



## Downlights NZ: Behind The Brand

The co-founders and owners behind Downlights NZ are Tony and Emma Sykes (Father and Daughter team) and Jennifer Del Bel, owner of Illumina NZ.



*L to R: Jennifer Del Bel, Emma Sykes, sister Nicki Sykes and Tony Sykes*

### Emma Sykes

Is the inspiration for Downlights NZ. A lovely, 23 year old young lady, Emma was born with Down syndrome. Delightful and good-natured, Emma's condition has resulted in developmental delays, which prevents her from speaking and responding properly, even though she is able to understand mostly everything.

She finished school in 2018, graduating from Sommerville Special School in Panmure, East Auckland. She then set about trying to find a job, which soon became a next to impossible task as few employers would give her an interview based on her disability, while others did not even reply to her application. Turning to her Dad, Tony for advice, he suggested starting their own company making and selling a product at the local markets. Emma loves candles and father and daughter set out to do simple trial runs using store-bought DIY soy candle kits. Fate took a turn when she and her Dad, Tony met with Jennifer Del-Bel, Managing Director of Illumina and now Downlights Candles.



These days, Emma spends her workday at the Downlights NZ Mission Bay office mixing scents like French Vanilla, Vintage Gardenia and Purple Orchid into soy wax, and then carefully pouring the wax into decorative jars, then adding labels to her products. The result, a range of luxury, fragranced and additive-free soy candles, each with a 45 hour burn-time, marketed under the brand of Downlights NZ.

## **Tony Sykes**

Is a loving father of four. Two of his youngest daughters, Emma 23 and Nicki 22, both have Down syndrome. He lost his wife, Carolyn in 2011 and was then left with the sole responsibility of caring for the family.

An independent self-starter, Tony has always been a self-employed entrepreneur with diverse business interest. He owned the popular Maraetai Wharf Café selling coffee and baked goods and later opened his own airport transfer shuttle business. It was on one of these shuttling trips, transporting and chatting with a van load of mothers of children with Down syndrome that he had an epiphany.

He had been spending months helping Emma who had just finished school to secure a job, applying to corporates and supermarkets with an employment policy that included hiring disabled workers with no success. With the realization that there was little chance of finding a job for Emma, and later Nicki when she finished school, he decided that the best path towards his girl's journey to independence was to help them start their own business. He then set out to look for something that Emma was interested in and could take on – that product was candles which Emma loves. Taking up a stall at a local Beachlands market, he soon realized that creating candles from kits was not enough or easy.

So with the help of a few friends, he reached out and connected with Jennifer Del Bel, the owner of Illumina, a luxury candle making company in Auckland who suggested that Emma come into her Illumina workshop to learn some skills. Using Illumina's materials and help, Emma produced enough candles to sell successfully at their Beachlands Market venture and Downlights was thus born.

Tony is involved with product manufacturing quotas, packaging and distribution.

## **Nicki Sykes**

A new member to the team, Nicki is Emma's younger sister. She is a 22 two year old young lady who was also born with Down syndrome. Nicki has many of the same developmental delays that affect her sister, but she is a completely different character! She is noisy and full of joy, but at the same time, introspective and stubborn. After leaving school, it was only natural that Nicki would join her sister at Downlights NZ to help with the business, and that's where she now goes on her working days.



*L to R: Sisters - Emma Sykes and Nicki Sykes*

## **Jennifer Del Bel**

Is the Managing Director for Downlights NZ. She also solely owns and manages Illumina NZ which custom-makes premium luxury soy candles from their Mission Bay based office and workshop.

Jennifer hails from Canada and holds a degree in History and English from Wilfrid Laurier University and an Associate's degree in Kinesiology and Exercise Science specializing in exercise physiology from Simon Fraser University.

Passionate about functional fitness, she set up a private personal training studio in Orakei in the late 1990's then qualified as an Iyengar Yoga Instructor to offer ongoing wellness opportunities for her clients. She still continues to teach yoga today, offering classes at private gyms. Her interest in candles started when she began to look for unique fragrances to scent her studios to create a distinct mood and feel. Intrigued by how smell uplifts and powerfully connects us, she started experimenting by making her own candles using bespoke fragrances housed in glass jelly jars. An instant hit, her yoga students started to place orders and she began giving them to friends as gifts. In 2016, she decided to take the idea further participating in two Trade Shows, first in Auckland and then in Sydney. The Illumina brand was birthed after these two shows when orders poured in and soon, she was supplying her candles to over 60 retail destinations all over New Zealand and Australia.

Today, Illumina is an established New Zealand luxury soy candle manufacturer specialising in custom manufacturing for premium brands, leading hotels and boutique retail, producing seasonal and special gift ranges. Illumina candles have become exquisite gifts and keepsakes that transform any room. Downlights NZ was born in May 2018 after Jennifer met Tony and Emma.

Jennifer currently manages the candle design and manufacturing process for both Illumina and Downlights NZ as well as overseeing sales, marketing and work- place opportunities within Downlights



## The Crew from MOXIE

Joining Emma, Nicki, Tony and Jennifer since July are the MOXIE team from Recreate NZ.

Recreate NZ started in 2002 providing outstanding social and recreational services and managing over 400 programmes annually to the disability community of Auckland, Christchurch, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.

MOXIE stands for Meaning Opportunities X'ing Into Employment and is an initiative started by Recreate NZ in 2016 through a series of projects that provide experiential learning and meaningful work experience for youth with mild to moderate intellectual, physical, special needs or sensory disabilities. MOXIE provides a safe and supportive space for the young people involved, where they are given opportunities to learn and perfect new skills. They are also given resources to track their progress and reflect on what they are learning. See more at: <https://www.recreate.org.nz/copy-of-media>

Jack, Kirsty, Taylor and Rachael from the MOXIE programme join the Downlights production team on a weekly basis working from a studio and workshop in Mission Bay, Auckland to produce about 1000 candles a week.



## About Downlights NZ

Downlights NZ is a New Zealand owned and operated fragranced soy candle company that manufactures luxury candles using traditional artisanal techniques. Our candles are lovingly hand poured and the entire manufacturing process supports the development of a variety of workplace skills for people with Down syndrome and disabilities.





Social entrepreneurs, the team offer their latest candle ranges to schools, community groups and charities so that they can fulfil their fundraising endeavours. Made with love, the candles result in a superior New Zealand hand crafted candle range that empower people with disabilities.

The company's tagline '*illuminate-care-change*' amplifies their dream to set an example for other employers in New Zealand by looking to '*illuminate*' and light the way by creating jobs and showing '*care*' as a community by offering opportunities within our company. We hope that one day, this will pave the way for '*change*' that leads to greater acceptance for people with disabilities to be placed and valued in today's growing workforce.

Started in May 2018, the Downlights NZ team comprising Managing Director Jennifer Del Bel and co-founders father and daughter team, Tony and Emma Sykes. Emma 23, her sister Nicki 22 who have Down syndrome and from the MOXIE team, Jack, Kirsty, Taylor and Oliver. The team currently operate from their Mission Bay office and workshop making about 1000 candles a week sold on both the Downlights NZ and Illumina NZ company websites and through Downlights Fundraising, a fund-raising entity that assists schools, groups and clubs to raise funds for various causes by providing high quality products that can be sold within different networks.

Support Downlights NZ candles at:

- Illumina NZ: <https://www.illumina.co.nz/>
- Downlights NZ: <https://www.downlightsnz.com> (under construction)
- Downlights Fundraising <https://downlightsfundraising.co.nz/>

**High Resolution Photos - Click [HERE](#)**

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