



*When my husband Ivan was diagnosed with cancer, we faced it together as a family.*

*When his diagnosis became terminal, we found a new family through the incredible team at Karuna.*

*They surrounded us with love and support during the hardest time in our lives. We never felt alone through Ivan's palliative journey.*

Dear Supporter,

As a Karuna supporter, you are already part of the same Karuna family. Like us, you might have experienced Karuna care firsthand through the loss of a loved one. You might have been reassured by the warmth of the nursing team. Or guided through grief by their Spiritual Care Practitioners.

Maybe you are one of the kind and generous donors who make it possible for families like mine to access Karuna care. Your support goes beyond words or monetary gifts. I know our grief journey would have been very different without Karuna by our side.

No matter what your connection is. Thank you for being part of the Karuna family, and continuing a legacy of love, kindness, and respect.

My name is Melissa. I've been part of the Karuna family for over four years now. And it is a privilege to share our story with you.

My husband Ivan was the most beautiful soul. He was a real family man. He showed me and our children, Ryan and Sarah, that we were his priority every day. He embodied what it meant to be kind, loving, thoughtful, loyal, and humble.

He was a proud New Zealander and Māori man. Of course, this meant he was passionate about rugby. Especially his beloved All Blacks! There was always a rugby game playing in our home.

He also had an extremely playful side. He loved children's movies, even when the kids weren't home to watch them with us. And he could make us laugh for hours over the most random little things. Even now, our favourite memories of him are marked by joy and laughter.

From the beginning of Ivan's cancer journey, we knew that we wanted to face his illness as a family. We started by pursuing treatment options. And we also decided to keep our children informed of what he was going through. We sat them down early to explain that he was sick. And reassured them that we would all do our best to help him through it.



Me, Sarah and Ivan

As you can imagine, it was a difficult conversation to have with the children. Ryan was only 14 at the time, and Sarah was 11. They had many questions that we did our best to answer honestly. But we also tried to be mindful of answering in an age-appropriate way. Both kids were adamant that Ivan would recover. I had fought cervical cancer when they were very young. And they expected dad would get better too.

I initially kept my own cancer journey hidden from the children. I did my best to navigate treatment while still being present as their mum. I made special teddy bears with my voice in them for the days I was in hospital having procedures. I also continued working as much as possible during my treatment. This helped to keep a sense of normality for them.

It wasn't until the children were older that I sat them down and spoke to them about my cancer journey. I felt that they would understand better. And I was in remission at that point. But with Ivan's diagnosis, we involved the kids as much as possible. They were older now. I knew it would be important for them to see and understand what their dad was going through.

This included bringing Ryan and Sarah to the hospital to visit Ivan while he underwent chemotherapy. It gave us the opportunity to show them what the treatment process was like. And also allowed us to answer any questions they might have.

But the hardest conversation with our children came in early 2020. We had recently learned that chemotherapy wasn't working. The hospital couldn't do anything more for Ivan. The only option left was to pursue palliative care.

There were a lot of tears and anxiety around this new diagnosis. Ivan and I managed it as best as we could. We continued to have open conversations about what our next steps would be. Ivan also spoke frequently about the Māori beliefs surrounding death with the children. He emphasised that death is a beautiful thing. That it was natural, and just as beautiful as birth. That death is not something we should fear.

Ivan was adamant that he did not want to receive palliative care in a hospital setting. He was a very proud man and wouldn't ask anyone for anything. But when the hospital referred us to Karuna, we found the perfect bridge between hospital and home. Karuna ensured his medical needs were met. They gave me confidence to manage his pain at home. And they were a phone call away if I ever needed assistance. Their support allowed Ivan to remain at home during the final months of his life. **Just as he wished.**

On the night of Ivan's passing, I spoke with one of Karuna's nurses about how I could help him through the process. I wanted to be there with him as much as possible. To give him the comfort, love, and respect he deserved. She was an incredible support. She gave me reassurance and advice on how to handle some of the pain medications he would need as his condition progressed.

Karuna were there for us the whole night. The on-call nurse gave me time to be alone with Ivan. But she also checked-in frequently to offer reassurances. She made sure to check on the children, and other family who had arrived to say goodbye. Venerable Tsultrim, one of Karuna's Spiritual Care Practitioners, came to be with us and say a prayer for Ivan. **The comfort of knowing they were there was soul-touching.**

Melissa and Ivan's heartfelt story beautifully shows how important it is to respect parents' needs for time and space during a palliative journey. This gives them the opportunity to consider the unique needs of their children, their age and developmental stage, family values, as well as relationship with the family member who is dying. This is important when thinking about what information to share at each point in the process.

In my experience, involving children and young people early, can help them as they navigate through their grief and loss. It can be so valuable for children to feel included and involved to the extent that they want to be, by giving them simple and honest explanations, as well as being reassured that there are family members who they can ask questions of at any time. Our team are available to provide information, counselling, and resources to parents to help them make decisions about how they want to support their children as end-of-life approaches.

**On average it costs around \$490 for a 2-hour session to support our families. Would you consider making a donation to support our families in need?**

**- Michelle English**  
Karuna Senior Social Worker

**Kotahitanga is a Māori word that is often defined as unity, togetherness, and solidarity.**

Palliative Care that embodies kotahitanga recognises the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

The presence of a united family can create a supportive environment that fosters emotional strength. Sharing experiences and memories can help whānau process grief together, reinforcing their bonds and emphasising the importance of legacy and tradition.

This collective approach can alleviate feelings of isolation and fear often associated with palliative care.

Through kotahitanga, whānau learn to value and look after themselves and others in ways that promote acceptance, kindness and compassion for all.

**- Dylan Moore, Ngāi Tahu**  
Karuna Clinical Nurse

There were moments I felt overwhelmed. But I am so grateful for the extra time I had with him at the end. I was able to lay beside my husband in his final moments. To sing to him while his favourite music played in the background. To talk to him and reassure him that we would be okay.



*Music was special to Ivan*

Keeping Ivan at home gave our whānau (family) extra time to say their goodbyes. Ivan's sister was able to travel to see him in the hours before he passed. I am so grateful they got to spend some quality time together at the end. Ryan and Sarah also showed incredible resilience and bravery to be with him one last time. They were able to tell him how much they loved him. And that we were going to miss him so much.

Something Ivan and I really valued about the Karuna team is how they always met us with so much respect. They followed our lead as parents on how we wanted to have conversations with our children. They would ask the kids how they were feeling. But they were never pushy or intrusive. They stepped back and allowed us to navigate those conversations. If we felt that we needed advice, the staff were always willing to share their perspective.

They openly embraced Ivan's Māori cultural practices and beliefs. I think in many ways, his beliefs around death and dying aligned with Karuna's Buddhist roots. He had formed a special bond with Tsultrim during their time together. I would often come home to find them engaged in conversation.

I could never thank Tsultrim enough for helping Ivan through the hardest moment of his life. For connecting with him on a level where he felt like talking and engaging. Even when he didn't want to. Tsultrim, my family has so much love and respect for you. I may never be able to put it in words. But we are so grateful for everything you shared with Ivan.

Ivan died during the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that we were unable to bring his body home to New Zealand for burial. Instead, I decided to honour his culture by hosting a Tangihanga – a Māori funeral ceremony – at our home in Brisbane.

A Tangihanga is a time for family and friends to come together to remember and celebrate the life of someone who has passed away. It normally lasts for three days and focuses on the connection between the person who has died and their community. During the ceremony, people share stories, sing, and support each other as they grieve.

We adapted the Tangi as best as we could with the restrictions at the time. We had friends and family from New Zealand or interstate who couldn't travel to say their goodbyes. We would FaceTime with people, so they still had the opportunity for a farewell.

We were also able to welcome some family and friends who were based in Brisbane. This included Tsultrim, and some of the Karuna nurses. It meant a lot to me that they came to pay their respects. And I know Ivan would have been grateful to know they were there.



*Visiting a traditional Marae in New Zealand*

As a family, we have so much love, respect, and admiration for the Karuna team. Our journey with them did not end with Ivan's passing. They have reached out several times over the years to check on us. This has really helped as we navigate our grief together and separately.

Grief has been a very difficult process for us. As a mum, it has been really important for me to walk through Ryan and Sarah's grief with them first and foremost.

I wanted to keep a sense of normality after Ivan's passing. Before his illness, we spent a lot of time outdoors together. We enjoyed weekend picnics, hiking, and especially beach trips. I tried to emphasise to the children that it was important for us to continue getting out in nature. Even when we didn't feel like leaving the house.

I'm very grateful for the preparation Ivan and I did with the children during his treatment. I think it was the best thing we could have done for them. We talked, we cried, and we even laughed. But no matter what challenge the children faced, we walked through it together as a family. And we always spoke about our "every day" blessings. The small things that made us feel grateful, no matter how hard it got.

Even now, there are moments when we struggle. I know that we will continue to have hard days. I feel the loneliness of knowing he's not here to laugh with, share parenting with, and celebrate with. But I remember each day we had together was a blessing.

I like to remind Ryan and Sarah that Ivan would want us to continue laughing. He would want us to spend time at the beach. And he would definitely want us to continue cheering for the All Blacks. Together, we embrace each day we are given in his honour.

Whether you are new to the Karuna family. Or have been part of it for many years now. Karuna will meet you wherever you are in your palliative care journey. They will surround you with support, warmth, and kindness that goes beyond words.

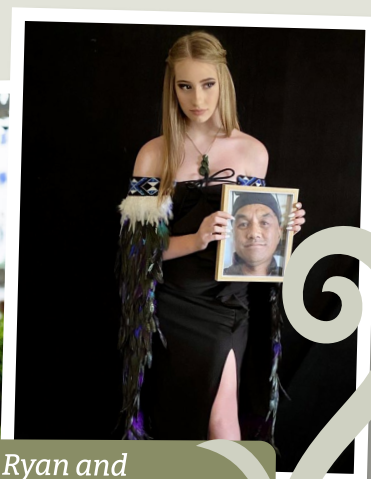
It has been four years now since Ivan's passing. But I still want to express my absolute gratitude to our Karuna family. Thank you for all that you have done. And all that you continue to do.

Kind regards,  
Melissa

Celebrations like Christmas bring Ivan to the front of our minds. There are many traditions that look a little different without him here. And I know that we are not the only family grieving a loved one during the holidays.

Karuna became part of our family when they cared for Ivan. Now, we want to give back to our Karuna family in the best way we can. By helping them raise much-needed funds for the continuation of their services.

**Without community support, they would not be able to continue providing their exceptional service to those who really need it. If you are able, please consider making a donation to Karuna this holiday season. You can make a big impact for families facing a terminal diagnosis.**



*Our children, Ryan and Sarah, with Ivan's portrait*