

Vale – Dr. Alison Louise Cooper (nee Webb)

Emily Jones, Annabel Grant, Patty Govender, Rachael McEvoy, and Paula Leslie

Our dear friend and colleague Alison died in October last year after a long battle with cancer. To those of us at Te Whatu Ora Waitematā and Massey University, Alison was a dear friend and colleague, who achieved a great deal in her profession, yet was very humble about these achievements. With input from her longstanding friend and colleague Paula, we would like the wider speech-language therapy community to know more about her.

Alison graduated with a degree in English from Newcastle University in 1988 and worked in an unrelated field until moving to do her MSc in Clinical Communication Studies at the City of London University in 1992. She then moved back up north, starting her first job at North Tees Hospital where she met Paula, a final-year student. Alison became one of Paula's supervisors, bonding over a shared upbringing near London, but preferring life in the north of England. They had been at school only 10 miles apart, and at some point, visited the same village pubs!

In 1998 Paula started a research secondment to Newcastle Hospitals NHS Trust and often reflected on clinical and research work with Alison, as they felt they were both clinicians not traditional academics. In 1999 Alison met her husband Roy, marrying in 2004 and bringing up their sons Daniel and Thomas in Norton, Stockton-on-Tees. During this time Alison undertook her

PhD in Voice at Newcastle University part time while continuing to practice at North Tees. Alison graduated with her PhD in 2005.

In 2010, Alison moved to Aotearoa from the United Kingdom, starting her first role in NZ as a 'speechie' at Waitakere Hospital. Despite the "culture shock" of swapping England for NZ, Alison fitted right into the west, and the west was firmly home from then on.

It was there that she met and became firm friends with Rachael. They were a close-knit team of two! Alison had a wide range of skills and knowledge to share and did this in her inimitable humble manner. She also utilised her skills in voice to support a voice clinic at North Shore Hospital and supported a number of students on clinical placements.

In 2013, Alison joined the team at Massey University as a senior professional clinician, teaching the Voice Disorders and Adult Dysphagia courses as well

as working in the University Campus clinic. There she met Emily, Patty, and Annabel, her fellow clinical educators. Always an innovator, Alison set up clinical placement opportunities for our students at the then-Waitematā District Health Board and Elevate. She worked closely with Annabel and Patty at Aria Gardens Home & Hospital and the Aphasia Group. Alison initiated the longstanding interprofessional working with the nutrition and dietetics department at Massey in 2017, encouraging our students to work collaboratively to serve our clients with dysphagia and feeding difficulties across the lifespan. She aimed for high standards in her teaching, successfully gaining membership as an associate fellow of the Higher Education Academy and embracing her responsibilities as tangata Tiriti.

She made the difficult decision to retire due to her health in 2018, but continued to contribute to the profession through

providing professional development for the aphasia special interest group, and helping to mark assignments. Her door was open for social visits as well as listening and supporting us with our professional and research questions. Her wise counsel was always delivered with kindness. A favourite memory for all of us is meeting her at the Kreem café in Henderson for a coffee, or visiting her at home where a strong cup of Yorkshire Gold would be waiting and lots of conversation and laughter.

Alison was a woman of faith, who bravely took her diagnosis and made the most of her time given. She far surpassed the time the doctors advised and fulfilled the goals she set. She saw both her sons finish school and was so proud when Daniel was offered a scholarship to start his Master of Science and Thomas, his bachelor's in culinary arts. The family went on road trips and cruises around Aotearoa and went whale watching in Kaikoura, a long-held dream of Alison's.

As her friends it was always going to be hard to say goodbye, but we were all with her in her final days, and that was such a privilege and special time. She leaves us with the legacy of always looking out for our clients by researching and implementing new ideas, and sharing that with our colleagues and students. She also reminds us to make sure that despite the business of life, we make time to stop, grab a cup of Yorkshire Gold together and remember our wonderful friend. ●



Alison gaining her PhD in 2005, with Paula Leslie



Alison with Rachael McEvoy



Alison at Kreem Cafe in 2019, with SLT colleagues from Auckland City Hospital, Waitematā District Health Board, and Massey University. Left to right: Carleen Perris, Louise Hume, Robyn Gibson, Delize Delaney, Annabel Grant, Emily Jones, Patty Govender, Elizabeth Doell, Yvonne Cope



Alison, Emily Jones, Patty Govender, and Alison's son Thomas in 2019