



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

## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 17 December 2022 – “ Time to look back on all we have done this year – The good and bad of 2022 ”**

It's nearly the end of the year and with a big PHEW it's goodbye to 2022. So how has this year been through the lens of “A Different Light”?

In January we recognised an unsung home-grown rock star of the pandemic, Amanda Kvalsvig, who has been a leading epidemiologist advising the Government on New Zealand's pandemic response alongside her *Otago* epidemiologist workmates, Michael Baker and Nick Wilson. Maybe she missed the punch of Baker's spectacular spectacles...? No, unfortunately it appears that it's more to do with the fact that she is profoundly deaf, meaning that phone and radio interviews have not been readily accessible to her. Nevertheless, she achieved some great mahi that we recognised. Also in January, the volcano, Hunga-Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai thoroughly rinsed the Kingdom of Islands and smothered them in toxic ash which contaminated Tonga's precious water supply and destroyed crops. Disabled people living Tonga in aftermath of the destructive volcano and tsunami fared particularly badly.

February saw an online rally that involved over a hundred registered disabled people and many more who watched it as it live streamed online. The rally was about the appointment of a non-disabled person to be the executive director of the establishment unit of the new Ministry of Disability Whaikaha. The attendees used analogies that I have been using for over a decade now; you don't see a man being appointed to run the Ministry of Women's Affairs and you don't see a non-Maori person running Te Puni Kokiri!

March was the month of the Beijing Winter Paralympics of 2022. I was transfixed by the speed and the deftness of our Kiwi Paralympians as they scorched down the slopes, not like a runaway bobsled to hell- but more like a runaway Medal

grab! The Paralympic Kiwi team was parallel to the recent Winter Olympic Medal count at the end of those games. Of course, that's why they are called the Paralympics – in parallel and equal footing with the Olympics.

In April, I wrote about the housing crisis – and how the effects are greatly exacerbated if you need of an accessible house. I highlighted that residential and respite services were scarce, and that the majority of service providers were rest and retirement homes with young physically disabled person units- a totally inappropriate living situation for any young person. We are currently conducting a survey on the Residential and respite needs of disabled people in Northland. It can be found on the Tiaho Trust website.

In May I focussed on Art Therapy. I grilled my daughter who graduated with a Masters in Art Therapy. I asked her what is it like being a Creative Arts Therapist

Chyna explained her passion for this mahi. “As a Creative Arts Therapist working at Blomfield Special School, I have found working with disabled and neurodiverse ākonga a privilege. To be able to provide our students with a safe place to express themselves, explore special interests, and build inner confidence within a therapeutic relationship is magical. “

Halfway through the year in June I did one of my unfavourite tricks of doing a face plant into the carpet which resulted in my forehead having a big angry looking graze the shape of an elongated butterfly. To say it stood out would be a gross understatement. It looked like a banner that shouted DEBAUCHERY and DEPRAVITY at the same time. Such fun!

July saw a new Minister of Disability Issues, Poto Williams, to go with the new Ministry of Disability. I believe she is the fifth Minister of Disability Issues we have had. I gave a run down on the previous four Ministers and noted that none of them had a disability.

In August I wrote about Lizzo, a mega popular American rapper. You could say Lizzo is a champion for diversity. That's why I was somewhat surprised when I heard she had been called out for using the word “spaz” in one of her latest

songs. Disability activist and writer Hannah Diviney who has cerebral palsy, tweeted *“Hey Lizzo my disability Cerebral Palsy is literally classified as Spastic Diplegia (where spasticity refers to unending painful tightness in my legs) your new song makes me pretty angry + sad. ‘Spaz’ doesn’t mean freaked out or crazy. It’s an ableist slur. It’s 2022. Do better.”*

To Lizzo’s credit she apologised and rewrote the song. In a statement on her social media platforms she said *“It’s been brought to my attention that there is a harmful word in my new song “GRRRLS”. Let me make one thing clear: I never want to promote derogatory language. As a fat black woman in America, I’ve had many hurtful words used against me so I overstand the power words can have (whether intentionally or in my case, unintentionally). Go Lizzo!*

During September Paula Tesoriero landed the position of CEO at the long-awaited brand new Ministry of Disability Whaikaha. Tesoriero, the former Disability Rights Commissioner, is- low and behold –Disabled!

October was like Groundhog day. Once again, I wrote about New Zealand’s immigration Health Standards Policy. The policy essentially bars disabled people from other countries from moving here. No changes to that old chestnut!

November was about the slings and arrows of going to the dentist and my personal Dental Nurse horror story.

And December, well my dear readers, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and an inclusive New Year. Thank you for your readership!

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