



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

## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023 –“ Luck was with us ahead of Cyclone Gabrielle”**

In my last column I wrote about the perils of holding events and the unpredictability of Covid 19 and extreme Weather Events . I was slightly worried at the time about the Ruakaka Surf Day that was approaching. As the day grew closer I thought I had jinxed the day as reports started rolling in with fearsome predictions about a new unwelcome menace, Cyclone Gabrielle.

Well, Hallelujah, our Surf day just squeaked in, pretty much moments before Gabrielle touched down. The waves were robust. The sky was threatening. The rain had started as the last surfers reluctantly came up from the swell.

Tradition has it that, once the shivering and excited surfers re-emerge into the lifesaving club, peel off their brightly coloured rash shirts (donated may I add by Marsden Point Refinery- cheers!) and dry off we immediately go into sausage sizzle mode. Lashings of white bread, slitherings of onions, all kinds of mustard and of course good old T Sauce accompany the top class snarlers ( ‘on ya’ Ray White Realty for your grant) Volunteers had been buttering, slicing and BBQing in festive anticipation of the occasion.

Next up is our feel good part, the award ceremony. Participants and our younger volunteers are acknowledged with a certificate, and a smile for the camera. Thanks are given to our volunteers and sponsors (On The Run Distributors), Participants were thrilled with the Primo drinks, bucket hats, sunnies and key rings!

Home we went, with feel-good feelings abound. We did it! We sneaked Surf Day in and just in the nick! The Ruakaka Surf Lifesaving Club who generously lent gave us the use of their club and had our backs had their front foreshore washed out the next day! We were exhausted but needed to move outdoor gear to relative safety and make sure our grab bag was in order. This was done perhaps

a little half-heartedly , as well, like other Northlanders, we just didn't think it would be that bad.' And it wasn't... for a while.

As I sit to write this a couple of days later, I can report that things have taken a turn for the worse and that the grab bag has been fully reviewed. In fact we have been lucky compared to many up here, with no damage to property or life in our whanau. We have, however, found ourselves in a somewhat eerie state of incommunicado. Power was first to go, the wifi crashed and cell phone coverage dwindled to non-existent for long periods of time. We had plenty of provisions but most needed cooking . The fridge was idle and the sausages needed cooking. What better than another Sausage sizzle on the BBQ huddled from the pouring rain. Sadly it was not up to the standards of the Ruakaka Surf day extravaganza. No onions, no mustard just a touch of T sauce. And while the coffee tasted extra good , campfire styles, the sense of joie de verve was not comparable, how could it be?

Providing the opportunity for people with disabilities of all ages and stages is a magical event to behold.

The smiles are wide, the enthusiastic whoops and applause for those who get on, give it and catch a wave in whatever way they do, is a pretty unbeatable experience. The impending storm was of no consequence to these hardy surfers and their wonderful volunteers from the Disability and Education services and surfing communities. Let try and squeak it again next year.

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