

Noted

Sometimes, it's the little things that can make a big difference during tough times, writes COLLEEN BROWN of Auckland.

Let's talk about disability. Let's talk about disability during a pandemic. Let's talk about the families doubly locked away during Covid lockdowns – the families you may never see, some of them living behind very high fences with codes and locks on the gates, designed to keep their children in, rather than keep other people out.

Let's talk about those families who cannot risk taking their child to the supermarket or even to the local dairy. Children so vulnerable to any infection that getting Covid would kill them.

We in the disability community know that we walk a different path from other families – parallel but different. It's the little things that make a difference for those of us in this community, managing our lives in these times.

Last year, at the start of the Level 4 lockdown, an Auckland City New World store-owner and a Neighbourhood Support co-ordinator came together with the disability community to see how, collectively, they could get food to families with a disabled child in need of support.

Together, we established an excellent process.

The list of families was supplied by the disability sector; the food was packed by New World staff, collected by Neighbourhood Support volunteers, then distributed across the wider Auckland area.

The supermarket staff wrote and attached a message of support on a Post-it note for each bag. Just a simple message. A simple connection. A simple gift of food. A simple way of saying: "We know you are having challenges; we've got your back."

We delivered food to families who, over the weeks, began to trust our eyes and what we were saying from behind our masks.

In the first lockdown and those that followed, I delivered food each week to a mother who had two young children at home with her. One of her children was due to have an operation to help her walk. Needless to say, the operation was deferred.

As a volunteer delivering food boxes, I was the only person she saw, apart from one other person included in her bubble, during that long lockdown. Each week, she took the stickers off

the bags and placed them on her fridge. We spoke about life from a safe distance. She knew that I, too, had been down this particular parenting path with our disabled son. There was a connection, a shared understanding.

After a few weeks of just her and the children, she, as she phrased it, "hit the wall". The only thing that kept her going was the Post-it notes on her fridge. It was the reminder that although she was alone, others cared.

This year, we are back delivering food to some of the same families. The mother with the disabled child had shifted, but the disability community is small. We found her new address and delivered her food.

Again, we stood masked and apart. Although her housing situation had changed, her need for support had not. We talked about children and life. Her daughter had been in hospital for

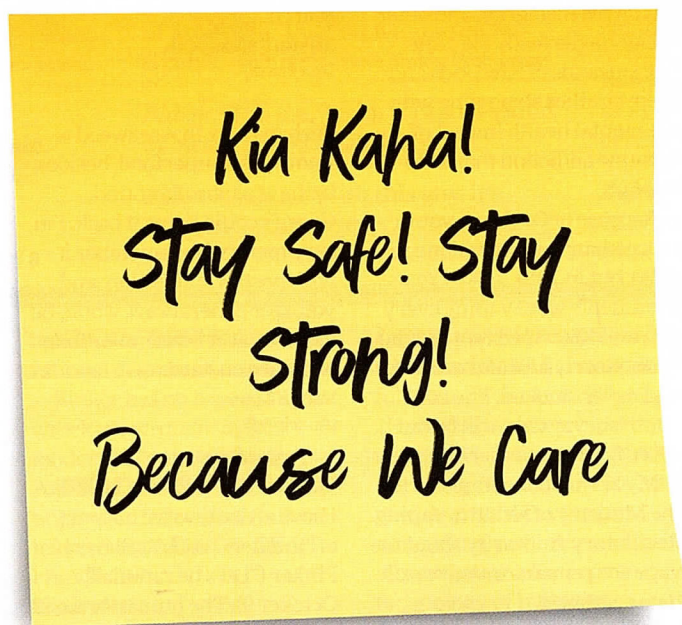
two months, discharged just as the Level 4 lockdown started. Life was still tough.

I handed her the bags. Then she saw the Post-it note.

One of the 2020 Post-it notes still remains on her fridge today. Many other things would have been thrown away before her shift, but not the Post-it note.

Once again, families with disabled children know that people care, and that other people who don't share the same life want to help. And they can and they do.

Small acts of consideration count. ■



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