**Renal Fund Enhances Quality of Life**

At 13 years old Jessie Cherrington was diagnosed with the autoimmune disease Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE). Because it can affect the skin, joints, kidney, brain and other organs she was told there was a possibility she would end up on dialysis.

However, no one expected it would only be eight years until she would spend three days a week in hospital from 6.30am until 12.30pm on dialysis.

A year later, Jessie and her partner Dillon Gavin were tied to the hospital even more so when their daughter Rayven Rayne was born 11 weeks early, weighing just two pounds.

From there, things got tough for the young couple.

Dillon had to quit a new job in Auckland because they wouldn’t give him time off to support Jessie who was spreading herself between feeding Rayven and pumping milk in the Special Care Baby Unit and dialysing in the Renal Department.

“We spent three and a half weeks in Auckland and then another nine weeks at Whangarei Hospital, and fell pretty significantly behind on our bill payments,” said Dillon.

The couple got through the ordeal. Dillon now works locally as a gib fixer, and they chip away each week to make sure they can keep up with their bills.

In September 2018, Jessie began home dialysis which has made their life much less complicated not having to spend so much time at the hospital.

“Now I’ll dialyse in the morning from 10am to 3 or 4pm if my mum or sister can come over and help with Rayven. Otherwise, I wait until Dillon comes home from work and do it in the afternoon,” said Jessie.

However, their power costs escalate to around $4 or $5 per day when Jessie is dialysing compared to $1 on the days she is not.

When Northland District Health Board (Northland DHB) renal social worker Anna Stewardson suggested Jessie apply for $500 from the Contact Energy Fund, they decided that they would put it towards their monthly power bills.

Jessie said knowing they are getting some money from Contact Energy is a big help for their family, and she would like to thank them for their support.

Anna said Jessie had done amazingly well, combining her treatment with bringing up two-year-old Rayven, and she has full admiration for her.

“The Fund has been helpful for our patients to maintain their independence and continue dialysis at home. It’s a tough treatment, and there are many benefits to doing it at home.

“People who undergo constant medical treatment have ‘out of pocket’ expenses that are not always covered by Government subsidies, so this Fund helps to fill these gaps.”

The Contact Energy Renal Endowment Fund was established in 2009 as a result of discussions between Contact Energy and the Northland DHB around the most effective way they could support the renal unit. It was decided that rather than buying new equipment for the unit, equivalent funds of $28,000 were put into an endowment to provide financial hardship funding for patients on home dialysis in Northland.

The Northland Community Foundation manages the Fund on behalf of Northland DHB and after careful investment grew the Fund to $38,000.

Thus far, 27 recipients have been given grants of up to $1,000 towards items that would improve their quality of life.

Grants have now totalled approximately $26,767 and have been allocated for purposes ranging from a generator to prevent loss of dialysis during power cuts to recliner chairs used during dialysis and contributions to power bills, with a further $11,233 remaining.

The Fund has not only positively affected the lives of these patients directly, it has also allowed 46 patients and whānau to attend seminars where they have had the opportunity to share their experiences and gain invaluable knowledge about their conditions.

With the Fund now rapidly diminishing, Northland DHB and Northland Community Foundation are looking for organisations or individuals who would like to contribute to the Fund so that it can continue to support the renal patient community in Northland.

With an ever-increasing number of renal patients in the region eligible to apply, Anna said she hopes new investors will come on board and take over the Fund set up by Contact Energy.

“We could then continue to support renal patients to remain independent and reduce some of their financial stress and hardship.”

If you would like to make a donation or receive more information please contact Greta at the Northland Community Foundation on 021 558 224 or email

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