

heart



of the home

Anya Brighthouse has used clever ideas, plus heaps of generously donated time and product to create a simple, yet beautiful, haven in a small flat for a single-parent family

I have to say right from the outset that I have loved doing this particular article. Not because of the design aspects as much as it is always an amazing thing to see how generous people can be given half a chance.

Realising that many people with small children find themselves in small flats I wanted to do a project on transforming a small living area into a child-friendly space - and I knew just the right home. Louise Poole lives in a small two-bedroom unit in Mt Wellington, Auckland. She shares the home with her five-year-old son Callum. It is a tiny unit with a small kitchen, a separate lounge, bathroom and two bedrooms. This wasn't always her life. She had a different life to this one. It was one where she was married with two small children, one of which Kian, her eldest, was born with ACC (Agenesis of the Corpus Collosum) - a condition that leaves the two hemispheres of the brain unconnected, leaving Kian with myriad permanent, chronic conditions. He would never speak, walk, run, play or cuddle Louise. But he was a beautiful boy with a gorgeous sunny spirit who seldom cried and was loved by everyone with whom he came in contact. He spent a lot of his short life in hospital and on medication to control epilepsy. In one six-month period he had 1200 seizures. Louise was relentless in her pursuit of an easier life for Kian, adapting his diet and medication to help him. She also managed to have another child, Callum. However, when Callum was six-months old, Kian suddenly died. His heart gave out at just three years of age.



So the second part of Louise's life started. Her marriage didn't survive Kian's passing. But in an effort to help other families through the same difficulties she had faced navigating the medical system, and the technicalities of grief, she went to work with Parent to Parent. Parent to Parent do exactly that - help families with resources from medical issues to funding, as well as just generally understanding the complexities of caring for a 'special needs' child.

I have always been in awe of Louise; her large heart, and wicked sense of humour and fun that have helped keep her sane. Although no longer active in Parent to Parent, she continues to help others around her with an unwavering determination.

The first time I saw Louise's house - to assess this project, I was a little taken aback. It was so much smaller than I had imagined, and was in pretty much original condition. However, the basic house was sound. The first thing I did was get Owen Wildbore from ALL ABOUT FLOORS to have a look at the floors in the lounge (which measure just 3 metres by 5.) I told him a little about Louise and her history and it was at this point that something really remarkable happened, which changed what we did in that house so completely.

I mentioned that long-term Louise was hoping to remove the wall between the lounge and kitchen to open up the space. Owen explained there was little point in stripping the floor in the lounge on its own, and to take the wall out first would be a better option



all round (of course!). He wandered off around the house and when he came back to me offered that if I got the wall removed, he would sand all the floors in the house for nothing. For nothing! And so from there this neat project all fell into place. RESENE, as always, kindly supplied the paint. Rich Graham from PLANET PROJECTS got his guys to do all the painting not only in the lounge and kitchen but also the hallway and bathroom. For nothing! Paul Stewart from PS ELECTRICAL refitted every switch, socket and light fitting in the house. For nothing! He also got one of his suppliers, J.A RUSSELL, to supply most of the electrical fittings. Again for nothing!

I have a great guy I use for kitchens, Basil, from BASIL SCOTT CABINETMAKERS. I asked him in to see what we could do with the existing kitchen. He was rather direct

and told us to bin it! In its place, Basil would put in a whole new kitchen including tapware and sink. For nothing! AND He got AUCKLAND LAMINATES to supply the benchtop at cost.

The last piece of the puzzle was to take out the wall. Bruce Parker of ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN put the plans through council and even paid the fees! Phil Hathaway from PARAMOUNT CONSTRUCTION did the building work at cost. His builder, Chris Norman, did an amazing job working on it in his own time, for which were incredibly grateful. For nothing as well! How generous can New Zealanders be?

Even while I am writing this, I am still amazed at the incredible good nature of people, and what they have given to Louise. We both had a bit of a cry on the day we took these photos, as although it has been

a very long six months, what a beautiful home she now has.

When I originally thought of doing this article I wanted to impress on people the single biggest mistake I think many make. They forget to make their beautiful house into a home. Too often we look at a magazine and try to replicate something we have seen without adding our own 'self' in there. We buy furniture for one particular spot, or buy a whole roomful at one time because it looks so great in the showroom. We buy furniture too cheaply so we can have it now. Part of what we like about furniture showrooms and magazines that they all look very perfect with no clutter or day-to-day mess. But we still have to live in them! Our own homes can never look as perfect as magazine-styled houses because someone lives in them! With Louise I tried



to get her to see what she wanted to have the house look like long-term and buy things, within her budget, that could be kept for a long time. She already had most of the things she needed. But there were a few extras. She needed small, practical pieces for the small spaces. William Morris the 19th Century designer and craftsman said (and I paraphrase) 'Surround yourself with things that are both beautiful and practical' – and in a small space this is especially important.

In the kitchen the colour on the walls (as with all the house) is Thordon cream by RESENE. The ceiling and joinery colour is half villa white. We chose oyster as the cabinet colour, and found the small table which

folds down when not needed on TRADE ME (for \$100). Louise spent many man/woman hours stripping it herself. She finished it with Danish oil for a lovely sheen. The chairs were finished with a white wax so they could easily get a bit of a knock and still look great. Louise was a landscape gardener so all the containers (bought from French Country seconds shop for \$4 for 3) are filled with her plants. The extra cupboard we put in next to the washing machine was from Bunnings @\$140 which we painted the same colour as the walls. The baskets on the top (again for storage) are from Country Road @\$15 each. They give texture and extra colour, as do ser-viettes and tea towels from Wallace Cotton.



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For the lounge we bought a cube bookcase from TARGET furniture @\$499 (they gave us a very good deal). It is off-white and a simple piece that holds both beautiful and practical things. I found all the glassware in Louise's cupboards and it looks great all bunched together. The bookcase will hold books, precious things, photo albums and boxes for Callum's toys and art stuff. The old chair in the corner, also off TRADE ME for \$80, had a loose cover made for it. The floor lamp was from LIGHTING PLUS @\$59 on sale. We changed the white shade to a textured cream one for \$24. The other chair was re-finished by Joshua Tree (for very little) and the fabric, IKO in the colour linen, supplied by Charles Parsons @\$50 per metre.

I felt the curtains would be very important in this room – they are in most rooms. We used scrim linen @\$33 per metre donated to us by MARTHAS in Newmarket. It gives a lot of privacy while still letting in the light. We had simple undercurtain that we kept very flat underneath for warmth. The curtain railing was from HARVEYS @\$140.

Several things in this room I really love: A small wooden suitcase made by Louise's grandfather, and an old jarra box from Louise's school. I love the old trunk holding mementos of Kian and the photos on the wall which make it Louise's home. We particularly like the artwork and the beautiful cushions. A frame from NEST @\$120 holds a piece of wall hanging from TRADE AID @\$70, made from antique pieces of saris stitched together, plus two small pillows from the same fabric. The rest of the cushions were given by WALLACE COTTON. I love all the textures together! We put feather inners in all the cushions which also come from MARTHAS @\$22 each. Louise chose the tv cabinet. She was much more confident about her choices now we had spent this time creating her own 'space'. ■

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