



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 11th May 2020 – “Adjusting to the new normal after Level 3”

It's official. I am dishevelled. When I look in the mirror, it's not ideal! It's my hair mainly. It's growing fast and in the wrong places. Sides of my head, neck (which is fur ball) eyebrows and ears are all superseding the volume of hair on top of my head - never a good look! Lockdown has certainly taken its toll on so many levels. We are poised at a critical juncture.

From Level Three to Level Two next, is going to be a big stride back into normality. Like many I haven't been off my property for the last six weeks. While I'm looking forward to stepping back into a world outside my house, I also have a sense of angst. It's amazing how quickly one can get accustomed to environments and routines. It's almost like stepping out into a new world.

There has been a good amount of supposition that there will be significant changes to the economy, the way we work and our society as a whole. Some are pointing to the chance to try and positively re- imagine these impacts and turn them into opportunities, as there clearly won't be a rapid return to how things were pre Covid 19.

I've read that some people who have social anxiety normally are finding the lockdown a relief from the usual pressure they face, of having face to face conversations and social interaction which they find awkward and stressful. They are enjoying the alternative ways on connecting with people through phone and video calling.

For most of us, lockdown has proved how critical social interaction is for our mental health. It has also given us an opportunity to consider how we like to give and receive these connections.

The idea of leaving the house, being freer to move around, can feel quite overwhelming after a period of lockdown. Apparently in South Korea, and China, when the restrictions were lifted, many people felt anxiety that limited their ability to leave the house.

Lockdown has given us a chance to really reflect on what we value. We need to learn from this and build these values into our new normal. People who may be experiencing social anxiety must also be taken into consideration when planning how to release lockdown.

For me what I am really looking forward to is some face to face time with my hairdresser. I hope they're still in business!

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