

Melissa Vining

Melissa Vining is a Southlander known for her dedication to improving cancer treatment in New Zealand. After her husband Blair was diagnosed with terminal bowel cancer in late 2018, Melissa and Blair realized the significant lack of resources in the public health service in their region.

Motivated by their own experiences, the couple embarked on an arduous campaign to advocate for better cancer treatment.

Blair's petition to establish a national cancer agency garnered support from over 140,000 New Zealanders. Additionally, they founded the Southland Charity Hospital Trust, aiming to create a community hospital to provide free colonoscopies and dental care to the people of Otago and Southland denied care by the Southern District Health Board.

Tragically, Blair passed away in October 2019, but Melissa continued their mission relentlessly. The community has worked tirelessly to build the charity hospital which opened in February 2025

Melissa Vining's unwavering commitment to making a positive impact on cancer treatment in New Zealand earned her a well-deserved place as a two-time semi-finalist for the prestigious Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year award. Her story is nothing short of amazing and serves as an inspiration to many.



Sarah McCarthy



Sarah McCarthy (Dip Journ) is a not-quite-born and for-the-most-part -bred Southlander with a passion for words, stories, collaboration, the arts, and Pinot Noir.

Sarah has worked in Southland for many years helping people tell their stories as a reporter and columnist for The Southland Times and The Eye and now The Southland Tribune, where she has a weekly column Thirsty Thursday.

Sarah is an experienced MC, who dabbles in event management, has interviewed a former PM in front of 900 people, and helps to create a vibrant arts community in the South.

Sarah is also a Shakespeare in the Park Trust trustee and a Kind Women Trust trustee.

And a busy mum.