

Media Release

Date: 26 August, 2022



Learning to communicate after a stroke – volunteer group celebrates its 40th anniversary

Telesia (Sia) Key, who had a stroke in 2020, feels she owes a debt of gratitude to the Volunteer Stroke Scheme (VSS) as it celebrates its 40th anniversary.

The Henderson resident says the regional service, funded by the Ministry of Health and hosted by Te Whatu Ora Health - New Zealand Waitematā, has given her a sense of belonging through her recovery – particularly as she learns to live with aphasia – a stroke-related brain disorder that makes it difficult for patients to communicate and express themselves.

“I had a feeling of being isolated and not belonging,” Sia says. “I needed to find somewhere to fit in and know that I was not alone - that there were other people out there who were going through the same thing as me. I didn’t know that until I joined a conversation group run by the VSS. I suddenly met all of these great, amazing and strong people who were on the same journey and I felt grateful for the opportunity.”

The group is run by VSS volunteers under the supervision of speech language therapists.

The volunteers also act as ‘conversation partners’ - offering one-on-one home visits or video assistance to help clients who are living with speech impairment after a stroke.

“Our volunteers give people opportunities to participate in effective communication and social interaction,” Volunteer Stroke Scheme and Community Speech and Language Therapist Louise Hume says. “This plays an incredibly important role in helping clients regain their confidence and integrate back into society.”

The VSS was formed in 1982 by a small group of speech language therapists and can now have between 80 and 100 people on its books at any one time. All clients are referred by speech language therapists.

The scheme also has around 80 volunteers who provide individual conversation practice for up to an hour-a-week or assist with the 90-minute group sessions.

Training is provided over two days by a speech language therapist and a volunteer coordinator," Louise says. "We do our best to match people with clients who live close to them and who have similar interests." Please call - (09) 487 1513 if you are interested in being a volunteer or [click here](#) for more information.

CAPTION: *Telesia (Sia) Key says the Volunteer Stroke Scheme (VSS) has given her a sense of belonging.*

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