



Power

to the Disabled



Meet **JONNY WILKINSON**, a man with a mission to enhance the lives of the **DISABLED**

Jonny as CEO It is one of the very few organisations where most of the employees are themselves disabled. Since the inception of Tiaho Trust, there have been some positive signs for disabled people. "We've established closer relationships between the local disabled community and local government such as the Whangarei District Council, the Far North District Council and the Northland District Health Board," Jonny points out.

and white photographs by Hanne Johnsen at Reyburn House. The images depict a range of disabled people at school, work and with their families. They capture moments of inclusion and exclusion, loneliness and playfulness, drive and passion.

Another aspect is "our stories in our town", involving a workshop for year 7 and 8 students to interview a disabled person and produce a DVD of the encounter. Jonny, who was interviewed by students from Manaia View Primary, says he was "pleasantly surprised by how interested, vibrant and vital the kids were around learning about people with disability". This DVD will be shown, along with all the others made by the kids, at a special "Our Stories" film fest.

Tiaho Trust is also focussed on widening employment opportunities for disabled people and to have them included in recreational and sports activities. "Disabled people are very resilient and adaptive, with good problem-solving skills," says Jonny. According to him, the prejudice against employing disabled people is reflected in the high unemployment rate among this group, even at times of labour shortages. To help overcome this, "Our Stories" is also arranging an evening for employers and service groups, as well as sport, recreation and leisure organisations to hear stories from local people who have achieved work or are involved with a local group.

Tiaho Trust is involved in the innovative "Our Stories" project, which is all about breaking down barriers to the inclusion of disabled people in the larger community. It's about providing resources and a stage for the voices of local people living with disability to be heard. The

As CEO of Tiaho Trust, an organisation set up to promote understanding of disabled people, Jonny Wilkinson is an expert on the subject. But his expertise isn't only the kind that comes from study - it's also the firsthand experience of someone who is himself disabled.

Born with cerebral palsy, at the age of six Jonny shifted from Fiji to New Zealand with his family. "I've lived in Whangarei on and off ever since and this is really home to me," he says. Jonny attended local mainstream schools - Onerahi Primary and Whangarei Intermediate and Boys' High.

Recalling his OE to Asia and Europe, Jonny says he was particularly warmly received in Thailand where the Buddhist population treated him with great acceptance and kindness. He later completed a postgraduate diploma in information systems at Auckland University and developed a software package for the legal

profession. During this time he also met his wife and the couple now lives in Whangarei with their two daughters.

An attitude Jonny has often encountered is that because of his physical impairment, people assume he is also intellectually disabled. To overcome this, he has learnt to reach out

to others and establish a connection with them. "Once they get to know me, there's no problem."

Jonny is passionate about inclusivity for disabled people. Although things are slowly changing, "NZ society still has fairly deep-rooted attitudes towards people with impairments. The public disables them through discriminatory attitudes," he says. Disabled people are just like everyone else and, like everyone else, would like to be treated with respect.

Tiaho Trust was set up five years ago with

goal is to allow dialogue and understanding, leading to the creation of new relationships and opportunities.

"Our Stories" includes an exhibition of black

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OUR STORIES EVENTS

Film Fest
Screening of "Our Stories in Our Town" DVDs
September 9th at 7pm, Coffer Suite, Forum North

Information Evening
For employers, service groups and sport, recreation and leisure organisations, with MC Flash from More FM August 12 at 5.30pm, Reyburn House

Photographic Exhibition
At Reyburn House until 15 August

