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## "A different Light"

### **A Different Light 1 June 2019 – Mind the Gap Trap**

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“Mind the gap. Mind the gap.” This repeated announcement in the London underground tube stations is to warn the vague, the unsteady and the downright foolish not to fall down the gap between the platform and the train. It actually terrified me when I briefly lived in London in the 80’s. The thought of stepping into space, having a leg jammed into a gap with the train about to race off again was unsettling to say the least. Mind you 33 years on, the way I casually caught trains in tube stations in London rush hour on my own, terrifies me. Ahh the sheer robustness of youth.

There are plenty of other gaps around. Gaps in services. I had an enquiry the other day as to whether there were provisions and safe guards for vulnerable youth over the age of 18 with Oranga Tamariki. The enquiry was about an individual with very high needs who was at risk with their guardian. There aren’t a lot of options, it is quite a gap. Hopefully the announcement of Transition Services through Oranga Tamariki supporting people between the ages of 18 to 25 will cover this.

I had phone call from a woman in Australia last night. She told me she was a Kiwi with an Aussie husband who were planning to move back to Godzone- NZ. “My husband has got Motor Neurone Disease”, she said, “I want to know how to start to set up supports for him in New Zealand”. I sighed as I replied that, “New Zealand Immigration has a range of eligibility criteria on health and disability and that no doubt Motor Neurone is one of the conditions that wouldn’t allow him to become a resident and that therefore he would most likely not receive any disability supports.” “Oh”, she said glumly “Would it make any difference that I’m pregnant?”, “Unfortunately not”, I replied equally glumly.

I have always been somewhat embarrassed about our Immigration Laws and the Health and Disability screening. There is an inconsistency – a gap-between the rhetoric of our overarching documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People and the

New Zealand Disability Strategy that claims that we 'value disabled people' and the intolerance of banning disabled people immigrating to New Zealand. There's a gap in principles.

Another cavernous gap is between the support ACC offers someone with a disability because of an accident and what the rest of us get. This gap between ACC funded disability supports and Ministry of Health funded supports is eye watering. ACC funded supports are fast and gold plated. MOH supports are somewhat bleak in comparison.

Talk about the Gender Pay Equity gap, what about the pay equity gap between disabled and non-disabled people? Last week the Maxim Institute released a research paper 'Creating Opportunities: Opening doors to employment for people with disabilities'. It found that New Zealanders with disabilities earned just half of the average income of people without disabilities. The research shone a spotlight on a blind woman who was getting \$2.30 per hour for untangling headphones. She worked for an organisation which has minimum wage exemptions to provide work for people with disabilities. The issue is somewhat complex as the research pointed out.

Disability and employment have diverse and broad issues that need a variety of options so that we avoid the gaps. One issue that needs clarity is whether you are providing disabled people with employment opportunities or community participation and day programmes. Both have their rightful place without combining them into one service.

Minister of Social Development Carmel Sepuloni describes the rules, around minimum wage exemptions, as 'discriminatory'. In February, the Minister for Disability Issues announced that the Ministry of Social Development, together with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, would be conducting 'targeted' consultation with the disability sector on a proposal to replace the Minimum Wage Exemption scheme with a wage supplement.' Hopefully a new wage supplement will bridge that gap.

In the meantime: Mind the Gap', people; there's plenty of them out there!

Either we can "gap it" and just carry on or take a pause to mind the gap and explore some missing areas that can help avoid plenty of pain.

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