

National Story

Transplant mum tells of organ donor's gift of life

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By [Wayne Thompson](#)

Debbie Eaton looked at 600 faces in the cathedral as she spoke. Some smiled and nodded their heads in agreement, while others dabbed at their eyes with a hankie.

"I was kept alive ... I was given another chance at life ... The hard part is, how do you say thank you?" said Mrs Eaton.

Mrs Eaton was one of several people who spoke yesterday about their experience of receiving – and giving – vital organs at a service in Holy Trinity Cathedral, Parnell.

The Hamilton woman told the service that eight years ago an auto-immune disease killed her liver and she had just days to live.

But a liver from an unknown donor allowed her – at that time 27 years old and newly wed – to resume her job as a school dental therapist, after only seven weeks' convalescence.

"Since then, we have had two lovely children and I lead an ordinary life.

"Every anniversary I think about the donor family and wonder how they're going. I think about them lots of days. It was their loss and I was lucky enough they had chosen to give organs to somebody who needed them."

Carolyn and Barry Nelson, of Te Awamutu, said they had "been to hell and back" in their grief since their 19-year-old daughter Melanie was killed – an innocent victim of a car accident.

"I didn't know that she wanted to be an organ donor, though her mum did," said Mr Nelson. "They used her aorta, heart valves, liver and kidneys and bones from both legs."

Organ Donation New Zealand co-ordinator Janice Langlands said 25 New Zealanders donated organs last year. It was important, she said, that family members knew each other's wishes.



Debbie Eaton with her children Elise and Harry at Holy Trinity Cathedral, where candles were lit for organ donors. Photo / Paul Estcourt