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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 30 July 2022 – “If you are looking at removing barriers for people, carparks and toilets are low-hanging fruit ”**

Disability- it's all about toilets and carparks. Well, you can imagine some crusty old bureaucrat declaring this in a cynical fashion. There is, however, a touch of truth in the statement. They both make life easier - especially when you really need them, and you can get to them! The requirement for them is straight forward. They are both kind of personal.

When it comes to mobility carparks- this provision is the one tangible thing NZ society has done to make the lives of disabled people easier on a day-to-day basis. When you see someone make that carpark unavailable, by blatantly not giving a toss, it feels like a personal attack. Now, when you can't use a toilet because you can't get into it when you need to, believe me the outcome is even more personal.

In the bigger scheme of things when you are looking at removing barriers for people in New Zealand, carparks and toilets could be described as low hanging fruit, in that they can be relatively easy to fix. This contrasts with those higher hanging more exotic fruit, such as the disability employment rate or achieving equity between disability benefits whether via Health and ACC.

The disabled community in NZ now have a new Ministry called Whaikaha. To go with the new Ministry, we have a new Minister, Poto Williams. I believe she is the fifth Minister of Disability Issues we have had.

First off, we had Ruth Dyson, who launched the first NZ Disability Strategy. She could be reasonably stropic. I remember at a meeting asking her why she was using the Social Model of disability to drive cost cutting. Her response was “I don't know what they put in the water up North but it must be good”, I thought

that was a bit rich, given that she had been recently found guilty of drink driving. Then there was Tariana Turia(now Dame Tariana). I wrote to her in 2011 regarding the issue of there being no funding for Sign Language interpreters at the Tiriti o Waitangi formal ceremonies and requesting funding to make that happen. She swiftly came to the party and made sure interpreters were in place that year and they have been there each year subsequently. After that there was National's Nicky Wagner...nothing really stands out for me in her performance in the role. We have just finished two terms of Carmel Sepuloni who was the first Senior Minister to have the portfolio. She has, of course, brought us the new Ministry of Disability, Whaikaha. Minister Williams comes to the new role after two years of suffering the slings and arrows of being Minister of Police over a time when gang violence has significantly increased. Pouto was on television this week when she featured on Fair Go addressing recent (recurring) complaints about nondisabled people abusing mobility parks by parking in them. I must say I was impressed by her hands-on, no-nonsense stance on the subject. She said "while we could say, people should do the right thing, we need to enforce it. There is some action I can take as the Minister and that will be to write to government agencies including the police setting out my expectations that way they work, their policies and procedures are actually informed to support disabled people to do what they need to do to go about their daily life."

Such a simple and hands-on statement is refreshing, coming from a sector where so called action plans can be so nebulous and airy fairy, that they often seem to just dissipate off into the atmosphere. I wish the new Minister all the very best in her new role and hope the new Ministry is equally clear cut and effective in making NZ a non-disabling country. But hey won't it be a great day when we have a Minister of Disability Issues who *HAS A DISABILITY*.

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