Comfort found in silver lining

Last July *The Aucklander* told the story of a young cancer sufferer. **Sophie Bond** catches up with Kelcey Roberts again and meets her new friend

IT'S a sunny afternoon and Koral Marchant and Kelcey Roberts chatter away about boyfriends and cats and sleepovers. Their conversation is peppered with other subjects—nasal gastric tube, steroids and lumbar puncture.

The two became friends under challenging circumstances. Kelcey has T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia and Koral has Hodgkin's lymphoma.

When they were too unwell for school they would accompany their mothers to a West Auckland coffee group for parents whose children have cancer and there they struck up a friendship. With their huge smiles, the pair say their friendship is pretty cool.

"We can talk about what we've been through," says Koral. "And we understand what the other is talking about," adds Kelcey, before rattling off a list of medical procedures while Koral nods in agreement.

When *The Aucklander* met Kelcey in July last year she was eight months into treatment and in isolation at Starship Hospital with absolutely no immunity.

For five weeks after our story she was battered by a superbug that reduced her weight to just 22kg.

Although the intensive chemotherapy is over and she's now in the maintenance stage, the regime is still pretty gruelling: intravenous chemo and antibiotics once a month, lumbar punctures every three months, steroids for five days a month and daily chemo pills.

The treatment for Hodgkin's is shorter and Koral, who was diagnosed last June, is now in remission. A scan in January showed no cancer cells and she's back at Te Atatu Intermediate fulltime.

The girls are a little disappointed Kelcey cannot go to Koral's sleepover birthday party at the weekend but, with Kelcey still in treatment, their mothers agree it's easier for her to stay home.

Despite some lingering limitations, Kelcey returned to school part-time in October and, in November, she was able to return to jazz dancing.

Instead of moaning about their lot, both girls are quick to list the opportunities they've had through a number of charities.

They've endured invasive and painful treatments, spent weeks in hospital and had to miss out on things their friends were doing.

But this period also has been punctuated by experiences that make their eyes shine.

A trip in a hot-air balloon, a stint as extras on *Shortland Street*, an interview on *What Now* and a bedroom makeover are just some of the highlights.

Koral Marchant (left) and Kelcey Roberts
MICHELLE HYSLOP

APPEAL WEEK

Three children are diagnosed with cancer each week in New Zealand. The Child Cancer Foundation provides each child and their family with a family support coordinator. The 2011 Child Cancer Appeal Month runs throughout March, with the Beads of Courage Day (street collection) on Friday, March 25. The foundation aims to raise $1 million.

■ **See: www.childcancer.org.nz**

Anthony Towler uses acting to ease his cerebral palsy and he wants others to know of its benefits. He chats to **Hayley Hannan**

Anthony Towler, 36. Technical manager at Eyeworks. Beach Haven resident.

I'm trying a new style of acting, a style originally developed by Michael Chekhov. I've had four classes, taught by Elena Stejko. Each class is about three hours with a five-minute break and it's a lot of