

Pacific Homecare News

Tue 18 Jun 2013: Husband and wife stay strong

It's hard to tell who is sporting the biggest grin, Pacific Homecare client Raea Utia as he lies watching his wife fold the blankets on his bed, or wife and Support Worker Taitua Utia as she stands looking at her beloved husband.

To onlookers, the scene is nothing especially remarkable- just a husband and wife in their humble Mangere home. But for Support Worker Taitua Utia, these are the moments to cherish.



They were living in the Cook Islands when Raea suffered a stroke in October 1997. He was 56 years-old at the time and a respected teacher in the Cook Island community. But the stroke left him largely bed-bound and his life had changed forever.

While Taitua had experience in nursing and would care for her husband using natural remedies, she knew moving to New Zealand would enable them greater access to better medical support.

Now 70 years-old, Raea's condition has worsened over the years, with the stroke forcing him to lie on his back and sides most days, which has led him to suffer intense back pain.

"His stroke led him to be very immobile at times," Taitua shares.

"He can still transfer himself into a wheelchair, but he is weak."

Both had previously lived in New Zealand for short stints during their teaching and nursing training, but a call to help their families back home led them to return home to the Islands in the 1960s.

"When I look back at Raea's situation, I know my family and I made the right decision. I would usually go to the beach to get ingredients for his medicine. It would be very hard for him to drink," says Taitua.

A year after moving to New Zealand, the couple decided to approach Pacific Homecare for extra assistance.

"Raea's situation is awkward at times. To be able to receive help from your own people makes it less embarrassing for him."

As Pacific Homecare has strong links to the Cook Island community (it was founded as a Cook Islands organisation in 1988), 76 year-old Taitua said it was through word of mouth at church that she was able to hear about the organisation. She became a Support Worker soon after approaching the organisation, and cares solely for Raea.

The couple now receive extra support during the week from two Support Workers, Gabrielle Peyroux - who was employee of the month in July 2012 - and Sara Andrews. Gabrielle showers Raea five days a week and Sara fills in on Sundays while Taitua goes to church.

The couple enjoy the help from both Support Workers, and Gabrielle has helped them in a number of areas, particularly diet.

“Our Support Workers have been very good. Gabrielle will bring things to us that he thinks will be good for Raea. He introduced us to a multi-fibre drink that Raea loves as his appetite can be poor at times. This fills him up,” she says.

Taitua is also quick to praise their Coordinator Amelia Joseph.

“She reminds us of Mama Pi (one of the Pacific Homecare’s founders). She is very good with Cook Island people and it’s helpful that she can communicate with us in our language.”

After 36 years of marriage, Taitua continues to stand by her husband. Her hope is to see Pacific Homecare expand to the wider Auckland region.

Both are thankful and continue to remember those who have helped them over the years.

Despite communication barriers, when asked what he thinks of the services Pacific Homecare provides, Raea is quick to assert “very good” while doing the thumbs up.

Taitua sums it up by saying, “I used to do everything for my husband, but with help from Pacific Homecare I have been able to look after him and also do things for me. Thank you to everyone for helping us both.”

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