

Disabled tell Our Stories

By Denise Piper

An exciting project aimed at changing attitudes toward disability is launching in Whangarei this week.

The exhibition and workshops, Our Stories, is sponsored by IHC and CCS Disability Action, and co-ordinated locally by Tiaho Trust.

The aim is to achieve a greater awareness of disabled people in Northland, says trust chief executive officer Jonny Wilkinson.

"They are citizens and community members just like everyone else and they add value to the Northland community when they are able to be included," he says.

The workshops for primary school children, employers and community groups will help people recognise the differences in disabled people and see their potential, says Mr Wilkinson.

"I think that to not label people as disabled is to undermine what it is to be disabled and to pretend that disability doesn't exist," he says.

Mr Wilkinson says employment is one area of particular interest, as disabled people have the highest rate of unemployment.

"I think that has a lot to do with employer's attitudes viewing disabled people as either being non-productive or a risk to their business," he says.

The workshop aims to educate employers that disabled people can add value to their organisation, as they tend to be more local, more committed to their work and good problem solvers.

Mr Wilkinson will be one of the guest speakers for Our Stories, sharing his life to primary school children.

"My talk will involve connecting to the young children as an ordinary guy, as an ordinary dad with ordinary chil-

dren, that happens to have a physical disability called cerebral palsy."

Mr Wilkinson says while he leads a relatively normal life, he says he does do things differently, like drink with a straw and drive with a steering nob on his steering wheel.

He will also be the subject of a movie made by local children for a film festival.

Mr Wilkinson says he is disappointed more local primary schools have not got involved with the learning opportunity.

Last week just four schools – Glenbervie, Manaia View, St Francis Xavier and Aniwanui in the Far North – had signed up.

Our Stories, which will tour New Zealand during the next two years, is one of the biggest education projects about disabled people held in Whangarei, believes Mr Wilkinson.

He expects it to be well received.

Earlier this year exhibition Intimate Encounters, about disability and sex, was viewed by 2000 people in Whangarei, including 100 on opening night.

Our Stories, including photo exhibition My Name Is... will be held at Reyburn House Gallery, with opening night from 5.30pm on Friday.

The project will be opened by deputy mayor Kahu Sutherland and entertainment by Hatea Kapa Haka.

The employers workshop, chaired by Northland Chamber of Commerce chief executive Jeff Smith, will be held on August 5, from 5.30pm.

The workshop for service, sport and recreation groups, chaired by More FM presenters Markby and Flash will be held on August 12, from 5.30pm. The exhibition will run until August 15.

■ **For more information phone Saffron Tyler, Tiaho Trust, on 430-3406.**



My story: Jonny Wilkinson will be sharing his life as a disabled person as part of the Our Stories project.

Nite Flite needs more vehicles

Nite Flite has fallen victim to its own success with more vans needed to meet demand.

About a third of late night bar patrons in the Whangarei CBD use the service, which currently has two vans to deliver customers safely home.

But the success of the service has brought demand for more vans to reduce waiting times.

Whangarei Alcohol Accord co-ordinator Linda Nash says the availability of taxis in Vine Street can still be erratic and organisers are now investigating doubling the fleet to reduce the wait during busy times.

"In a way I guess you could say the service is a victim of its own success, but it's a great problem to have and we're thrilled with the support and loyalty those taking advantage of Whangarei's night life continue to show it."

Nite Flite was started late last year by the Whangarei Alcohol Accord.

The service shuttles people home from town on Friday and Saturday nights at a cost of \$5 per person.

Ms Nash says she has had a very positive response from Nite Flite users who now feel they can go to town and not worry about how to get home safely.

"They're telling us that they now feel safe to come out knowing they can get home relatively quickly and safely. This is especially true for single female patrons."