

Bex loves Food for Love

Bex Sarginson

Bex Sarginson is all heart. That's what stands out when you meet her, whether or not you know she runs Food for Love and spends more hours a week than she can count coordinating the delivery of home-cooked meals to people in need all around the Upper Clutha.

That's on top of being a wife and mother to husband Karsten Ludwig (a local gasfitter and plumber) and their daughters Bella, 13, and Zoe, 8. And working five days a week as a cleaner.

Bex has been the coordinator of Food for Love since July 2016. She and her team provide meals and baking to families or individuals who need a little help. Food for Love was the brainchild of Wanaka's Louise Carney who started it in April 2016. Bex joined her soon afterwards.

"I heard about that little boy from Auckland with a brain tumour who was coming down here for a holiday with his family," Bex said. "I thought, the least we can do is fill the fridge. So I joined Food for Love."

Fifteen months on Food for Love has 70 volunteer cooks who provide a home cooked meal about once a month and 30 more who do baking.

"If they can, I like my cooks to take the meal they make to the family it's for. When meals are delivered for the first time there's often lots of tears," Bex said. "And I often get messages from my cooks saying it's the best thing they have ever done."

Of all the people cooking for Food for Love, only one has pulled out. But as more people are referred to help, Bex could do with more help, especially with pick ups and deliveries.

"All the running around is a bit of a killer." She would also like to form a committee, to share the load of organisation.

Food for Love was runner-up in the Health and Wellbeing section of the Trustpower Queenstown Lakes District Community awards earlier this week, Bex was thrilled.

"I cried and cried. I was so happy for everyone who helps Food for Love. I want to use the prize money [\$250] to have a party for everyone."

Food for Love was runner-up to Baskets of Blessings, a similar organisation based in Queenstown which has been operating for four years.

In the bus on the way back to Wanaka after the awards ceremony everyone was trying to think of ways to help Food for Love, Bex said. One result was Gina Dempster of Link Upper Clutha has offered to help Bex find some funding for delivery expenses (namely petrol).

Whatever happens, Bex has no regrets about joining Food for Love and becoming the coordinator.

"It's incredible to be able to help. There are so many people out there without support who could do with a hand."

People receiving meals from them for all sorts of reasons, but the main ones include sickness, surgery and childbirth. Others need help after a separation or sudden unexpected financial hardship.

"Just having someone turn up who cares, when you are just home from hospital, or in some kind of trouble, is amazing," Bex said. "There are a lot of people here with no family around to support them."

People are referred to Food for Love by phone or through the group's facebook page. No explanations are required.

"All we want to know is how many people we are cooking for and if they have any food intolerances," Bex said. Some people just get one meal, but if there is a need for ongoing support Food for Love will try to provide it.

She has approached some local food businesses for support, and some

have come forward, so some food is provided for free, which is always a great help, Bex said. Individuals who have received meals often give something back when they can too. Individuals also often supply fruit and vegetables from their gardens, or other treats. Bex has access to a chest freezer so is able to store food which can be frozen.

"People are so kind and generous and I've met so many amazing people. That's the best thing about doing this. The people I've met."

To volunteer, nominate or learn more, visit the Food for Love Facebook page.

PHOTO: Caroline Harker