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"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 18 June 2022 – “Getting Out There is for everyone”

Don't you hate it when you double book? Particularly when both things are important and have different, but competing, demands. I recently had to reschedule a photo shoot for the annual Tiaho “Getting Out There” magazine front cover. I like to invite lots of groups of different people to highlight the diversity of disabled people and our wider community. On the day the photo shoot was due to occur the rain was bucketing down with grim dark skies promising no reprieve. I had to postpone. After a myriad of phone calls and emails I came up with a date that suited most. Phew I thought. But no! A few days later, with some horror I realised that on the date I had chosen, I was actually going to be in Auckland to witness my daughter's graduation with her partner and my wife Sally. What was I going to do? I had been front and centre of the cover photos for the last 10 years. I had also cajoled numerous groups of people to converge on the same day at the same time more than once! My wife as usual came up with a cunning option, “Why don't you ask the Chairperson to hold up a sign saying ‘Where's Jonny?’ like ‘Where's Wally?’” Okay, I thought, it's vaguely narcissistic but quirky and different. “and then” she continued “someone else can hold up another sign saying, He's Getting out There”. “Yes”, I decided, that would work. A bit of humour plus a bit of quirkiness with a subtle reinforcement of the magazine brand. Perfect! I had just enough time to order the signage from the printers before heading south to Auckland with the graduation party.

When we got to the event I was taken back by the size and volume of the occasion. My daughter had completed her Master's degree in Art Therapy at Whitecliffe, which is private tertiary education entity specialising in fine arts.

The number of students graduating with either a Bachelor of Fine Arts or a Masters of Fine Arts was extensive. Their dress was eclectic, as you would

expect of art students. The only common factor apart from the hats and gowns was the number of students wearing Doc Martins. It was so common place I even started counting the Doc wearers. The graduates of Art Therapy Masters were the last in the ceremony and then in alphabetical order. Accordingly, Chyna was the last. To see her cross the stage was emotional to say the least. I was indeed Getting Out There.

Over the past week other disabled people have found the process of Getting Out there a lot more herculean. Alan Hall had his murder charge acquitted last week after wrongfully servicing 19 years in prison. The Court of Appeal found he was treated unjustly by both the police and the Crown through the tampering of evidence. Alan Hall has recently been diagnosed with Autism. Hall is one of many New Zealanders who undergo custodial sentences with an undiagnosed disability. There is a piece of legislation that prevents people with intellectual disabilities from going to a mainstream public prison. It is the Intellectual Disability (Compulsory Care and Rehabilitation) Act 2003. Under this Act, if people are assessed with a certain level of intellectual capacity, they can have a court order which will direct them to live in a secure residential facility. This Act is flexible because if someone under the Act is directed to live in a secure residential facility they are reassessed every six months. This means that they wont need to languish in a facility for years on end when it is not necessary to ensure safety for everyone.

As Allan Hall sat trial before the Intellectual Disability (CCR) Act came in, he didn't have the option of being diverted to a Residential Secure facility. Would it have saved him countless years of being innocently being incarcerated? The answer to this is probably. Nevertheless I am sure Alan Hall is enjoying 'Getting Out There'. Go well, Alan.

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