

Workshops to enable dreams and ambition

by Lindy Laird

A programme coming to Whangarei soon aims to add value to the lives of people who have disabilities, through enabling them to share their own stories, dreams and ambitions.

Our Stories is a joint venture between CCS and IHC, two organisations with many shared concerns and aims. The programme also involves another partnership in which abled people — educators, employers, sport groups and school children, for instance — learn more about the daily lives of people who have to live with the effects of disability.

Our Stories is designed to be an eye-opener about how schools

and sports clubs, to name two organisations that are geared to the fit and able, marginalise the disabled, and, by association, their families.

Introducing the programme to sector representatives at a meeting at Tiaho Trust last week, Christchurch-based IHC advocate Pip O'Connell said there was still a lack of full inclusion for disabled people in schools, the workforce, clubs and other areas.

"But these people have the same ambitions, dreams and goals as anyone else," Ms O'Connell said.

However, society failed to actively seek ways to help those ends be met, she said. *Our Stories* uses workshops, film-making,

story-telling, art, guest speakers and abled and disabled people working together to get that message across.

School students play a major role. As well as all schools in a region being invited to take an active role in workshops, a group of students selected from two of the schools make short films about a disabled person in their community.

The films are then shown at a gala night at the end of the two-week programme.

Cut-backs in teacher-aid spending and the high cost of transport for rural schools has been a stumbling block for participation in other areas where the scheme has been staged.

"It has been a challenge to fill all the workshops but feedback has all been about the great rewards gained from taking part," Ms O'Connell said.

She said it was important for all groups and individuals to help encourage as much participation as possible.

Tiaho Trust chief executive Johnny Wilkinson urged all schools and organisations to take part when the programme comes to Whangarei in early August.

"It's been a long time coming. We need to stress 'don't let this opportunity be wasted'," Mr Wilkinson said.

Our Stories has been rolled out in several New Zealand centres in the past two years.