



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light –3rd December 2022 –“ Focus on Equal Opportunities for All”

When writing a column, there is one thing you really must consider: timing. Yesterday's current events become the wrapper on today's fish n chips very quickly. The small cycle of time between when you wrote your purple prose and when it is published a few days later can become an unforgiving death coil.

Here at Tiaho Trust, all we have been thinking about this week is the International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPD). When this column comes out it will be on official day, December the 3rd. We are celebrating the day on the Friday before it. It will all be over for another year.

The day is a product of the United Nations. Each year the UN attaches a theme to the day. The theme is always very lofty and nebulous and this year is no different. The theme is “Transformative solutions for inclusive development: the role of innovation in fuelling an accessible and equitable world”. Now what does this mean? You may well ask, and also: how do you celebrate it?

To my mind this theme refers to very clever and far-reaching initiatives that bring people together on a level playing field that is accessible. We all get the concept, but we just are not there. So how do you celebrate something has not yet happened? Umm, pass! Other organisations are doing things, such as publishing an article in their newsletter, or holding ‘open discussions’ about improving the services to their clients. The British Government is celebrating the day with a debate on the International Day in the House of Commons. I have no idea how that works- but suspect it may involve a shedload of yelling, jeering and general buffoonery. Hmm, that will surely assist!

In googling suggestions for your workplace or organisation to acknowledge the Day I found the following sensible five point pledge plan:

1. Donate to Disability Charities
2. Strengthen Your Discrimination Policies
3. Improve Accessibility e.g., Wheelchair Ramps
4. Assess Your Employees' Diversity
5. Make a Public Statement of Support

You can't argue with this – and I'd be keen to see our Whangarei business community challenging themselves against these 5 hard hitters.

At Tiaho Trust we are opting for the tangible. A simple, but fun day at our fabulous Amphitheatre below the Canopy Bridge. It will be a day of music and dance with performances from disabled and mixed abilities Pacifica dance groups as well as our own local Pacifica Dances from the Mana o te Hula, and entertainment and fun with Circus Kumarani to name a few.

International Day of People with Disabilities should be a day to help everyone become more compassionate and understanding of the challenges faced by people with disabilities. The day doesn't discriminate between intellectual and physical disabilities, and the spirit of the day is to ensure that all people in the world have equal opportunities for work, play, health, and success. Our celebrations highlight how people with disabilities contributing and valued members of society, who form a vibrant community. I just hope it doesn't rain on our parade. By the time you are reading this you'll know if we were a soggy but determined bunch, or a sun seeking crowd of revellers. Either way spare a thought for what you are doing to improve your contribution and appreciation of our disability community- just before you tuck into the weekend takeaways!

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