

Living vibrantly!

Basil Fernandes, National Healthy Lifestyles Co-ordinator

Basil Fernandes is a person who is always keen to take on a challenge. He's the type of person who can convince three other Pathways staff to join him in a 100 kilometre mountain climb. He believes nothing is impossible and that if you want something enough you can achieve it. The words 'no' and 'can't' aren't in Basil's dictionary!

Basil is Pathways' National Healthy Lifestyle Co-ordinator, but he hasn't always worked in mental health. Originally from Mumbai in India, Basil's background is in medicine, physiology and nutrition. However, when Basil came to New Zealand the medical profession was crowded and there were few opportunities. It was a friend working for Pathways who suggested that he look at working in mental health.

Six years ago Basil joined Pathways as a support worker at Hamlin Road house and loved it. He started using his motivational skills and knowledge of healthy living to encourage people to get active and set diet plans. It was then he was offered a new role as Pathways' Healthy Lifestyle Co-ordinator for 12 months. Basil took on the challenge. Within six months he had proven himself and his role became permanent.

Over the years Basil has organised a range of sports and fitness groups. He's encouraged many people to train and take part in competitions, such as Auckland's Round the Bays. He even organised a group of Pathways' people to cycle from Pukekohe to Ngaruawahia! The group of eight staff and people using services trained at numerous biking events to prepare themselves for the 75 kilometre cycle.

Basil says it's truly rewarding to see people who would never usually participate in community activities getting involved, getting motivated, getting jobs and eventually living independently. "It is incredible to see that people who in the beginning wouldn't talk are now involved in a dance or pantomime. We see those who struggled to even get out of bed in the morning performing in the annual stage show for an hour or two. Watching peoples confidence grow is what keeps me going."

As Healthy Lifestyle Co-ordinator, Basil also supports many people to quit smoking. He's even worked with district health boards and the Ministry of Health to help develop smoking cessation guidelines.

Healthy living and fitness is a part of Basil's personal life in a big way too so his regime is pretty busy. "My whole day is planned so I can fit it all in. That keeps my energy high."

Just as Basil is passionate about his job and fitness, he's also passionate about family and community. "Quality family time is important. It helps me recharge, reconnect, maintain motivation and start sizing up my next big challenge. I truly believe if I want something enough I can achieve it. Nothing is impossible."