



Lennon (3), Briar, Johnny and Johnny Ocean (2) Avatea

After getting an appointment to see the specialist two months later, she went along with her husband Johnny and son, prepared with a list of questions, including some she had found on Melanoma New Zealand's website.

"The nurse and surgeon were lovely and gave me all the information I needed and said they would cut it out there and then. But it was such a whirlwind.

"The procedure took just over an hour, and the nurse kept popping out to see if my son was okay. It was such a small spot, but they took so much out."

For the next two days, Briar had to keep her arm elevated, which was not easy because she still had to breastfeed Johnny Ocean and look after her young daughter, Lennon.

A week later, she returned to the hospital to have her dressing changed, but unfortunately, her body rejected the soluble stitches, and they were difficult to remove.

"Because they didn't want to do a skin graft, they had to pull the skin quite tight. They gave me a sleeve to put over the wound, which made it feel more protected. But it took a good couple of months to be able to touch it. It was pretty gnarly."

Briar was told to massage the wound to help it heal, but she said that doing that made her feel physically sick - and today, the scar still feels quite numb.

## Melanoma Mythbusting

**As a young Māori woman, Briar Avatea never thought melanoma was something she had to worry about, especially because her mother always made her wear sunscreen as a child, and she recalled getting sunburnt only once or twice in her 20s.**

So, when the 33-year-old got a call from her GP in early 2022 to say that the results from a biopsy he had taken from a spot under her arm showed she had stage 1 melanoma, she was completely floored.

Just a week earlier, at a routine visit with her GP in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington with her four-week-old son, Johnny Ocean, Briar decided to take the opportunity to show her doctor a spot slightly larger than a freckle that she had recently noticed was quite dark and a bit itchy. She said the doctor thought it looked okay but took a biopsy as a precaution.

"I felt okay about it because I'd had moles taken off before, and they were fine. I was more concerned about who would hold my baby while I got the biopsy done. But all it took was one stitch, and it was done."

"But then doctor had some bad news to tell me - I had melanoma. He asked if I

had any questions, but I just felt spaced out. It hadn't even come into my realm of thinking.

"I had no insight into melanoma or skin cancer in general. So, of course, my mind started to race and jump to conclusions.

"It was pretty horrible. My husband was working out of Wellington at the time, but luckily, my mum lived close."

The GP immediately referred Briar to a specialist at Hutt Hospital.

"I had no idea where to go for information about melanoma, so I Googled it. Unfortunately, the first thing that came up was, 'How fast do you die from melanoma?'"



Briar now has six monthly checks with a skin specialist and books in for an annual review with her GP. She also joined the Melanoma Support New Zealand Facebook page, which she says has been helpful and informative.

"In Aotearoa, we have this laid-back attitude that everything will be alright, and we assume skin cancer won't happen to us. Everyone knows the UV level here is bad, but we still risk it every day. It's just not worth being tanned."

"For Māori, in particular, the focus seems to be on other cancers - not skin cancer. It is so important to educate about the dangers of melanoma for all ethnicities. We all know about 'slip, slop, slap, seek, slide', but people need to know you must wear the right SPF, apply sunscreen frequently, and cover up or stay out of the sun as much as possible. My kids are so covered all the time."

People with darker skin may have a lower chance of getting melanoma, but they often have thicker, more serious melanomas.

Briar hopes her story will encourage other whānau Māori to get their skin checked, even if they don't have any spots they are worried about.

"Melanoma is such an aggressive cancer, but your chances are much better if you catch it early."

"Being Māori and young, I thought the chances of me having melanoma were low. But just because we don't fit the mould of a typical skin cancer patient doesn't mean we're protected from getting it."

## Spot Check Van makes it to Bluff

**Since we started offering free skin cancer spot checks in 2021, our Nurse Educators have checked more than 13,500 people and found more than 1,360 suspicious lesions and almost 300 suspected melanomas.**

A lot of these outings are done in Melanoma New Zealand's Spot Check Van, which is doing its best to get as far and wide as possible around the country. So, it was definitely a photo-worthy moment when the van reached Bluff for the first time during our most recent trip to the South Island in December.

In January, Nurse Educator Sue Bibby, Gill Rolfe and the team were at the ASB Classic thanks to support from La Roche Posay. During the event, they provided 280 spot checks and found 29 suspicious lesions for follow up. We also held two well-attended community events in Auckland at Greenhithe and Papakura Marae.

Last month, Sue joined the FMG Spot Check Roadie and went to the Southern

Field Days, then headed to the East Coast for the Shepherdess Muster and East Coast Farming Expo. This month, she headed to Northland Field Days and then down Central Districts Field Days. In April, she will head to Te Kuiti for the Shearing Champs.

When our Nurse Educators find suspicious lesions at these events, they will refer the patients to their GPs/skin specialists and then follow up with them in the coming weeks. Our Nurse Educators also provide free online and phone consultations to anyone concerned about melanoma wanting advice, support or links to other services.

These spot checks are a wonderful way to engage in conversation about the importance of early detection, but they are

not a substitute for a full skin check and a diagnosis is not provided. We recommend that everyone has a regular full-body skin check by their GP, dermatologist, surgeon, or plastic surgeon.

We host a video on our website that teaches you how to check your own skin, and we recommend that this is done every month to keep track of any new or changing spots.

The first sign is often a change in the size, shape or colour of an existing mole or the appearance of a new mole.

If you find anything of concern, contact your doctor immediately - because if caught and treated early enough, melanoma is almost always curable.





Slip



Slop



Slap



Seek



Slide

For more information go to [melanoma.org.nz](http://melanoma.org.nz)

## Message From Our Chief Executive

### Welcome to our first edition of *Spot News* for 2024.

As always, our team has been hard at work raising awareness about melanoma prevention and early detection, as well as providing support to patients and their families. The people behind the work we do is what drives us – and hearing from you is a real privilege.

One such person is Briar Avatea. In this issue, you can read about Briar's melanoma journey and her passion for raising awareness, particularly amongst Māori. We are also grateful to Julie and Harrison Vaughan for their commitment to raising awareness about melanoma. Julie credits her and her son's melanoma diagnoses to her late friend Polly who, following her own diagnosis, insisted all her friends get their skin checked.

We are so appreciative of Briar, Julie and Harrison for generously sharing their experiences to help others.

The support we get from our corporate partners also helps us to reach larger audiences with our lifesaving messages. We are delighted to welcome several new partners and supporters to our Melanoma New Zealand family – La Roche Posay, CARTERS Building Supplies, Just

Cuts and Karma Drinks. They join our other fantastic corporate partners and supporters – FMG, Burnsco, Lidgard Shades and MSD – all of which provide us with vital funding and far-reaching platforms to share our key messages.

Last month, the Marketing Association held its third Keith Norris Charity Golf Cup, raising \$70,000 for Melanoma New Zealand. Events such as this are a brilliant fundraising, fun-raising and friend-raising opportunity, and we are so grateful to be the beneficiary. We are also glad to help with these events in any way we can. So, if you have any ideas or are interested in running a fundraising event, please get in touch to see how we can help.

Our Nurse Educators have been travelling around the country providing education and free skin cancer spot checks, including a South Island road trip to Christchurch, Tekapo, Oamaru, Dunedin and Invercargill, as well as attending events such as the Queenstown Marathon, the ASB Classic and the Marlborough A&P Show, Northland and Central Districts Field Days as part of the FMG Spot Check Roadie.

Word of our spot check events spreads rapidly, and although we try to see as many people at these events as possible, if anyone can't be seen, we do remind people that we also offer free online and phone consultations to discuss any concerns (bookings can be made on our website).

Looking ahead, we are recruiting another Nurse Educator and a newly-created Counsellor role to increase our patient support service, allowing Melanoma New Zealand to establish patient and family support groups, a patient-led advisory group, and offer more one-to-one support consultations. We are so pleased to be able to extend our services in this area and provide greater support where it is needed most.

In the coming months, we will also share details about Melanoma New Zealand's move into funding research – watch this space!

We have a huge year ahead, and we can't wait to take you on the journey with us.



*Andrea*

**Andrea Newland**  
Chief Executive  
Melanoma New Zealand



A few members of our team working at the Keith Norris Charity Golf Cup

# The MA Throws Another Great Golf Gig!

**It was a fantastic day out on the course at the Marketing Association's third annual Keith Norris Charity Golf Cup in support of Melanoma New Zealand.**

The event was held at the Royal Auckland and Grange Golf Club in February, with the support of key event sponsors, Google, Cartology, Foodstuffs, CARTERS and La Roche Posay.

Melanoma New Zealand Ambassador and former Silver Ferns Captain Adine Wilson, together with her husband and former All Black and Black Cap Jeff Wilson, took part in the event and generously agreed to offer themselves up as an auction prize too, with the successful bidder and a friend winning a round of golf with Adine and Jeff at Te Arai Golf Club. Melanoma patient and advocate Vickie Hudson-Craig also took part on the day, together with her friend Jessica Reid. \$70,000 was raised for Melanoma New Zealand, which will go towards helping to fund our vital awareness initiatives and support for patients and their families navigating their melanoma journey.



Jessica Reid, Vickie Hudson-Craig, Jeff and Adine Wilson

## Spot Prize in Place

**Thanks to Lidgard Shades, the students and staff at Te Kura o Te Kauaeranga – Thames South School now have much more protection from the sun when they play outdoors.**

Te Kura o Te Kauaeranga – Thames South School was the winner of our 2023 Get Spotted Spot Prize and won this fantastic 49m<sup>2</sup> shade sail, which included four steel posts and installation, worth almost \$20,000, kindly provided by Lidgard Shades.

We look forward to seeing all the entries for our 2024 spot prize when our Get Spotted campaign kicks off in October. We will reveal more details about the campaign in an upcoming edition of *Spot News*.



Te Kura o Te Kauaeranga – Thames South School's new shade sail

## Will You Help Save A Life?

Every donation we receive from you, our wonderful donors, goes towards supporting the urgent work we do at Melanoma New Zealand to help save lives. Tragically, we lose too many of our loved ones to this terrible disease, and yet if caught and treated early, melanoma is nearly always curable.

To try to turn around New Zealand's terrible statistics, we need to fight for better funding, as well as reach as many people as we can with our life saving messages about the vital importance of both staying safe in the sun, and getting regular skin checks.

Your generous support enables us to get the message out into the community. Will you help save a life? No donation is too small, and we are very grateful for any support you can provide.



[www.melanoma.org.nz/donate](http://www.melanoma.org.nz/donate) or phone 0800 463 526.

# A Legacy of Awareness

**Wellingtonian businesswoman Julie Vaughan will be forever grateful to her late friend Polly who, after she was diagnosed with melanoma, insisted all her friends get their skin checked.**

Sadly, Polly passed away in 2020, but it was Polly's insistence that led to Julie's melanoma diagnosis and possibly saved her life.

Raising awareness about the importance of skin checks has become a legacy that Julie and her family are continuing after two others in her extended family, plus her oldest son in his 20s, were also diagnosed with melanoma.

Julie has never been a sun worshipper and recalls getting sunburnt only once as a teenager. As far as she knows, there had never been any other previous family history of melanoma. However, on Polly's advice, Julie made an appointment in 2019 with her GP. She got her GP to check a mole on her arm, which resulted in a referral to a dermatologist. It was during the check with the dermatologist that he noticed a small pink nodule on the top of her leg, which resulted in an immediate biopsy. The results showed that it was stage 1A melanoma and required more extensive surgery to her leg to remove the melanoma.

Once diagnosed, Julie read everything she could find about melanoma and joined a few support groups on social media. She also had her eyes checked, informed her optometrist and hairdresser, and had it added to her dental information so that they could all be alert to any risk of melanoma also.

Over the last four years, Julie has had another six biopsies, including a lymph node biopsy, to rule anything out. In recent months, a tumour appeared on the hard palate in her mouth, and her specialist actioned it quickly to rule out any malignancy. Luckily, it was benign, and she had it surgically removed and grafted in January.

Since her diagnosis, as a family, they are now on high alert for any skin changes and ensure that the rest of her immediate family are having annual checks.

"High self-awareness and educating yourself are two of the most important components with a melanoma diagnosis, and as a family, we will continue to be vigilant and proactive about this."

Julie's 28-year-old son, Harrison, said he was shocked when his mother was diagnosed with melanoma because she had always been so careful.

He said he also never lay in the sun to tan, so skin checks were never on his to-do list, especially being under 30. However, because his mother encouraged the family to be vigilant, he had his first check two years ago, and it was clear.

"Then, during my check in November last year, there were two inflamed moles they were interested in – one right in between my shoulder blade and the other on the side of my waist. Unfortunately, the one

on my back was melanoma. It was on the top of the skin – so it was very easy to deal with and cut out.

Harrison is very vocal about his experience with his friends and colleagues. He actively encourages his colleagues to get their skin checked and ensures they have wide-brimmed hats and UPF protective clothing provided as part of their uniform.

"It's trickled down. You want to tell as many people as possible and share your experience. It's your life you're talking about. You have to do everything you need to protect it."

As well as encouraging family and friends to have their skin checked, Julie actively shares information from Melanoma New Zealand, including spot check details, on her social media platforms. She also tells people to wear protective clothing, a good sunhat, sunscreen, and to stay out of the sun.

"It's not until it affects your family or friends that awareness becomes more apparent. Sunbathing at a young age is where it comes back and bites you later in life. Everyone dreams of having a great tan, but people need to be more educated about the damage the sun can do and how deadly it can be."



“

If it hadn't happened to Mum, I wouldn't have gone and got it checked for another ten years, and the damage could have been far worse.

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## New Year, New Partners and Supporters

**We are thrilled to announce several new organisations that have joined the Melanoma New Zealand family of partners and supporters that share our passion for helping raise awareness about skin cancer.**

La Roche Posay sponsors Melanoma New Zealand's A-G flyer, which is distributed to around 700 GP clinics and hospital waiting rooms nationwide and helps the public learn how to check their own skin, identify any spots of concern, and seek professional advice.

La Roche Posay has also come on board to support our Nurse Educator to provide spot checks and education across the country, including in the general community and at a wide range of sporting events such as the Auckland, Queenstown and Hawke's Bay Marathons, the Winter Games and the ASB Classic. But wait, there's more! The operating costs to run our Spot Check Van are being sponsored by La Roche Posay, too.

As part of La Roche Posay's global cancer prevention programme the brand has launched its #SaveYourSkin initiative, which aims to educate and protect consumers from the harmful effects of UVA and UVB rays. Thank you, La Roche Posay, for supporting Melanoma New

Zealand's mission and for your care and commitment to helping New Zealanders embrace the #saveyourskin mantra.

Another fantastic new partner to join forces with Melanoma New Zealand is CARTERS Building Supplies. The passionate team at CARTERS already has innovative plans in place to help us raise awareness in the building industry, since both their customers and staff spend a lot of time outdoors in the elements. Together, we will change some lifetime habits around sun and skin safety and undoubtedly save lives along the way.

Two other organisations that recently came on board to help raise awareness and funds to support our work are Karma Drinks and Just Cuts.

In January, Karma Drinks launched a fun summer campaign featuring their Lemmy Lemonade character, who was adapted for the campaign to be more sun smart on a new limited-edition bottle. Karma Drinks has donated \$10,000 from the sale of its

Lemmy Lemonades to support our work educating Kiwis about the importance of melanoma prevention and early detection.

Just Cuts will be raising funds for Melanoma New Zealand within their salons throughout the country and providing all their team members with access to our online learning course to ensure they are aware of the signs of melanoma should they come across any suspicious spots while working with their clients. Just Cuts already knows first-hand about the lifesaving potential this will have - as last year, Just Cuts Hornby salon owner and stylist Michael Turner spotted an irregular mark on a client's scalp, which turned out to be advanced melanoma.

Welcome and thank you to each of these organisations that, together with our other wonderful partners and supporters (see the panel below), are helping Melanoma New Zealand to champion melanoma prevention, early detection and patient care for all New Zealanders.

## Thanks to our supporters.

