



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 8th June 2024 – “ The Budget could have been much worse ”

This weekend is the anniversary of my mother's death. She died on Queens birthday. It's now called Kings birthday weekend (a little hard to get use to but we all seem to have embraced it). Speaking of mothers, we had a rerun over the 80's mother of all budget that was Ruth Richardson's baby. But was the budget 2024 really comparable? I know that there are a number of people who are very unhappy with the budget results. There are cuts to Maori development, the omission of 13 Cancer drugs that were promised and not being funded (although there seems to be a reactive u turn on this). First home buyers who were already struggling to raise a deposit having their grants whipped away. The disability sector on the surface appears to have come out unscathed and supported with the allocation of 1.1 billion dollars over the next 4 years.

I know Disability Support Services have been running into deficits in the past and this may not be an increase in reality. I know the devil is always in the detail but really, I feel somewhat relieved. Here is what other people have said in the sector. The New Zealand Disability Support Network CEO Peter Reynolds said, *“We see the \$1.1 billion allocated in the Budget to ‘address demand’ as code for meeting growth or inflation costs only. No-one's support quality or availability will increase. It sounds like a lot of money but unfortunately it won't cover providers' cost increases for very long,”*

Disability Rights Commissioner Prudence Walker said “the \$1.1 billion over five years to address cost pressures for Whaikaha Ministry of Disabled People was urgently needed to ensure sufficient support for disabled people to participate in community. Many disabled people are simply doing their best to survive and have been devastated by recent abrupt changes to their delicately balanced support structures. I urge the Government to co-design supports for disabled people and remember, people have a right to contribute to their own advancement,” she said.

When I asked the prominent and out spoken Disability Advocate Dr Huhana Heke for her take on the Budget, her response was *“While I am pleased there is funding for disability, it is simply what's already needed and with health and education cuts impacting disabled as well, especially as there is no effort to restore the funding they cut in March. It is time disabled claim their autonomy and stand for Parliament to have our own voice for our communities.”*

Whilst I am very aware that New Zealand has a long way to go before we have a non-disabling society and that this will require significant resources I find myself taking a leaf from my mother’s book who was always the eternal optimist always finding a way to focus on the positive. The budget could have been far worse: to be honest I’m somewhat I’m relieved.

While recent increases in volume and inflationary pressures seem to be addressed by this Budget, there are still impairments unfunded such as ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Tourette’s, ADHD and Long Covid. Maybe we need to rethink how disability supports are funded. The support disabled people get from ACC when their disability is a result of an accident is gold plated in comparison to Whaikaha’s funded services. How about using the same model of levies? How about a kickstart from ACC’s investment portfolio of over 47 billion dollars and their even greater stash of reserves?

One can only hope...and keep taking a leaf out of my dear old mum’s book!

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