



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

## "A different Light"

### **A Different Light - 29<sup>th</sup> February 2020 – “Ruakaka Surf Day for disabled brings out smiles”**

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I wasn't going to write about it -but the day was so upbeat- I couldn't help myself. The convergence of Blomfield Special School students and teachers, Tiaho's dedicated Staff, Ruakaka Surf Life Saving guards, Tutukaka Surf Experience, Waipu Surf Club Lifeguards, Northable LYNKZ, Spectrum Care and other individuals and families, occurred with the same fluidity as the gentle surf at Ruakaka Beach last Saturday. We have been hosting the Ruakaka Surf Day for disabled people now for seven years. The day runs like a well-oiled machine. The concept of having a widely diverse range of disabled people in the surf up to five at a time might seem high risk and complicated. But Gary Butt's relaxed and commanding leadership ensures safety is paramount while people enjoy the thrill of "catching a wave".

I always feel like somewhat a third wheel on the day, with everyone being happily productive. My main task other than talking to people was to chop onions for the BBQ lunch. The sausage sizzle has become an iconic part of the day, a classic with bread, mustard and tomato sauce, washed down with bottles of Primo donated by Luke from On The Run Distributors. The volume of onions was almost apocalyptic in nature. I use a mandolin to conduct the task with fingers bending backwards away from the blade and my head also tilting backward with tears running down my face. This year we were well resourced with the generous funding from Ray White Whangarei's, "We Can Help With That" fund. With this generous support, we were able to give koha to those volunteers who have helped us out year after year paying for their own expenses incurred.

Gary Butt who is a veteran of providing disabled friendly surf days first picked up the concept in Hawaii in 2009, from a programme named called the KORE (Kauai Ocean Recreation Experience) Kauai. He has been involved in surfing for over 60 years and won the NZ Junior Surfing Championships in 1963. He and his wife Mary have been an intrinsic part of the surf days for the last seven years. I asked him how he felt Saturday went and he

replied “Tumeke!”. This year he surreptitiously started to have conversations with people who could take over the lead role of organising and overseeing the Instructors on the day. At first I wondered why and then I remembered that he is 71. It’s amazing sometimes how time can march on unnoticed until we are reminded of it by our own physical constraints. I remember how in my early teens I used to go ‘out the back’ in Sandy Bay on my own, wearing a buoyancy vest on an early 80’s surf mat, which was a popular device before the invention of the boogie board. It is something I wouldn’t contemplate now.

Everyone had a smile on their face at Ruakaka Surf day; young and old, volunteers and participants, new comers and founding veterans. A big thank you to you all! Tumeke indeed!

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