to patients and their families. Together, we focus on effective pain and symptom management to ensure comfort and dignity through the end-of-life journey. In addition to clinical care, we support families through the acute bereavement stage and offer emotional guidance.

Capacity coaching is also a large part of our role, to ensure our patients and families are supported and guided through sensitive conversations around prognosis, treatment options and advanced care planning.

Our main priority is to help families build capacity to care for their loved ones at home. Our wider family support team (including social workers and spiritual care practitioners) make up a larger support network that can help families navigate the difficult emotions associated with death, grief, and loss.

I believe strongly in the importance of talking openly about death and grief. Especially for young people. People like me, who may be facing loss in their teens or early twenties. People who may feel uncomfortable talking to their friends about death, because they don't know anyone else who has experienced a loss yet. People who may be scared or intimidated to talk about death.

I know firsthand that there is value in having conversations about death and grief. When young people are encouraged to talk about death, it can help to break down stigma and fear. Open and honest communication can show young people their emotions and experiences are valid. That they are shared by others.

It opens the door to support from loved ones and peers. It can help young people recognise that expressing vulnerability is a key part of healing. **And that being honest about death and grief can be a source of comfort and clarity.**

Karuna's collaborative team environment allows all the different aspects of palliative care to be addressed together. We are a community – and community is a vital part of palliative care. I find it truly empowering to be part of such a unique and specialised service. One with a focus on providing well-rounded care for all patients and families.

When I think about community and palliative care, I'm reminded of a Māori word: kotahitanga. It translates simply to "unity." And in practice, it describes the way a wider community comes together to care for a grieving whanau (family).

It is a way of ensuring that no one faces loss alone. It can help people feel a deeper connection to the deceased. And the collective support helps to heal feelings of grief. Because no one has to face those feelings alone.

Growing up with these teachings has influenced my understanding of life and death as a continuous cycle. They have taught me how to approach death with respect and peace. And also, the value of "living every moment." Not because death is something to be feared. **But because it is a natural part of life's journey.**

Now working for Karuna, I see many similarities between kotahitanga and Buddhist teachings on life and death. The same teachings that form the foundation of Karuna's service.

In kotahitanga, I found the roots of my calling. In Karuna, I found the place where that calling comes to life. Where compassion, culture, and community meet to honour every life, right until the end.



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*We cannot speak highly enough of your Karuna staff, in particular Dylan, who is an amazing nurse.*

*His care for our brother Shane was excellent. He is an exceptional person. It is easy for people to say they have found their calling in life. **We truly believe he has found his.***

**- Shane's family**

Shane received care from Karuna during his end-of-life journey earlier this year.





## How Kim turned grief into community—and a way of giving back

I was 33 years old when I lost my mum, Penny.

My mum was a very kind and caring person. She spent her life caring for others, both personally and professionally. She built her entire career around caring and she loved her role, working as a special needs social worker. It was important to her to give back - a truly selfless act of love.

We were shocked when we found out mum's diagnosis was terminal. Her wish was to die peacefully at home. It was important to us that we honour this and made Karuna the obvious choice when seeking support for her care.

Mum had a special connection with the service. She had previously volunteered for them and eventually landed a role as a Carer Respite Coordinator in the early 2000s. She always spoke highly of the team and loved working for Karuna.

The Karuna team supported us with regular nursing visits, as well as spiritual care. Spirituality and mindfulness were very important to mum. Before she fell sick, her favourite hobby was her daily walk, an act of mindfulness. She did this every day for as long as I can remember.

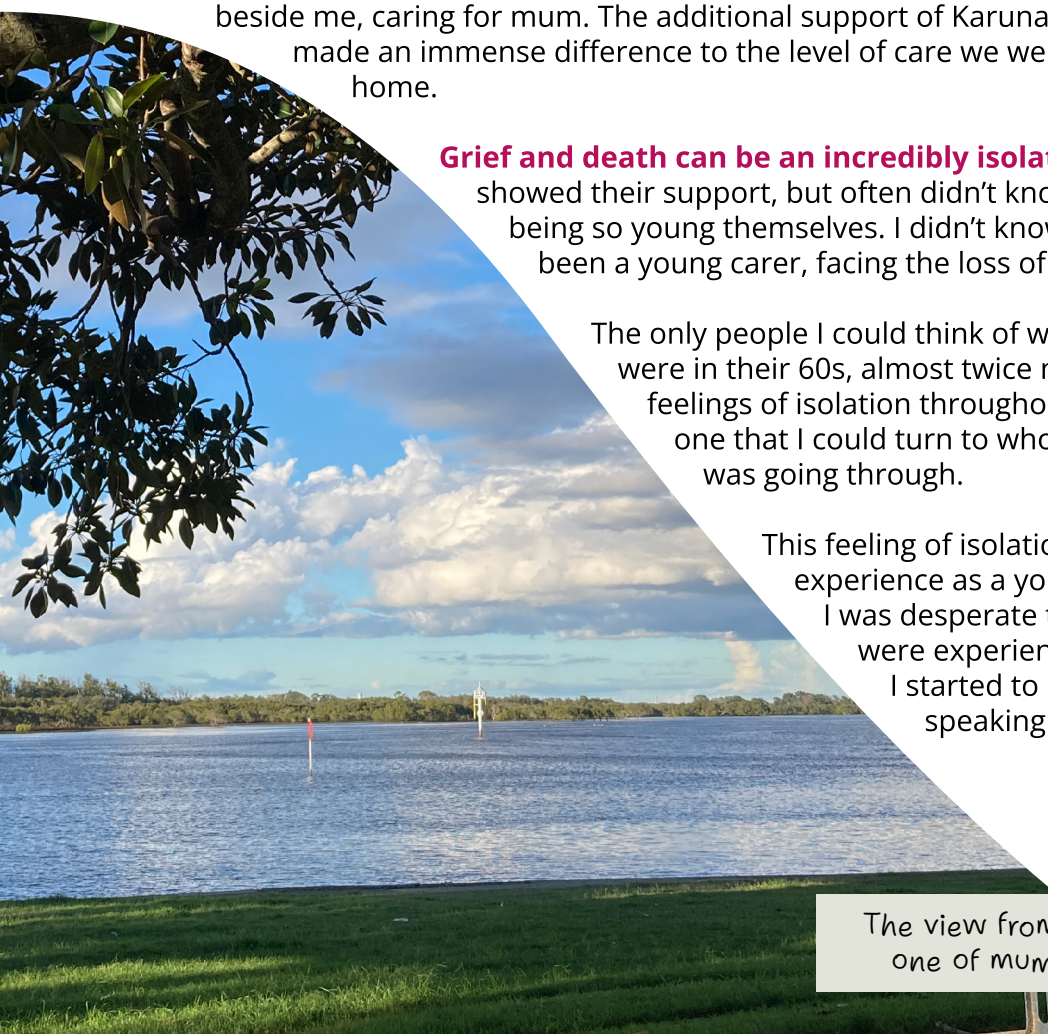
It was very important to her that spirituality was still present at the end of her life. We arranged for one of Karuna's spiritual care practitioners, a Buddhist nun, to come to the house and give her an end-of-life blessing. It was a very special, sacred moment that provided mum a great deal of peace.

As a young carer, the support of my sister was integral during mum's illness. She was right there beside me, caring for mum. The additional support of Karuna during mum's final weeks made an immense difference to the level of care we were able to provide to her at home.

**Grief and death can be an incredibly isolating experience.** My friends showed their support, but often didn't know how to be there for me, being so young themselves. I didn't know anyone else my age who had been a young carer, facing the loss of a parent.

The only people I could think of were older than me. Often, they were in their 60s, almost twice my age. This only added to my feelings of isolation throughout this experience. I had no one that I could turn to who could empathise with what I was going through.

This feeling of isolation inspired me to share my experience as a young carer on social media. I was desperate to connect with others who were experiencing the same thing. So, I started to regularly post on TikTok, speaking about my experience.



The view from Shorncliffe beach, one of mum's favourite spots

**I could never have imagined what that community would become.** I've been able to connect with many people who have experienced loss. This connection inspired me to combine my community with my grief to raise money for an important cause.

I designed a special cap, embroidered with the words 'Sad Girls Club.' I chose these words as a way of offering the wearer a layer of support on days where dealing with grief was overwhelming.

The caps are a symbol of my own personal grief journey. But they are also a reflection of the community I have grown. A collective of people who have faced loss at a young age. **A way of uniting people who have lost loved ones.**

100% of the profits from the caps were donated to Karuna. This was important to me as I wanted to honour my mum's memory by giving back to a service that had so much positive impact on our lives.

Their dedicated team empowers people to die peacefully at home. For some people, like my mum, this is the ultimate gift. By raising funds for Karuna, I hope to be a small part of helping their service flourish for many years to come.

Grief can be all consuming and affects every part of your life. Especially if you are young, nothing can prepare you for the challenges that you will face on this journey. If you are reading this and are a young carer, I encourage you to find your community.

Seeking external support, outside of my family and friends provided me with a lot of relief. Being able to connect with people all around the world, during the long, difficult days of caring made a huge difference.

**Losing my mum in my early thirties has totally changed my perspective on life.** I no longer prioritise and value my career as much as I did before. Instead, I choose to focus on enjoying life and cherishing every moment with my loved ones.

I've been told my laugh sounds very similar to my mum's. She had such a distinctive chuckle, which brings me a lot of joy when I hear this in myself. It's like she's right there beside me and we are laughing together.

If there is one lasting lesson my mum taught me, it was to lead with kindness. I try to take this approach in every aspect of my life, both personally and professionally. Leading with empathy has brought me a lot of peace. It's helped me to not sweat the small stuff.

Something I like to do to keep her memory alive is to wear pieces of her jewellery every day. I have a couple of rings that I never take off and I love looking down at my hands and remembering mum. It makes me feel very connected to her.

I know that mum would be proud of me for sharing our story with you, as Karuna has been such an integral part of our lives. So on behalf of her, thank you for taking the time to read this.



Me as a little kid, in a dress up outfit that mum always had readily available for me



Some of mum's rings I wear to remember her by