



Kōrero with Bryan

Kia ora koutou

December Reflections: Giving, Creating, and Being Present

As we come to the end of another year, it's a time to pause and reflect on what truly matters. December often brings with it a focus on receiving, whether it's gifts, accolades, or attention. But what if we shifted that focus to giving - of ourselves, our time and our attention? Rather than consuming what the world offers, this season invites us to create something meaningful, whether it's connection, joy, or even just a quiet moment.

In the hustle and bustle of modern life, it's easy to lose ourselves in distractions. Our days are filled with tasks, screens and endless noise, leaving little room to simply be with our thoughts. Yet, this constant busyness might not be the relief we hope for. Research shows that many of us would prefer discomfort, even pain, over the stillness of sitting alone with our thoughts for just 15 minutes. We avoid these quiet moments because they often bring up uncomfortable feelings. But what if those moments, instead of being filled with distraction, became opportunities for something else?

This is where the power of *sensing* comes in. Rather than drowning in the noise of our thoughts or judgments, what if we paused to notice the world around us? The warmth of the sun, the softness of a chair, the rhythm of our breath. These small, sensory details connect us to the present, helping to ground us in a reality that is richer and more fulfilling than the rush of consuming more.

Scientists have found that when we shut down our ability to feel and sense, especially in moments of sadness or stress, we risk lingering in mental ruts, leading to longer periods of anxiety or depression. On the other hand,

staying open to sensory experiences - what some researchers call "sense foraging" can help refresh our minds, pulling us out of the cycle of overthinking. (Farb, Norman (2024 September 30) **The big idea: how to use your senses to help beat depression.** *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/sep/30/the-big-idea-how-to-use-your-senses-to-help-beat-depression>)

As we enter this holiday season, let's challenge ourselves to embrace moments of stillness and give ourselves the gift of presence. Instead of defaulting to consumption - of things, of media, of noise why not practice creating? Whether it's through a shared meal, a heartfelt conversation or a simple act of kindness, we can create connection and meaning. Give yourself a break from constant busyness, not by filling your time with distractions, but by allowing yourself to fully sense the world around you. Take a moment to notice the breeze on your face, the texture of the ground beneath your feet, or the smell of something delicious baking in the oven. These simple sensations are there to remind us of the richness in life, the beauty in slowing down and truly being present.

So, this December let's focus on giving and creating - giving ourselves time, space, and grace, and creating moments of connection, joy and peace. It's in these moments that we can find true wellbeing, not in what we consume, but in what we nurture and share.

Ngā mihi nui

Bryan



Easter Egg

Everyone knows what an Easter egg is, right??? It's usually a chocolate egg or decorated hard-boiled egg, hidden somewhere for children to find.

Do you know the other definition of Easter egg? It's something snuck into a piece of media like a movie or a *newsletter*. We've hidden an easter egg in this month's newsletter and the first five people to find and identify it and contact Bryan will get a prize, the first being one of the weekly fruit and veggie boxes!



Craft at Stanmore and Puriri

At Stanmore on **Wednesday 4th December** at 1pm we will be making paper Christmas decorations. These will be made from recycled paper. You can make a few for yourself to take home and we will also make some together for decorating the Stanmore Road house.

At Puriri we will have a craft day on the **Thursday 5th December**. At 10am we have card making - a great opportunity to make some Christmas cards or tags to give to loved ones. Then from 1pm have Kirstee from CanBead coming to teach us how to make beaded bookmarks and suncatchers. This is a free session aimed at beginners. If you have attended a Canbead session before, please remember to bring along your tool kits.



Rachel

Raft Building at Diamond Harbour

Friday 13th December at 9:30am, Stanmore (limit of 8 members)

Come along and see if you and your team can make a raft that floats! You do not need to have any experience with raft building, we just ask that you are happy to swim in open water under staff supervision! We will supply all the equipment including life jackets.



You will need to bring togs, towel, sunscreen, water, lunch and most likely a change of clothing.

Rangiora Pānui

The phrase of the month that we would like you to practise is :

Ko koe ā runga – You're the best

Kia ora koutou, we hope you are enjoying the warmer weather. We are excited for the start of Raumati - Summer, so we can be active outdoors.

We are having a trip to Christchurch which includes a picnic lunch at the *Sign of The Takahe Reserve* on **Monday 2nd December**.



Our Christmas Lunch is on again at the Richmond Club. This year it will be on **Wednesday 11th December at 11:30am**.

So, get ready to dress up in a fabulous Christmas outfit and have some fun! We will have two vans travelling from Rangiora so everyone can come along!

Step Ahead is open over the Christmas/New Year period except for the statutory days. We will be meeting up with the other bases at various locations, so book in for the days that suit you and remember to be prepared with hats, sunscreen, and water bottles.

We have been listening to your ideas and are ticking off the craft suggestions starting with tote bags on **Monday 23rd December**. Make something you love or a last-minute Christmas gift for someone 😊

"The best way to capture moments is to pay attention. This is how we cultivate mindfulness".

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Anna and Rachel

Tech Group/Nature Group

Thursday 12th December at 1pm, Stanmore

Utilise technology to learn more about the natural world. This is an outside-based combined tech/nature group where we'll be using an application available for download on smartphones to identify plants and birds. We'll chat about different ways to use tech like this in the outdoors and fun facts about the species we find as we go.



Olivia

Celebrating a Kiwi December Together

As December sweeps in, we find ourselves embracing the unique summertime spirit of the season here in New Zealand. While snow blankets the northern hemisphere, we're enjoying longer, sunlit days filled with strawberries, backyard barbecues, and beach outings. Our holiday cheer might look a bit different - think sunshine and pōhutukawa trees in bloom, but it's every bit as joyful.



December is also a perfect time to connect with each other. This year, as part of our wrap-up events we're planning some special gatherings across all our locations. We'll be sharing stories, celebrating achievements, and surprising everyone with a little treat or two (more about that below!). Plus, we've woven a little fun into the mix for those paying attention: Can you spot the *hidden kiwi* in this newsletter? If you can find it, bring it up at one of our events, and you might just get an extra holiday surprise!

Our goal this December is to celebrate in true Kiwi style. So, whether you're headed to the beach, planning a getaway, or just enjoying a classic BBQ with loved ones, we hope this season brings you warmth and connection. And don't forget to keep an eye out for a hidden kiwi- it might just bring a little extra joy your way!

Ashburton Pānui

December will be a fun month for Ashburton with a trip to Peel Forest, three Christmas meals and our first trip to the Ashburton Golf Driving Range. There will be two vans travelling to the Step Ahead Christmas Party at Richmond Club so please dress up and come along for a fun day!

We are lucky that our member Laura K has her own official therapy dog that she brings along to the group so we can all enjoy his company. Thanks Laura – we love Ted!

Jen and Anjie



Ted the therapy dog



Enjoying the A&P Show

Saying Goodbye to Petra

Petra, our sewing tutor for more than a decade, is no longer able to take the sewing groups at Step Ahead.



We will have a farewell for her on **Friday 6th December at 2pm, Stanmore**. If you have attended the sewing groups at Stanmore Rd or Puriri St please come along to say good bye and wish her well.

SoonMay, an accomplished sewer will be able to continue with offering sewing groups at both bases. They may look a little different from how they have previously been run, so please talk to SoonMay, Kevin or me if you would like more information.

Di

Step Ahead Christmas Lunch

Wednesday 11th December at 11:30am, Richmond Club (\$10)

It's time to celebrate the end of another year! An invitation to our lunch will have been included with your monthly newsletter and programme so please read the details and book in early.

Please make your own way to the restaurant if possible as there will be more members coming than we are able to provide transport for.

The menu will be available when you book so, please make your menu choice then.

Lunch will be followed by entertainment.

Christmas Theme dress up. Raffle prizes will be drawn.

Bookings are essential and payment of **(\$10)** is required by **Friday 6th December**.



Outdoor Skills Sessions

Thursday 12th December at 10am, Stanmore

Following member feedback we are introducing Outdoor Skills Sessions as an opportunity to learn some tips and tricks to help make your future outdoor adventures easy breezy.

Ever wondered how much water do I need to bring on this walk? How many layers do I need for today's tramp? Are these shoes okay for this track? What's all the hype about walking poles?



Bring your burning questions and whatever gear you already own and we'll discuss it all in our first session focused on "Preparing for a Tramp".

Olivia

Individual IT Assistance

Ryan W, a recent new member at Step Ahead, comes to us with a great deal of IT (Information Technology) experience and has generously offered his time to provide individualised tech support in December on **Tuesdays from 1pm - 3pm.**

Each session will go for a half hour and must be booked through Bryan. To book in please ring or email: bryan@stepahead.org.nz

Holiday Programme

Step Ahead is only closed for the statutory days. Between Christmas and New Year and the first Friday in January we have a holiday programme planned.

In December we plan to have an easy-going day at Hagley Park, a day out at Orton Bradley Park and a Scavenger Hunt Day around the Margaret Mahy playground area in the city.

There's a combination of walking, biking, playing frisbee etc on offer, or relaxing and reading a book in the shade if that sounds more like you.



Hopefully the weather will be kind to us, and we'll be able to take advantage of all the opportunities that the great outdoors has to offer in the warmer weather.

Enabling Good Lives

As we hop into our busiest month of the year, I want to remind you all to breathe. December is a time of year when it can be filled with joy, loneliness, love, or sadness for those around you. Remember to be kind, to yourself and others.

Following in Puriri's footsteps the 'What's Happening this Month' will be at all other bases as an activity, once a month. Encouraging members and staff to bring forward ideas and events you know of around your community. Look out for it on your programme and bring ideas! Knowledge is power.

As we step into another month, I have had the pleasure of helping members one-on-one with a range of different things. Services I am also available for are goal setting, personal training (outdoor exercise), and extra support at an appointment. If you would like to chat about what I can offer. Do not hesitate to ask. I encourage you to connect. Connect with your community, a neighbour, or even Step Ahead. You are not alone.

Kaylee

Farewell to Karen

Tuesday 17th December at 3pm, Stanmore



We bid a fond farewell to Karen, who has been an integral part of our team since April 2013.

She has inspired countless members through activities from stone carving and mosaics to various other creative endeavours. Karen's role has been marked by her ability to create a warm, inclusive environment that nurtures creativity and self-expression. Beyond organising and leading activities, she has always encouraged members to explore new techniques, embrace challenges, and find joy in the process of creating.

Karen's personal passion for the arts has been a gift, bringing an added layer of expertise and authenticity to her work.

We are grateful for Karen's many contributions and wish her all the best in retirement.

Come along to say goodbye and wish her well. Refreshments provided.

Create Holiday eCards

Thursday 19th December at 2pm, Stanmore

Use Canva to create a Holiday eCard to send out to be emailed out to Step Ahead members in time for the holidays! Bring your own device or borrow a spare laptop to create your own personalised cards to send out to your loved ones.



Olivia

Basic First Aid with St John

Monday 2nd December at 10:30am, Stanmore

Make the most of this FREE 1 hour training session with St John. You do not need to have any previous experience or knowledge of first aid, just a willingness to learn. Over the hour you will learn to how identify a cardiac arrest, perform effective CPR and how to use an AED.



Tom

Roller Skating

Wednesday 4th December at 1:30pm, Stanmore (\$5)

Keen to get on a pair of roller skates? We are heading down to Wharenui Sports Centre for some fun!. No experience is needed and skates are provided.

Please bring your own helmet, and other safety gear if you have it (knee pads, wrist guards) There will a limited amount of gear you can borrow.



SoonMay

Christmas Day

Wednesday 25th December, 11.30am - 2pm (\$5)

Step Ahead staff will be opening the Stanmore Road house for a midday meal on Christmas Day for members who would otherwise be on their own for the day.

Pickup at Puriri St at 11:15am. Please book in as usual so we know how many to cater for.



Nutrition

Kia ora everyone, I hope you are already sorted with the last Christmas shopping for your whānau and close friends. It is that time of the year when we have to be extra caring toward the people that are always present in our lives and to share memorable times together.

But we also must be mindful of ourselves too. It is easy to overindulge with treats that make us feel good like sweets, roasts and gingerbread cookies but let's try to be mindful and don't skip the veggies! They are full of essential nutrients for our body.

For the month of December, the Nutrition topics are:

- **9th December, Rangiora: Food Labels.** Bring down your favourite non-alcoholic drink or packed snack and we will have a discussion about what is in it - you will be surprised of the answer. There will be further discussion about what are the common health conditions related to processed food and how to prevent them.
- **16th December, Stanmore: Trendy Diets.** Will it work for me? Let's review the popular diets available and discuss who are they suited for, what are the foods that you need to avoid, how to manage the nutritional intake and the health outcomes.
- **20th December, Puriri: Let's talk about Fats.** De-myth the reputation of fats, learn where to find them and why they are essential for our health.

Also, I am happy to let you know that the seedling project at Stanmore is still going well, so hopefully this month we can start to give out the seedlings to take home for those who are interested. It is very easy to keep herbs and vegetables in a pot over summer even if we have little space. Some fruit and vegetables like tomato, zucchini, beans and capsicum can thrive in decent size pots and guarantee you a fresh product at zero expense.



Come and talk to me for tips and suggestions, I will be more than happy to help!

Marco



The Green Team recently celebrated six months of regular attendance at the Park Run. Great effort team!

Puriri Pigeon Post

Puriri Christmas Meal
Thursday 19th December (\$2).



"Community Christmas" is the theme of our Christmas event this year at Puriri Street. A chance for all members to contribute to a fun celebration of Christmas including the opportunity to donate goods to create parcels for the charities in the wider community.

How can you get involved?

- preparing the house for guests
- decorating
- preparing food at Puriri
- providing some food (purchased & unopened please)
- bring a Christmas photo to display
- bring a donation for the SPCA or City Mission (food-purchased & unopened please) or toys, blankets etc
- plan an activity, game or quiz
- or let us know what you could assist with

Timeline for Puriri Christmas Meal

12th December - Book in with details of how/what you would like to contribute

18th December - 1pm early preparation, furniture

19th December

- 10am - Preparation (decorations, food)
- 12:30pm - Meal
- 1pm - Activities
- 2pm - Refreshments
- 2:30pm - Activities

Library Account and Service

At Puriri we currently have an account with the Christchurch City Libraries and we receive a delivery of books and other resources every six weeks. This includes audio books, large print books, fiction, non-fiction and quiz resources.



If you find it a challenge to get books from your local library, this may suit you instead? We can also customise what we have. Please let me know if you are interested or come and have a look at the selection.

Kevin



Stanmore member Sarah created a wonderful Nativity scene



Staff member Marco celebrated a BIG birthday recently

Step Ahead Trust

167 Stanmore Road
Christchurch 8011
03 3894001 or 0800 688 732
www.stepahead.org.nz
info@stepahead.org.nz



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