

# Beads a symbol of cancer battle



By JULIE KAIO

At the tender age of 3, little Kiriana Ronaki has fought battles beyond her years.

The courageous tot took on brain cancer – and claimed victory – though her future health can't be guaranteed until five years post-surgery.

Kiriana's mum Anna and her dad Kramer, of Onewhero, have been nominated to receive a "special break" from the Franklin Silver Lining Trust, a local charity which provides relief for families facing adversity.

Ronaki is hugely grateful for the gift, but for her and Kramer, and their other children, Tutewehiwehi, 4, and Larni, 6, their greatest gift is Kiriana's health.

The family's world turned in December 2012. Kiriana had fallen ill, complaining of a sore neck.

"She would hold her neck and wince in pain, she was waking a lot, vomiting and her balance was off," Ronaki recalls.

Her symptoms were confusing, and doctors gave various diagnosis – from an inner ear infection to eczema.

But Ronaki wasn't convinced. Her intuition told her it was something else, so she sought help from experts.

On January 17, 2013, scans at



## COURAGEOUS KIRIANA:

Three-year-old Kiriana Ronaki, with mum Anna, plays with her 600-plus beads – each a symbol of medical treatments she has undergone in her fight against cancer.

Kids First and Auckland Hospitals revealed the worst. On the base of baby Kiriana's neck was a tumour the size of an orange.

"That was the last thing we were expecting. Life changed, from that day on," Ronaki said.

Immediately Kiriana underwent eight hours of surgery to remove the tumour. But a post-operation scan revealed 20 per cent of the tumour remained, so less than a week later Kiriana was forced to endure another surgery.

This time, surgeons were successful, but Kiriana's cancer was of a kind that meant if doctors didn't start chemotherapy it would grow.

Cruelly, just as Kiriana's treatment was to begin, she contracted meningitis, and spent 12 days in the hospital's high-dependency unit.

Chemotherapy was physically gruelling for Kiriana's little body and an "emotional rollercoaster" for her family.

"It was such an emotional time, although we knew the whole way

she was going to get through this, the process was horrible," Ronaki said. "There were many times I just wanted to take my baby and get her out of there.

"But we were keen to get on with it (chemotherapy) because knew what would happen if we didn't, the tumour would grow back."

Focal radiation was the next step, a big call for the family given Kiriana's young age, but a decision made based on their trust of Kiriana's oncologist.

The radiation lasted five weeks

and on its completion in November last year, a MRI scan showed Kiriana to be clear of all cancer. And there were no effects left by the radiation.

Doctors now say that Kiriana has a 65 per cent chance of remaining cancer-free within the next five years.

"You have to be confident and positive," Ronaki said. "When you are in hospital, doctors always give you the worst case scenario, so you learn to be strong, you have to, what choice to you have."

Apart from a scar on the back of her head, today there is little sign of the battles Kiriana has faced. She's an inquisitive, chatty three-year-old who looks up to her big brother and sister.

And she's very protective of her beads – all 600 of them – each a token of the many medical procedures she's endured over the past 18 months.

She plays with them on the lounge floor but is careful not to lose any under the couch.

Brave Kiriana has earned her beads and they are a colourful reminder to all who know her of this little girl's courage.

The Franklin Silver Lining Trust helps those in our community struggling in times of adversity. The trust provides time out and getaways to local people who are going through a difficult time, whether it is themselves or their family. For more information on the Franklin Silver Lining Trust you can visit [franklin-silverlining-trust.co.nz](http://franklin-silverlining-trust.co.nz) or the trust's Facebook page

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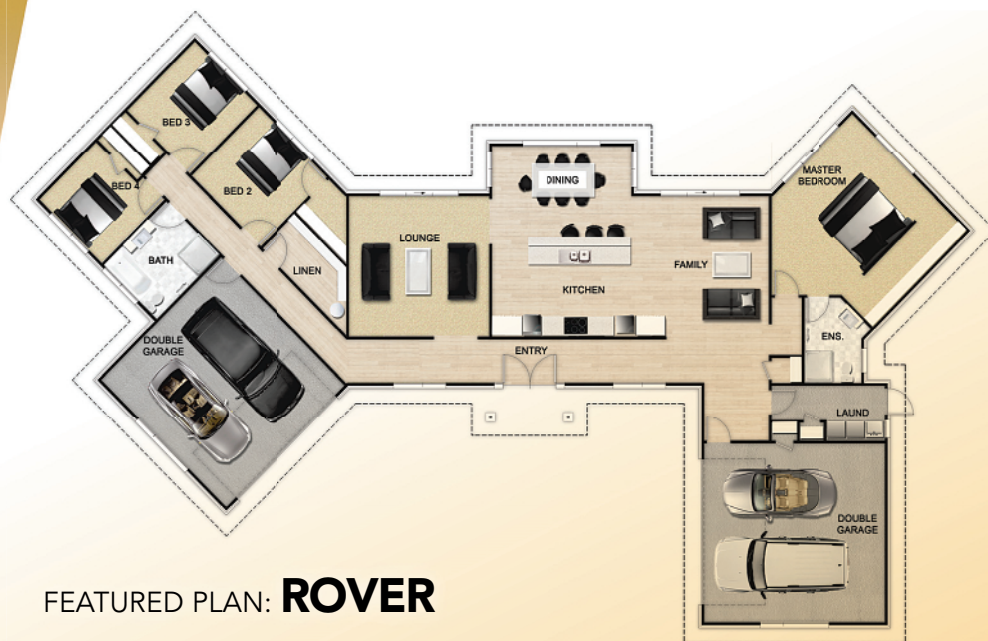
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