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"A different Light"

A Different Light - 28th March 2020 – “Time to take a break and look out for others”

I knew things were fluid and fast moving. But I like many others were shocked at how fast our country has moved into lockdown in a concerted call to action to avoid the horrendous state of play Italy is now in. I was horrified at the footage of Italian hospitals with people on gurneys gasping, with what looked like water cooler bottles on their heads. It kind of reminded me of my night breathing mask in a macabre way. While Italy seems like a distant reality from little NZ, our world Down Under has moved drastically with Jacinda's announcement on Monday. What we thought might happen sometime, was suddenly upon us. We're on lock down. It's hard to know how things are going to roll out over the next four weeks. Will we conform and do what we've been directed to do? Or will we revert to think about our own needs. Will we support the most vulnerable or go into a survival "I'm alright Jack" mode? I'm hoping for the former.

No doubt there will be a mix. Many organisations are doing their best to offer support where ever they can. I have even been emailed by sign writers offering to supply signage for social distancing. For some people this new regime will be harder. The disabled community is one of the most vulnerable sections of our community. While the Government has recognised this and they have received lots of advice on our sector, one worries that in the time of duress and pressure these needs maybe overlooked. While disability supports are deemed as essential services, those families who use individual funding to hire their own support staff are experiencing further pressure. As the employer of their own supports, they have to ensure a safe working environment, by supplying protective equipment such as masks and gowns. This protective gear should be available through their District Health Boards- apparently this has been problematic for some and we are only a few days in. Who knows what the following weeks will bring to our communities. Hopefully we will be able to draw on our collective resourcefulness and goodwill to ensure that we all get through this without leaving people behind.

Looking at the optimistic side of the ledger, this is a time for people to take a break and look out for others, their neighbours, people who could be isolated and offer help that will leave us feeling better about ourselves.

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