

Students learn about disabilities



Jasmine Watts, left, and Nadia Brown discuss a photograph in the Our Stories exhibition.



Blaketown School student Amber McKenzie studies some of the photographs in the Our Stories exhibition at the Left Bank Art Gallery in Greymouth.

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Students from Coast schools are gaining a new awareness of what it is like to live with a disability, through visits to the Our Stories exhibition at the Left Bank Art Gallery in Greymouth.

Blaketown School teacher Dianne Burke who was at the exhibition with Year six, seven and eight pupils said the event would form part of a longer unit on various disabilities and awareness of these. The students had already discussed the parts of the body which would be most vulnerable in certain activities, such as wrestling in the playground, or popular sports, and had made up a set of safety rules.

For homework after the visit, they would be investigating the meaning of such terms as paraplegic and tetraplegic. And another planned follow up activity was painting with the feet or mouth.

The free Our Stories exhibition which runs in Greymouth until April 20, challenges Coasters to get to know people with disabilities - to see the person first, rather than the disability.

Based on photographs by Hanne Johnsen and Glenn Busch's book, *The Man With No Arms and Other Stories*, the exhibition uses photographs, words and film to tell the stories of people with disabilities. The project sends the message that people with disabilities have a right to participate in the community, to share in family life, have a job and ambitions.

Throughout the exhibition, primary school pupils have been taking part in educational workshops at the gallery, called "My Name Is ...". Some year seven and eight pupils interviewed people with disabilities to make a short documentary as part of the Film Fest workshop.

Students had the chance to meet local people with disabilities and find out what it is like to live with a disability.

IHC and CCS Disability Action have formed a two-year partnership to take the exhibition to audiences around the country.

By Jo Keppel