Stories of Belonging

Here are some stories of belonging made possible thanks to Catholic Social Services (CSS) supporters.

The power of belonging: Bronwyn and Seasons for Growth

Seasons for Growth · Bronwyn

Bronwyn is very much part of the Seasons for Growth Companion community. Seasons for Growth is a peer support programme that helps children, young people and adults through times of grief, loss and change. Companions are the trained facilitators who guide the groups.

Her journey began when she was a school nurse in Porirua East. One morning she arrived at school to find two distraught children in the principal's office. Their mother had died suddenly. The principal asked her: "What can we do for these children?" That question, 20 years ago, is how Bronwyn found Seasons for Growth.

Once trained, her first group was eight children grieving the loss of parents or grandparents. "The children loved the programme, their journals and the songs, and I found the Companion's Manual so helpful," she says.

After retiring, Bronwyn chose to continue as a volunteer Companion with CSS. "I just love this programme. I receive great support, and it is always a pleasure to facilitate a group of children going through a difficult time."



A Word From the Catholic Social Services Team

As we kick off this year's Annual Appeal, we want to thank you for your ongoing support. A favourite whakataukī of ours reminds us: Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi - with your food basket and my food basket, our community will thrive.



Belonging as a dad again: Michael's Game On! story

Game On! · Michael*

Game On! is our parenting programme for dads and male carers. It gives dads the time and space to really dig into parenting topics and learn from each other so they can make real changes at home that make a positive difference for their kids and in their relationships.

Michael* attended a programme in 2024. "It helped me to identify the toxic cycle of communication in my co-parenting relationship. I learnt that my ex and me needed to create some distance from each other. So, we put in place a system of written communication.

"This has helped me manage my feelings and behaviours and means my child isn't being directly exposed to the conflict between us. I knew the tense atmosphere was not healthy for my child. Without this realization I would have continued to get into arguments in front of my child. Now I ensure that I stay out of 'the box' when I have my child. This helps to maximise my time with them."

The programme also had a personal impact for Michael, who has joined CSS as a volunteer facilitator of the Game On! programme.

"Since I started facilitating the programme I have enjoyed working with dads to assist them in bringing out the amazing dad that is already inside them. Game On! is an excellent parenting course for dads."

**Names have been changed to protect privacy*

Our Year in Numbers

Soup Kitchen Project
- 175+ Meal Sittings
- 50+ Guests given tailored social work support

Seasons for Growth
- 111 Tamariki/Rangatahi
- 56 Adults
- 20 New Companions Trained

Game On!
- 29 Men Graduated

Social Work
- 16 Individuals & families supported

Refugee House Set-ups
- 24 Households Settled
- 72 Children and adults supported

Belonging starts with being present

Compassion Soup Kitchen · DJ & Sam

Catholic Social Services partners with Compassion Soup Kitchen by having one of the team on board to support breakfast service.

From about 7.15 each morning, Monday to Thursday, you'll find DJ, our social worker, greeting guests at the Compassion Soup Kitchen, checking in on how they're doing and offering a hand where it's needed. DJ knows what it's like to be without a place to call home and to be making it on your own, and that experience shapes how he shows up.

His role is to back the soup kitchen mahi in whatever way is needed, from washing dishes and handing out takeaway meals to the most important job of all: being present. That might mean friendship and company, helping someone settle when they're distressed, or giving practical help.

For many guests, belonging starts with having someone beside them. Guests come to the soup kitchen carrying worries about housing, health, Work and Income, legal matters and the everyday pressures of getting by. Often what begins as a simple chat becomes a chance to listen and build trust. From there, DJ can walk alongside them, help them understand their options, link them with community services and advocate with them.

Sam Johnson, Compassion Soup Kitchen manager, says: "It's great to have Catholic Social Services based here in our building and working alongside us at the soup kitchen. Having their social worker DJ support our breakfast means they can build genuine relationships with our whānau, connect people with other support agencies and help build a welcoming environment."

DJ's presence at the Soup Kitchen is only possible because of people like you. A gift of $150 helps fund a morning of support, connection and practical help for guests who need it most.

SCAN HERE

Your Support Makes a Difference

Your generosity helps make stories like these possible.

Scan here to support the work of Catholic Social Services.

Donations can also be made online at:
cadw.nz/our-work/catholic-social-services/donate

Or through internet banking:

Account Name: Catholic Social Services
Account Number: 02-0560-0213864-000
Particulars: your surname & initials
Code: CSS – 2026
Reference: your phone number

Refugee resettlement: home is where belonging begins

Having a place to call home matters to all of us. Refugee families arrive with few possessions and lack the basics to set up their own home. With the help of our community, we supply the essentials, home appliances, kitchenware, pantry staples and linen, so families can settle in with dignity.

Most days of the week, our volunteer Carolyn can be found in the CSS office prepping supplies and coordinating each home set-up.

We're part of the Red Cross NZ programme, supported by a network of seven community and parish groups who gather goods, make up beds with clean linen, and stock the pantry and kitchen — sending a simple but powerful message: you belong here.

In the last 12 months we've assisted 24 households ranging from 1 to 8 people, including newborns. The cost for a household of four (two adults and two children) is approximately $1500.

Belonging begins with being yourself

Seasons for Growth · Jess

Belonging begins with feeling safe, accepted and valued exactly as you are. In Seasons for Growth groups, it happens for children and adults alike.

Seasons for Growth trainer, coordinator and resource distribution Jess Ferroni—who works out of Catholic Social Services' offices on Tory Street in Wellington's Te Aro—shares some of the changes she has seen in groups she has facilitated.

Billy* (aged 7) joined a group during a time of great instability. At first, he was withdrawn. He would sit quietly apart from the others, even bringing a morning tea he wouldn't eat.

Over the programme, Jess watched him slowly connect with his peers. He began sharing morning tea with the group, joining in confidently and offering thoughtful reflections. During a session about family change, Billy shared his anger about what he had been through. Jess reassured him that all emotions are welcome, he was able to name what he had been carrying, and the relief on his face was immediate.

Maryanne's* experience was similar, though she came to it as an adult. She arrived nervous and unsure she would fit in, after significant changes in her life.

As she listened to others speak about change, loss and hope, she realised she wasn't alone. Over time she found the confidence to share her own story and felt accepted without judgement. By the end, she told Jess she felt connected, valued and supported.

These might be different ages, different stories, but the discovery is the same: belonging comes from being yourself and knowing you matter.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy*