

# Person of the Month: Mike Grigg



*Mike Grigg was a father, a friend and a strong advocate for the community. He was highly valued by everyone who knew him and made a positive impact on the lives of many people. Unfortunately, Mike passed away early last year. He will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him. We interviewed Dane Dougan, the CEO of Autism NZ and a friend of Mike to celebrate not only Mike's work but also who he was as a person.*

## How would you describe Mike Grigg?

Mike was one of the biggest autism and community advocates I have come across in my 5 years in this role. He was one of the first adults to come in and sit down with me when I first became CEO. Mike described the meeting as an opportunity to “size me up”. Over the last 5 years Mike would pop in at least once a week for a coffee or a chat. We certainly got to know Mike really well and when he passed away earlier this year it was a very sad day. Mike was well known in the community and one of his biggest goals was to create an inclusive community in Hutt Valley. He never gave up trying on that.

## What was his relationship with Autism?

David his adult son has autism. He is currently in a Laura Fergusson trust home, which is up here in Lower Hutt. David still pops in here from time to time, which is lovely. Although undiagnosed, Mike was a proud autistic adult who used his unique perspective to advocate on behalf of others in similar situations.

## What do you think were some of his biggest achievements?

I think Mike would tell you one of his biggest achievements was stopping the closure of special school units around the country. Back in the 90s Mike and 15 others went up against the labour government at the time. He fought it all the way forward along with other supporters and he was a big part in managing to keep the special need units attached to schools open.

I think one of his greatest achievements is what he did for his son David, getting him into a residential care space was a big achievement over the last few years. David is now very well looked after and in a good environment. Mike was very happy about that.

Mike also worked closely with local authorities, so they knew David really well and they knew some of the things that could potentially be challenging for David. Mike worked really hard to build a relationship with them to make sure there was always a smooth environment for David and the authorities. He did a really good job with that.

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### What was his biggest strength?

Passion was definitely his biggest strength. He was very passionate about trying to create change for the autistic community and creating an inclusive environment for everyone. That was his passion, that's what he wanted to do and he worked really hard at it.

### What do you think was his ultimate goal?

To create an inclusive community. He made really good progress and was able to form strong relationships. I think that was best seen at his funeral. It was opened by the mayor of Lower Hutt and the speaker of the house Trevor Mallard was there and spoke. Both the sitting MPs from our area were there from National and Labour. Mike got to know people well and they all knew Mike well.

### Why was his work so important to the autistic community?

Just that he tried really hard to create change for the autistic community and to make sure everyone could live to their full potential. Mike had gone through a lot on his own to get to where he was and to be able to advocate so strongly for the community was his biggest asset and achievement. To have people like Mike in the community is extremely important in order to create change.

### What will you miss the most about Mike?

I miss Mike every day. I miss his phone calls, his unannounced visits, his friendship and his passion for what he does and the way he could get things done. He just did things we couldn't do. It was amazing to see.

If you could sum him up in three words what would they be?

- \* Passionate
- \* Loyal
- \* Friend.