



ART FOR LIFE
Through her love of art, Gabrielle Prince has been able to do something to thank North Shore Hospice.

“I hope my story will encourage people to talk”

When Gabrielle Prince entered the care of a hospice she discovered it was not the doom and gloom she expected.

By Gabrielle Prince

The only thing that is certain in life is that we will all eventually die. Yet death is a subject we're often reluctant to talk about. This is the motivation for me to tell my story. I hope it will encourage people to talk about dying, and particularly about the role a

hospice can play at this stage in one's life.

How I got to where I am now is not the focus of this story, but I can assure you it has been a long, hard nine years that have tested me in ways I would not have thought possible. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, the twisting road of the initial discovery of a lump – uncertainty, diagnosis, operations, treatment and

check-ups – got very steep and windy at times, and it has had a huge bearing on those around me. In fact I believe it can be more difficult for family and friends to handle because there is very little they can actually do to help.

At just over 60, I don't consider myself to be old by any stretch of the imagination, nor am I ready to die despite already defying statistics and medical experts. So when a

friend encouraged me to seek the help of hospice services a couple of years ago, my initial reaction was one of horror. After all, a hospice is a place where old people go to spend their last days – isn't it?

I couldn't have been more wrong. Sadly this is a common misconception many people have, and I hope that through my story I can redress that perception. The pain I was feeling because of my illness

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had reached such a level that I was taking morphine, which caused terrible side effects and meant I had to take additional drugs. My bathroom looked like a chemist shop, something I struggled with as I have always been fit and healthy. So, with support from my oncologist I contacted North Shore Hospice, in Auckland, New Zealand. Within a short space of time hospice staff reviewed my medication and sorted out my pain. They are experts in pain management, so this allowed me to start living my life more fully again. As the nasty side effects disappeared, my world began to brighten, all thanks to the hospice care I was receiving.

However, I didn't feel I was sick enough to warrant the weekly visits from my hospice community care

nurse. In fact I tried to discourage her as I didn't want to waste the precious resource that someone else might need more than me. But she wouldn't take no for an answer. The first time she visited she brought coffee and we spoke of gardening, my family and the support services were available to me.

To have someone to talk to who isn't family or involved in my life, is hugely beneficial. I like to protect my family and hospice provides me with the emotional, physiological and physical support I need without burdening those closest to me. My family and friends also have access to this support, something my daughter and her husband are extremely grateful for.

When the time came to find the right words to tell

our oldest grandchild about my health, we again turned to the hospice. Maxine, our counsellor/family worker, helped us with ideas on how to chat with him, the sorts of questions he was likely to ask and how we should answer them. It was a huge relief to have that support. What's more, her advice and assessment of the situation and his reactions were so accurate, and Maxine had equipped us with the necessary tools to ensure we all coped.

On Wednesdays, the hospice runs the Day Stay program. This is designed to provide people who are being cared for in their homes with a change of scenery. I have met so many fascinating people and, while we all share the bond of dealing with illness and chat through aspects of the challenges facing us, there is more focus on other topics other than our health. Nurses are available for a confidential chat or you can take advantage of activities, such as art, aromatherapy, even entertainment. They treat us like royalty giving us tea and coffee and a beautiful lunch. I look forward to these days.

Through my love of art I have been able to do something to thank the hospice. Five keen artists, including myself, held an exhibition to sell our work and raised more than \$10,000 for

the hospice. I hope we can do another one soon.

A hospice isn't something to fear or shy away from, and I would encourage anyone to contact them sooner rather than later. Through their experience and expertise, a hospice can provide you and your family with options, talking you through them so you can make informed choices. They believe you have the right to be "master" of your own destiny.

The North Shore Hospice is my landing pad, it is my safe haven. When my hospice carer visits me it is like being snuggled up in bed with a hot water bottle on a cold stormy night. They do genuinely care for me. MF

NEW ZEALAND HOSPICES

The hospice movement has been operating in New Zealand for about 30 years. Hospice is a concept of caring for people who are facing a life-limiting illness 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Hospice cares for the whole person, not just their physical needs, but also their emotional, spiritual and social needs. Most hospice care happens in a person's own home and cares for people of all ages, cultures and spiritual beliefs. The services are free to patients and their families.

LIVING EVERY MOMENT CAMPAIGN

Hospice New Zealand has launched a new campaign called Living Every Moment. The campaign has been created as a way of reminding people how good it feels to share everyday moments, big or small, with people we care about. Sharing a moment is simple; all you have to do is visit hospice.org.nz

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important that carers maintain healthy habits too.



LOVING SUPPORT

Above: Gabrielle and her family.
Right: Now in remission, Gabrielle with her artwork *Exhausted Girls*.

