



Read our CEO **Jonny Wilkinson's** regular column in The Northern Advocate

"A different Light"

A Different Light 10 August 2019 – GREY MATTER

Don't you hate when things won't work for no apparent reason or when a straight forward plan fails miserably? Like a password that suddenly won't work. A Sky TV message saying "atmospheric conditions have prevented your viewing" when it's a cloudless day. Getting a court fine for an unpaid parking ticket that you have never seen before. Car keys that you put down and minutes later they've disappeared off the face of the earth. A winning recipe that you've successfully cooked numerous times turns into a hideous curdled gruel minutes before you serve it up to group of newly acquainted expectant guests. The grey of my hair starting to match that of my face! A mobility scooter that decides to go at snail's pace at a major road crossing in torrential rain. All of these events have the potential to make one break out into an uncontrollable fit of pique, raging to the heavens to explain "WHY MUST I ENDURE THIS @\$%^&!!".

That's how immigrants must feel when one of their family members gets their residency application gets turned down on the basis of disability. This week a Balclutha family were on the brink of having to leave their home they had lived in for 11 years due to an Immigration New Zealand deportation order. The father had moved to New Zealand in 2007 and his wife and son joined him in 2008. In 2016, Mrs Begum (the wife) had a severe stroke while working as at New World Balclutha. She now uses a wheelchair. Visas went on to be renewed, without pause, in both 2017 and 2018. In their latest visa application Mrs Begum's application was turned down due to Immigration New Zealand's health requirements, who would need further medical tests before they could decide on her visa. She failed the tests and a deportation order followed.

The predicament this family were in makes my aforementioned irritations trivial. The Caps Lock was on for the password. The TV was turned on and off and then Sky TV worked. The keys were in my pocket. My daughter confessed to the parking ticket. The BBQ can always be fired up as a plan B to the winner recipe. The Balclutha Family had a last minute reprieve with the help from Clutha-Southland MP Hamish Walker and New Zealand First list MP Mark

Patterson who registered separate appeals for compassionate intervention in the case with the office of Associate Immigration Minister Poto Williams. The reprieve, however maybe short lived as the Immigration New Zealand spokeswoman confirmed that no compliance action was being taken "at this time" but declined to comment further as a request for ministerial intervention had been received.

This immigration policy put a filter on people who could apply for permanent residency in Godzone. This was designed to stop people who would be a 'burden' on our society and the taxpayer from sucking us dry. Included in the criteria is a section on health issues, so that in particular non-New Zealand residents would not be able to drain our much-coveted free health service.

It seems to me that Immigration New Zealand decides what 'significant support' entails. This is a somewhat nebulous concept. Everyone will require significant support at some stage in their life, especially at the start and the end of our lives. It is part and parcel of the human condition. In New Zealand we have the Human Rights Act which outlaws discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference and disabilities. However this law is full of loopholes when it comes to government and national interests.

Luckily, we have a system that can bend and flex to accommodate individual cases. We have mechanisms with which to challenge inhumane decisions and politicians willing to stick their neck out when they see injustice happening. It is these shades of grey that make a functioning democracy. Black and white thinking rarely suffices to ensure we treat people with equity rather than 'equally'. Yes in New Zealand we have the capacity to recognise and respond to fifty plus shades of grey – and I'm not talking about my hair.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception. A Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.