



Programme offers hope for stutterers

By Anne Clarke

For seven years, Hamilton man Kevin Singers has been mostly free of a problem he had been trying to hide his whole life – his stutter.

“Life was absolute hell growing up,” Kevin said.

“In speech therapy we were made to speak into a tape recorder and they would play it back to us. It was horrible.”

Those years of struggling came to a head in 2000, when Kevin attended the first New Zealand-held course of the internationally-acclaimed McGuire Programme.

Before the programme, Kevin spent years learning to ‘manage’ his stutter.

He hid it with word ‘tricks’ typical of stammerers, such as avoiding difficult words, or missing them out of a sentence completely.

“Nobody even noticed. Subconsciously, I would be 12 words ahead of myself,” he said.

It was after returning to New Zealand from his OE in his 20s that Kevin found the confidence to do whatever he wanted, despite his stutter; an attitude he attributes to the support of his wife.

But although he had managed a number of businesses throughout his life, before the programme Kevin could not even bring himself to answer the phone.

On the four-day course, Kevin was joined by around 25 fellow stutterers, from bike mechanics to teachers, and although he admits to feeling apprehensive about the programme, by the end he was amazed at how much his speech had improved.

American man Dave McGuire developed the McGuire Programme in 1994, by combining the teachings of Dr Joseph Sheehan, whose solution to stuttering was self-acceptance and assertiveness, with the coastal breathing techniques of American opera singer Leonard Del Ferro.

McGuire Programme New Zealand regional director Chris Bland said stuttering was not a speech problem, but a communication problem – a social phobia.

“It is a fear that every time you speak, whether it is a particular word or a personal point of view, you will not be able to get the words out,” he said.

Chris said the main goal of the McGuire Programme was eloquence, not fluency – fluency comes as a result of

being eloquent.

Students follow the ‘Eight Laws of Dos and Don’ts’, and learn a range of directions and techniques including breathing, formulating what you are going to say before you say it, eye contact, and diaphragm exercises.

Once a student has paid for the initial course, they have lifelong access to resources, refresher courses and support.

Kevin has managed the Hamilton branch of Warehouse Stationery for more than 10 years, and he is confident enough to answer the phone, hold meetings, and speak to anyone.

“This programme, or any programme, is not a 100 per cent cure,” Kevin said. “It is hard work, and my stutter still returns sometimes, when I am tired, or under a bit of pressure.”

Despite this, Kevin said going through the McGuire Programme was one of the best decisions he has ever made.

“If I notice anyone who has trouble speaking, I’ll tell them about it.”