



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 20th July 2024 – “ Spotlight on Troy Robertson”

I had some trepidation about selecting someone for a ‘Spotlight Interview’ for the Tiaho Trust’s ‘Getting Out There’ magazine this year. This annual magazine insert in the Northern Advocate highlights disability services that are available throughout Northland. Not only do we profile sixteen disability support organisations, we also provide stories about people who use their services. Every year we have a new theme, and for 2024 it is ‘Innovative Solutions’. I wanted to tie this theme into a profile of a disabled person for the magazine- but who would fit the brief? Well, luckily for us all, we have a brilliant candidate for innovation in the world of disability right here in Whangārei – the unforgettable Troy Robertson!

Troy is 25 years old. He is a particularly stylish individual, spiky hair, retro post-punk clothing, a range of Jonny Depp style necklaces and chains, eye/guy liner and a charismatic broad grin makes him stand out in a particularly cool way. Like me Troy has Cerebral Palsy. He uses a power-chair to get around that he controls with his phone.

After completing NCEA year 13 with honours, Troy went to Waikato University, studying in Business Management and majoring in finance. I asked him whether he used any innovations whilst studying. His response was impressive. *“I started using eye-tracker, it’s an assistive communication technology. It uses software to track your eye movements to use as an interface so you can use a computer because my fine motor coordination won’t allow me to use a normal keyboard or mouse. But I found the eye-tracker too slow, so I used X-box game controller which you can use to access the intranet. From there I used Google Docs to do my Uni study”*. An extraordinary innovation!

Troy recently attended one of our Enabling Good Lives hui, where we were asking what key and current issues Disabled people had and whether collectively we could come up with any innovative solutions. Someone

mentioned they would like more social events that were disabled friendly. Troy, who is a seasoned and enthusiastic partier set about then organizing a successful retro disco, which was held a few weeks ago in town. Prompted by this achievement I quizzed him as to any other innovative solutions he had developed to support his partying prowess over the years.

“Well once I went to a party in the middle of nowhere and we had to cross a river! , he recalled. Apparently, his friends carried him in his powerchair over the river. Really? I thought, yet again flabbergasted by his extreme solution finding. Makes my party years seem mild.

Troy is also a talented boccia player. Boccia is an adaptive form of bowls, which uses apparatus such as ramps to roll the ball down. He won both a gold and bronze medal in Wellington. In Australia he got gold in the pairs category beating the 3rd ranked in the world. This opened up opportunities for more international matches. Troy described to me how he uses his ability to understand statistics, to use this knowledge as a guide, as to where to place the ball. He utilises spreadsheets to adjust the calibration of his moves to take into account variables such as the temperature and the floor surface, which all have an effect on the distance the ball goes.

Developing our personal innovative solutions to life’s challenges is a constant in the lives of people with disabilities. Troy is a person who radiates style and charisma, along with audacious problem-solving abilities. He also has Cerebral Palsy which is sometimes is abbreviated to CP. In Troy’s case I think you will agree that it totally stands for “Cool Person”.

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