

News Release

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No longer alone, elderly come together for friendship and festive cheer

For the first time in 14 years, 94-year-old Helen Whyte won't be spending Christmas alone thanks to Havelock North's Age Concern Christmas Day celebration.

Helen's lived by herself since her husband died 15 years ago. Since then Christmas has always been the time of year she's felt the loneliest.

Her situation is common. According to the Havelock North Age Concern, more than 750,000 elderly live alone across New Zealand, with around 120,000 expected to spend Christmas Day by themselves this year.^[1]

This year, Helen and 300 others from Havelock North, will be brought together to share a traditional Christmas meal with all the trimmings.

"Without the Age Concern Christmas Day celebration I would be very lonely," Helen says. "The Christmas lunch isn't just for old people, it's for families with kids who have nowhere to go or can't afford it ... and it's a very good meal."

To help reduce loneliness at Christmastime, community organisations across New Zealand, including local Age Concern and City Mission branches, are working to ensure people who would normally spend Christmas by themselves have somewhere to go and someone to share the festive cheer.

Age Concern is supported by the ANZ Staff Foundation, where payday donations from staff are matched by the company. Foundation Chairman Mike Bullock says the bank's Staff Foundation is proud to support organisations caring for people who might otherwise spend the holiday alone.

"Regardless of belief, Christmas is widely celebrated as a time to spend with family and friends. We know there'll be many people living in New Zealand who, if not for community organisations such as Age Concern and local City Mission branches, would be spending the holiday alone.

"Instead of giving our staff Christmas gifts, we make a six-figure donation to the ANZ Staff Foundation to support community outreach across New Zealand.

"We encourage staff to support local organisations through food, gifts or monetary donations. A small contribution can go a long way."

Christmas in the community

Havelock North's Age Concern has been hosting Christmas Day lunch for the elderly in their community since 2010. In the first year 40 people came, and the next year it grew to 60 people.

"We're expecting more than 300 people this year, which for a little town is phenomenal," Age Concern Havelock North Manager Carol Winters says.

^[1] Age Concern, Havelock North
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"We couldn't host this celebration without funding. We were fortunate to get money from the ANZ Staff Foundation recently to help us host this year's lunch. This means so much to our people and we're incredibly grateful.

"Everyone celebrates Christmas differently, but for most people it's about gathering around the table and having a meal with family. This group isn't necessarily family but we always make it special."

ENDS

About Age Concern

Age Concern is a charitable organisation dedicated to helping citizens over 65. It has branches in more than 30 communities across New Zealand.

Age Concern Havelock North Manager Carol Winters says: "We're here to support elderly in any way we can. We are a community organisation – working in the community for the community.

"Sometimes we get calls from nurses or doctors asking us to help an elderly woman or man. The help they need could be as simple as filling out the super senior WINZ forms. They can be overwhelming and we'll help make sense of them."

About the ANZ Staff Foundation

The ANZ Staff Foundation is a charitable trust founded in 2000. Since then it has donated more than \$4.5 million to local charities and has become a leader in payroll giving in New Zealand.

ANZ staff donate a percentage of their wage each week, and ANZ matches their contribution dollar-for-dollar. In 2017 the foundation donated almost \$660,000 to Kiwi charities to support their important work.

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