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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light - 4 December 2021 – “Covid 19 deepening pre-existing inequalities for disabled people”**

It was the International Day of Persons with Disabilities yesterday. The third of December. It's same day every year. For well over a decade, on the same day every year, Tiaho Trust has celebrated this occasion by holding a public event. Have we done the same this year? Have we hell as like! We have been well and truly thwarted in our attempts to hold events (like many others). I have done my fair share of whinging, wailing and gnashing my teeth over it so dear readers I won't put you through another round of it.

The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1992 by United Nations General Assembly. Every year the day has had a different theme to it. The United Nations usually waits until the last minute to declare what the theme for Day is making it difficult to plan anything into the day that will reflect the theme. The themes of these days have had a tendency to be somewhat nebula, lofty and broad like the 2017 theme; **“Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all”** or in 2015 **“Inclusion matters: access and empowerment for people of all abilities”**. These themes can be challenging to incorporate when holding a public celebration, as you are endeavouring to facilitate pride, showcase diverse performances and enable a positive profile of disabled people, whilst generating an atmosphere of festival and commemoration. Now don't get me wrong, these themes are admiral, worthy and aspirational - they are just hard to portray in the midst of cheer and good will.

This year's theme is **“Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-COVID-19 world.”** The United Nations background to the theme is that **“the global crisis of COVID-19 is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing the extent of exclusion and highlighting that work on disability inclusion is imperative. People with**

disabilities—one billion people— are one of the most excluded groups in our society and are among the hardest hit in this crisis in terms of fatalities”. Whilst this is undoubtedly true, it is also undoubtedly grim. Yes, it does give the Pandemic a silver lining – a vision of re-building a post-COVID world, with the attributes of inclusiveness and accessibility as it’s foundations. The reality of the current situation for the global disabled community is not the usual fodder of celebrations, particularly with the reference to “hardest hit in terms of fatalities.” For me personally, when I think of celebrating disability, I think of the diversity and uniqueness that is remarkable among our community. Disability has shaped my outlook on life in such a way, that is hard to imagine anything different. To coin a phrase from Shakespeare "Nothing is so common as the wish to be remarkable."

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