

# Lupus Awareness

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## Beyond the suffering - conquering the invisible illness

By **SAMANTHA RINA**

**W**HEN Phillipa Sariri celebrated her 21st birthday in 2018, life was pretty good.

She possessed the vigour, vitality and enthusiasm associated with youths and was always on the go.

That her life would be significantly slowed down on the first day of her transition into adulthood is something she never envisaged.

"The day after my 21st birthday I

woke up to swelling in my feet," she shared.

The next two years would be a journey punctuated by sickness, pain, sadness, fear, helplessness, mood swings and depression.

A cocktail of emotions, hospitalisation and medication - and yet her illness would have no name.

She yearned to know the cause of her disease, thinking it would give her a 'closure' of sorts.

However, when doctors eventually diagnosed her with lupus in 2020, Phil-

lipa lost all hope.

They told her it made her immune system damage organs and tissue throughout your body, but it was the caution against pregnancy that she found more heartbreaking.

Phillipa heard in great detail how difficult and risky it would be to have children.

As the days turned into months, she began to come to terms with the fact she would not have a family of her own.

And then, sweet surprise!

She found herself pregnant the very

next year.

Today, as a married mother of two reflecting on her journey as a lupus warrior, she says of all the lessons she has learnt along the way, one stood out.

It would be that lupus was not final. "God definitely has the last say."

"My life now is one where I manage lupus through medication and a very good family support system, bringing lupus somewhat under control."

"It has been a journey of faith, healing and miracles."

Phillipa Sariri with her daughter Magdalene Yalani in Navua. Picture: LITIA RITOVA

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