



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

## "A different Light"

### **A Different Light - 30<sup>th</sup> November 2019 – “Disabled People and Getting Work, never ending issue”**

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Remember the movie “Groundhog Day” featuring the hapless Bill Murray, who was caught in a never ending spiral of living the same day- forever? Sometimes the working week can totally feel like that – surely it’s the weekend but, no it’s only Tuesday, suckers. Get up, get dressed, breakfast, coffee, race off (or if you are coming to town from South of Whangas like me) dawdle along through the road works into town. Yep work can have a certain monotonous flow- but it can also imbue you with a sense of purpose, contribution and place of belonging and security. Many Disabled people never or rarely get this luxury. But hold onto your hats-help is at hand! This week the Minister for Disability Issues, Carmel Sepuloni announced the start of a consultation process on the draft Disability Employment Action Plan to help disabled people and people with health conditions find and stay in work. Problem solved? Well –it sounds promising, however it’s somewhat Groundhog Day-ish, all over again.

Rewind 7 years -back to the ‘2012 - 14 Disability Action Plan’. This grand plan was going to, ‘increase employment and economic opportunities’. It had the obligatory high level and nebulous sounding objectives and actions, including - ‘*Connecting disabled youth with the labour market*’, ‘*Easier access to apprenticeships: Explore ways to better support disabled beneficiaries to access apprenticeships*’, ‘*better information for employers and disabled workers*’, ‘*more joined-up employment policy: Promote greater coherence in disability-related employment policy and practice*’. Blimey – plenty to be getting on with and not before time.

Anyway back to the future...

Minister Sepuloni tells us that “This government wants every New Zealander who is able to be earning, learning, caring or volunteering,” Furthermore the plan will ensure that employers gain the knowledge and connections they need to benefit from recruiting, retaining and working with disabled people.”

The latest draft Disability Employment Action Plan looks all too familiar to Action Plans I read seven years ago. The unemployment of disabled people in NZ is something I have

rabbited on about a few times before, myself. It's a complex issue and it's not only about the capacity of disabled people or how knowledgeable employers are, it is also about deep seated discrimination which is the number one barrier against employing disabled people. The first plan seems to have achieved little - in June 2019 the New Zealand employment rate was 23.4% for disabled people, compared to 69.9% for non-disabled people. Groundhog Day is getting a little tiresome.

I would like to see bolder moves being made by the government that would include quotas of disabled employees in National and Local Government agencies. If it's good enough for the UK – why can't we be brave and smack this prejudice squarely between the eyes? A bit more 'Rocky' and a bit less 'Softly, Softly', I reckon. How about the resourcing of new, creative, bold social enterprises to support the employment of disabled people at the living wage? How about less of the abstract aspiration and a bit more action?

We at Tiaho Trust are doing our bit next Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December on the annual International Day of People with Disabilities, outside the Riverbank Centre/Theatre on Reyburn Lane from 10am. Workbridge, who provide employment services for disabled people will be there to promote jobs opportunities. Volunteer Northland will be advertising volunteer roles that may suit disabled people. We will be celebrating the day by disabled people selling their arts, crafts, products and services. Our market will showcase the value disabled people can add. It will also display disabled culture through live entertainment throughout the day.

Cos it ain't Groundhog Day, it is Our Day! – and we'd love to see you all there in SUPPORT!

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