

New Zealand Federation of Disability Information Centres (NZFDIC)  
Conference 16-18 May 2010

By Maria Radonich (with input from Harata Daniels)

**Sunday 16 May 2010 Day One**

Registration was held late afternoon followed by our regional meetings. Each DRC got together in their region and reported back on progress happening in each respective DRC. I read out a statement prepared by Sharron Blundell and introduced myself briefly. Harata and Noel Matthews also spoke briefly to introduce and/or reacquaint themselves with others in the meeting. Later that evening, there was an informal gathering in the bar. It gave us a chance to meet people from other DRCs as well as talk more informally with those we had met earlier in the day at the regional meeting. It was a nice way to break the ice before starting “work” the following day.

**Monday 17 May 2010 Day Two**

After an opening by **Bronwen Foxx**, Chairperson of the NZFDIC, where she officially welcomed us all and discussed the Federation’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, the NorthAble team opened the day with a Waiata.

**Ross Brereton, of Ross Brereton Consulting** was first to present His message was that disabled people have the right to live in society like anyone else. Though NZ is making progress, for example, NZ Sign Language recently becoming an official language, there is still a lack of awareness in NZ about disabilities. He highlighted cases that he was aware of where parents excitedly took their disabled child to enroll at his/her local school at the age of five, and the principal kindly says that their school would not be suitable and to take the child to another school down the road which would be “more suited”. Brereton’s speech touched on the thoughts and feelings of most of us present and was certainly food for thought.

**Sarah Greaney, of SRK Consulting**, was next to present. Her presentation was on giving us tools to time manage wisely. She asked the audience to self evaluate regularly to make sure one is not procrastinating, but also to take some down- (or self-) time to relax.

Next up was a presentation particularly relevant to NorthAble and the Tiaho Trust. It was presented by **Mariana Gordon and Mike Noonan from Coromandel Independent Living Trust (CILT)**. Their presentation focused on the challenges that their geographical location faces in disability support and information dissemination. For example, there is only one sealed road between either side of the Coromandel Peninsula. The other roads are windy and not tar-sealed, so a 50km journey can sometimes take more than an hour! There are small townships here-and-there with large farmland separating them. Some areas of the Coromandel still do not have power, let alone a broadband

connection! In order to do their best to make sure everyone in the region gets access to disability services, Gordon and Noonan told of how they make sure visiting specialists (e.g.: social workers and CYFS, Workbridge and WINZ representatives) are all in town on the same day once per month, so locals only need make one trip per month to town and can see everyone they need on that particular day. They also go to popular annual events and market their services (e.g.: Market Day) and do a lot of networking and word-of-mouth advertising. It was interesting to see how CILT manages the issues caused by their rural location, as we can compare what they do with how we do things, and take note of what has worked well for them or not. Basically, we can learn from their triumphs and their failures.

Later that afternoon, we also got to meet and talk to representatives from a variety of different organisations. The ones Harata and I found most informative or relevant to Northable and/or the Tiaho Trust are listed below:

1. **Libby Blackely (Adaptive Snow Sports NZ)**. How snow sports can be adapted to suit people with particular disabilities. Also relevant to Northlanders if they are able to travel regularly to Albany for indoor skiing lessons. It is good to know what sports are available, in our region (or nearby), that can cater for people with disabilities. When a client asks, we would like to have knowledge to answer them immediately, which gives them a better customer experience than having to call them back, for example.
2. **Christine Petch (MoH Disability Support Services)**. Christine Petch was keen to know what each organisation does in terms of getting the disabled integrated into community activities and the workforce at this present time. I told her about the LYNKZ programme that NorthAble has running and she was very interested by this. It was also interesting to hear what other DRCs also run a similar programme, and who receives funding and who does not for such a service. Petch was very surprised to find that so many did have such a programme.
3. **Steven Bennett (Lottery NZ)**. A rundown on the basics of funding available and what sorts of things can be requested for and by whom under the Lottery NZ scheme. Harata and I now have a better understanding of the eligibility criteria, so can advise clients if need be.
4. **John Brannon (Queenstown DRC)**. Brannon summarised his job from the tourist point of view; how he has contacted hotels, tourist attractions and public transport in the area to see what services they have for the disabled. He has put these into a database so when people contact the DRC to see what they can do in Queenstown, he has this resource on hand to inform them. NorthAble has a similar system in that we have “Access Whangarei” brochures in stock to hand out to members of the public explaining where the accessible facilities are in Whangarei and

what public transport is available. We also receive an accommodation guide once per year which outlines which hotels in Whangarei are disability friendly. However, when it comes to areas further afield (but still within our jurisdiction), such as the Bay of Islands, we would refer clients to contact the local tourist information centre. However, neither of these resources to our knowledge give good disability access information. There used to be a proper NZ Standards tested Accessible Accommodation resource by Alexia Pickering, but this resource is no longer available.

5. **Chris Wood (BUPA)**. Discussion and demonstration of some of the equipment that BUPA supplies, mainly focusing on the “pressure mat”. He explained how the mat had changed one deaf single mother’s and her baby daughter’s quality of life. The mat was placed in the baby’s crib and when significant movement was placed on the mat from a very upset baby, a vibrating alarm that was placed under the mother’s pillow before sleeping would go off. It would wake the mother, who could then go tend to her baby. Before the pressure mat, the mother could not get a good night’s sleep (because she was afraid for the baby) and the baby would not always be tended to when she was crying because the mother would have eventually fallen asleep with exhaustion. Harata found Wood’s presentation particularly inspiring since she has a hearing impairment and felt she could relate to this lady’s problem herself. NorthAble has a BUPA catalogue, as well as catalogues from other companies which sell alarms (e.g.: St John’s), but there is nothing like a personal demonstration from someone with sound product knowledge to really enhance one’s understanding of the product. We both feel very confident now to advise. We have contact with a BUPA consultant and further information on their products and other suppliers of Alarm type systems.

That evening, there was more socialising and networking over the evening meal. We also witnessed an inspirational presentation by **Graeme Sinclair of the series “Gone Fishing”**. He explained how the Multiple Sclerosis that he developed late in life has not affected his desire for fishing and that he will never let his disability turn him into a victim. He still fishes to this day, just needs to adapt his equipment somewhat (as he is now in a wheelchair).

### **Tuesday 18 May 2010 Day Three**

This morning opened with a workshop led by **Alison Hearn from the Ministry of Health**. She presented to us some case studies about certain families within which was someone with a disability, and asked us to work on these case studies in small groups. She encouraged us to share ideas and to think of possible and realistic ways that we could help each family. It was insightful to brainstorm and see what ideas others came up with.

Our dear friend and colleague, **Jonny Wilkinson from the Tiaho Trust**, then presented. His topic was “**Information Dissemination and Utilisation**”. I understood that Jonny’s main point was that we need to focus and tailor our marketing to the intended audience. Generic advertising does not always work in the Disability Industry. What is the point of spending money to advertise something when the target audience is being missed? It was a reminder to many of the DRCs that we all need to have a serious marketing plan based on the results of quality research from which to work - so that we can be sure that the money we spend on marketing is being utilised to its fullest extent.

**Independent/Individualised Funding (IF)** was next on the agenda. We heard from **Mike Hamill** who has Athetoid Cerebral Palsy. He tells us that by using IF, his life has changed for the better. “Manawanui In Charge” provides Hamill with the funding to hire his own staff with his allocated budget. He also does his own books and taxes, just as a regular employer would. He explains that there are varying degrees of IF where differing levels of fiscal responsibility can be chosen, though he prefers to do it all and “be his own boss”. Under the old system, Hamill had little control over who would be nursing him. He had absolutely no social life as he was required to be in bed at 7.30pm and up at 7.30am seven days per week. Now he goes to night school, church and sports events... And can go to bed whenever he would like - as long as he negotiates with his carers. It is a team effort and certainly one worth having. This presentation was a real eye opener for me since I am so new to the Disability Sector and perhaps a bit *green*! I could not believe how badly some people have to suffer in this country! Having to go to bed every night of the week at 7.30pm - like a child?! Suffice to say, I really like the idea of IF and would like to see it utilised as much as possible in Northland.

Later that afternoon, we heard from a variety of different people. Again, the most relevant to us I have listed below:

1. **Peter Fergusson (DRC Auckland)**. Fergusson and team have developed a database in which all sorts of information concerning clients can be stored and collated. I am not 100% sure of the cost, but I think it was \$2300 for a setup of the database on six computers. The cost is for licensing, branding and GST only (the database will not be sold for a profit). Noel is looking into getting this software for us here at NorthAble to help maintain our record keeping.
2. **David Guess (Enable)**. Guess discusses changes in WEKA. He said Enable is aiming for WEKA to be the “hub” site for information, providing people with tools so that they can go off and find their own information. The reason why the equipment search no longer shows each piece of equipment available (rather the organisation where the equipment can be sourced for clients/DRCs to contact directly), is because such organisations put their whole catalogue online, but in reality, not all the equipment advertised in the catalogues is actually available in NZ. It was

giving false hope to clients, and as such, needed to be rectified. I also fed back to him our problem with the site's search engine. For example, typing in "walker" draws up no hits (but typing in "walking frame" leads to many hits). He is going to take that on board and will try and follow the TradeMe style of search engine, where putting in "walker" would bring up anything on the site with the word "walk" in it, making the search engine far more efficient.

3. **Phillip Beilby (NZFDIC Committee Member).** "Survey Monkey" is a software package designed specifically for storing, collating and interpreting survey results. Any interested parties to contact him about purchasing. NorthAble currently uses this software and find it very beneficial.
4. **Career Force.** On-the-job training. A Level Four NZQA Disability Dissemination Qualification is available to all working in the Sector and all staff are encouraged to do the qualification. For more information, visit [www.careerforce.org.nz](http://www.careerforce.org.nz). Harata and I are to start this training shortly. I am really looking forward to it.

Harata and I had a very informative three days. We both met many inspirational people and learned a lot more about the Disability Sector in New Zealand. The conference provided a great forum for us to expand our knowledge and meet individuals from other DRCs, some with their own disabilities to contend with and their own moving life stories. We would like to sincerely thank the Tiaho Trust for funding our attendance at the conference and would highly recommend others to attend the conference next year and in years to come.