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# Rodney Times

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Your place, your paper



Gaylene Chambers said the quiet sensory hour can help a number of people, particularly those with neurological or physical disabilities. **BRAD FLAHERTY/STUFF**

## Sensory supermarket hour

**BRAD FLAHERTY**

Imagine if shopping amid bright lights and loud noises was so overwhelming it compelled someone to bang their head on the supermarket floor.

That was the experience for the autistic son of Orewa mum Gaylene Chambers when they visited supermarkets near their home on Auckland's Hibiscus Coast.

Rikki, 12, was diagnosed with autism eight years ago, and the family's experience has led Chambers to campaign for sensory friendly environments.

Chambers' lobbying has paid off and Countdown in Silverdale, north Auckland, has begun a weekly quiet sensory hour for its shoppers.

Countdown supermarkets in Auckland's Three Kings and Marton, near Palmerston North, already hold quiet hours.

"The quiet sensory hour can help a number of people, particularly those with neurological or physical disabilities," Chambers said.

"It makes their whole sensory experience not so overloaded and stimulated so they can cope with the world easier and not have a potential meltdown - like my son can."

Between 9am-10am every Tuesday, Countdown dims its



Once a week, shoppers at Silverdale Countdown in north Auckland enjoy a "quiet hour". **BRAD FLAHERTY/STUFF**

aisle lights, turns off the music and televisions, and limits the use of flat deck machinery, which can bang and crash.

It's been such a success that its staff have taken to whispering

during the hour.

"The team have embraced it tremendously well," store manager Ian Campbell said.

"We've had some real good comments, and when you walk

**"We have a lot of schools around here, and a lot of rest homes, too. It's a really diverse population, and it's our pleasure to deliver this."**

**Ian Campbell**

around the shop you see the team actually whispering, so they've really enjoyed playing their part and contributing to it."

Campbell said he jumped at the opportunity to offer the hour: "We have a lot of schools around here, and a lot of rest homes, too. It's a really diverse population, and it's our pleasure to deliver this."

The store would like to start offering the hour in the afternoon as well, he said.

It's good progress for Chambers, who in 2018 started Chambers & Co, an autism appeal to help raise awareness, as well as starting on a number of projects aimed at helping people with special needs have positive experiences in their community.

"What helped make it successful was sharing a little bit of my life and my experience with the team at Countdown," Chambers said.

"Our son is 12, but has the cognitive ability of a 3-year-old. The supermarket would be so

overwhelming for him he would start throwing himself on the ground, possibly remove his clothing, or bang his head on the floor."

"That was just torment, and in the end we just wouldn't bring him."

The family got around it by shopping online, but realised that was a temporary fix and did not provide a learning environment for Rikki.

She said the hour catered for any disability: "Cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, dementia, Parkinson's and brain injuries - it just gives them a chance to get out in the community comfortably."

The hour was also enjoyed by the elderly in the community, she said.

"It's quite comforting to know there is a time you can come in and feel a bit more at ease."

"It's a win, win, win situation. The store has got a sale with a customer, the community is a better place, and we are all working together for acceptance, awareness and inclusion."





## Nice neighbour

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would like to nominate Dave and Christine Croucher as they are certainly extraordinary neighbours. We have been the fortunate family to have moved in next to them almost five years ago. They became not only our friends, but also our family - especially as we do not have any other family in New Zealand. It has often been said that one cannot choose one's family, well we certainly chose well. They look after our property when we go away, tirelessly water our pot plants, mow our lawns and feed our fish. Dave surprised me on one of my birthdays with a beautiful handmade wooden bird table ... even hanging it up in our tree! Christine always comes to my rescue when I am baking and suddenly realise that I need a cup of sugar or an egg. I lost my mum last year and I had to travel abroad - Dave and Christine were there for my husband and kids, providing many meals, a taxi service for the kids and shoulders to lean on. Recently they went above and beyond: the kids and I arrived home to a burst pipe in the vanity in our upstairs bedroom, causing a major flood in the bedroom below. My husband was still at work so the kids did what came natural to them and ran to Dave to come and help. He just heard "water", flood and their panicked voices and he was there in a flash. In his calm manner he soon had the situation well in hand - their quick action was to hire a carpet cleaning machine immediately from the local supermarket to extract the excess water from the carpet. The insurance company said this was the best thing that could have been done. So thanks to Dave and Christine who yet again saved the day! A huge thanks to them for always being there for us.

- Nominated by Catherine Piers



## NICE NEIGHBOUR

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