



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 22 May 2021 "Plenty of Disability related stories in News Media recently"

Writing a regular column can be torturous, when you need to come up with a relevant, hopefully thought provoking or at the least, amusing subject on which to write fortnightly. I seem to vacillate between either writing about something current in the disability sector or writing about something personal, whether it be an unlucky but self-inflicted injury, a foolish mistake in selling something or a travelling foray. This fortnight I have been spoilt with the number of disability related stories that have hit the media. It is a smorgasbord of hot and cold morsels of news. None of them particularly appetising.

On the 10th of May the NZ Herald ran a story on a woman in her 20s living with quadriplegia and unable to talk, who suffered "extensive blister burns" from urine after a nurse neglected her care for 12 hours. Ouch! The story talked about a report, that revealed that the Christchurch-based community care home and the nurse were in breach of the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights for the failure. The Health and Disability Code of Rights is normally quite prescriptive and borders on being anally retentive in regard to what one can complain about under the Code. For example, it doesn't cover access to services, one of the most common issues other Advocates have to deal with. This incident obviously fell within the Code of Rights. I am guessing it would be the right to 'dignity'!

On 13th May, Stuff (a NZ online Media outfit) talked about a new report by the Community Housing Collective that recounted the concerns of disabled people about the tenuousness of their living arrangements and parents' "anxiety and desperation" around their children's futures. "There was a sense that regardless of what was offered to them, a disabled person or their family should be 'grateful' for whatever accommodation was offered," the report said.

With the shortage of housing in New Zealand for the general public it's not hard to understand how hard it may be if you are needing an accessible house.

Last Sunday disability again hit the Herald pages with an article on disabled protesters in Greenlane, Auckland who were unhappy with the closure of the Laura Fergusson Trust. The Trust used to provide rehabilitation, residential and respite services for disabled people. The protesters were calling on the Government and the Trust Board to reopen the services. Residential services are an important component of the range of supports available to disabled people. They are dwindling in number with young disabled people having to live in age-inappropriate places such as Rest Homes.

On the 15th May, Stuff ran an opinion piece about the roll out of the Covid vaccine. The story was about Claire Freeman who wanted to be vaccinated against Covid-19 before it is too late. In the story she said "I'm a tetraplegic. I need to be vaccinated to have a fighting chance. Vaccination for someone like myself is a potentially life-saving event." She went on to say "However, as much as I can see the logic in vaccinating some populations, I would love to see our vulnerable New Zealanders, who are at risk of dying if we contract Covid-19, to also be high up on the list of those to be vaccinated".

In Northland we have been told we can get a vaccine if we are over 50. You just have to prepared to endure waiting on the phone for hours to make a booking!

On the 17th May Radio New Zealand spoke of school Principals making pleas to the Government to include increases in funding to accommodate pupils with special needs. They quoted one Principal who said, "To have a child come into a classroom who's in a wheelchair, who can't toilet themselves or feed themselves or get themselves to a standing position or move themselves in any way independently and somehow they don't qualify for support; that just blows my mind, it's not right."

I have always been amazed at how high the bar is set before the Ministry of Education will provide Ongoing Resource Support(ORS) funding to school pupils with obvious disabilities.

This smorgasbord of disability news items are not appetising items and, it's disheartening to see the same issues come up time and time again. Things are improving at a slow rate. I thank the New Zealand Media for keeping them in the forefront of people's mind as the Press is an important component in the machinery of progress.

Next fortnight I will write on a lighter note about an upcoming trip down under to the deep South, brrr.

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