



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light –19th August 2023 – “Election 2023 – What has been absent so far is any announcements of disability policy”

Election fever has been feverish. Policies have been coming thick and fast. GST off our 5 + a day fruit and vege is dangled in front of us beguilingly. On the other hand, how about the allure of tax relief for lower and middle income earners? Could you be tempted by free dental care? How enticing would you find a ban on mobile phones in schools.? Hmmm, what if there were grants to cover the cost of installing solar panels and making energy efficient upgrades to households? Imagine four lanes from Whangarei to Tauranga and pothole relief! Four weeks’ paid leave for partners on top of paid parental leave could be a go. May we offer a commitment to rebalance sentencing in the interests of the victim and the community? All these are recent election promises made by NZ’s Political Parties as our General Election draws near. All attempt to win us over with a cheesy wink or earnest enthusiasm. What has been absent in this Election (again!) is any announcements of Disability Policy. This has continued to baffle me as every General Election cycles around. Why is it that a sizable constituency of twenty four percent of the population is ignored as a potential dance partner? We, as Disabled People are just as open to being targeted and wooed along with the numerous other communities in Aotearoa that are targeted by Political Parties’ as they try propel their Party to the best position of power as possible.

Tiaho Trust usually hosts a “Meet the Candidates” public meeting where standing candidates from the main political parties in the Whangarei and Tai Tokerau electorates are invited to speak to the Northland disability community. Candidates answer three questions that have been previously sent to them to aid their preparation. These are questions like *“What will you party do to implement a goal from the New Zealand Disability Strategy to increase the*

number of disabled people, including long-term unemployed disabled people, in paid employment and self-employment on an equal basis with others?"

We plan to hold this Meet the Candidates forum on the 26th of September. If anyone would like to suggest any questions to ask the candidates Please send them in to info@tiaho.org.nz. The reason we hold these "Meet the Candidates" forums is twofold. Firstly, it is to encourage the disabled community to vote on disability issues. To support parties that can demonstrate that they have policies that are inclusive and support disabled people. Secondly to educate the candidates about the fact that there is an active disabled community in their electorate. We need to make the candidates aware of our issues, to help them understand that we do vote, that our votes do matter, and our votes will be counted.

Of course, I do fret that on the day we could get a low turnout from the community, as that would be the wrong message to candidates- that this is a community that is not worth enticing!

So I encourage anyone who is at all interested in disability issues to come along on the 26th of September and show our standing candidates that we are a large segment of society that is worth the wooing of the General Election Courtship

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