

disability connect.

Impact Report

Jan 2022 - Jun 2023



Image description: Mike from Disability Connect sits in his wheelchair holding the Diane Rangi Innovation Award, smiling. Steven from New World and Lisa from the Federation of Disability Information Centres stand next to him smiling.

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Foreword

by Paula Tesoriero

As the Chief Executive for Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People, I am pleased to introduce the Disability Connect Impact Report. This report outlines Disability Connect’s important work in Auckland and across Aotearoa.

I have been privileged to support the work of Disability Connect for many years now and appreciate their tireless work to engage and support disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, and their parents/family/whānau.



Image description: Paula has short dark hair and is wearing pearl earrings and a white top with black spots on it.

This report rightly focuses on the experiences of our community, along with shining a light on the barriers and challenges disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori and their family/whānau experience. It shows that investing in the lives of people can bring about real change and highlights the power of local networks in responding at times of increased need, such as during the recent severe weather events.

Disability Connect has a 30-year history of working collaboratively, in ways that are mana enhancing, person-centred, disability community led, and respectful of the role of whānau. This is further enhanced by the commitment shown to the Enabling Good Lives principles.

Reading this report, I am struck by how the diversity of Disability Connect’s work reflects the diversity of their community: from the Transition Expo to individual planning workshops – this work is making a difference, it is transforming lives.

My congratulations to you all – committee members, staff, volunteers, and the community – on your work’s impact and your many achievements.

Ngā mihi nui,

Paula Tesoriero MNZM

Tumu Whakarae, Chief Executive, Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People

Our Values, Vision, Mission and Activities

Our Values:

To respect and support choice.

Our Vision:

That people with disabilities and their families are able to lead the lives they want.

Our Mission:

To lead and influence positive change for people with disabilities and their families.

Our Activities:

- Influence national policy and decision making
- Provide information and advice
- Host presentations, forums and workshops
- Facilitate networking, collaboration and partnerships

Finding Calm After the Storm

Tim is 11 years old, has autism and lives with his mum, Mary, who has a long-term health condition. Cyclone Gabrielle washed away their driveway. Tim was terribly upset and unsettled which added stress to Mary.

Both EQC and Mary's insurer turned down their claim for repairs which pushed Mary "to the brink". Then she called Disability Connect.

We were able to guide Mary towards calming devices to help Tim. We also connected her with community legal support to change the insurer's mind, and referred her for some funding through MSD and Carers NZ to help out.

"Thank you so much for caring when I was at my lowest point," said Mary.

Our Impact - In Numbers

- 55 families assisted through pastoral care
- 800+ support group attendees
- 284 seminar attendees
- 750+ Transition Expo attendees
- 3.3K+ individual information requests
- 1.1K+ volunteer hours
- 150+ WeChat group members
- 4.4K+ e-subscribers
- 3.8K+ Facebook followers



***"Every dollar invested
in Disability Connect
delivers an average
850% return over the
life of a disabled
person."
- Impact Lab***



Image description: Mike using animated hand gestures during an informal speech. He is sitting in his wheelchair and wears a blue shirt. Event attendees stand around the room listening to him.

People and Governance

For and by disabled whānau

Did you know 70% of our staff either live with a disability themselves or have a child with a disability?

Our CEO has a disability, is a parent and has a brother-in-law with a disability.

Our board includes a disabled person and six people who are or have been parents of disabled children.

Our Pastoral Care Service for families supporting members with disabilities has a direct knock-on effect on our community; encouraging whānau to seek more informed choices for their loved ones, thereby gaining more control of their lives in a way that's person-centred and mana enhancing. This is in complete alignment with Enabling Good Lives.



Image description: Asoka smiles, wearing black jacket and blue scarf. She is hugging her son Indika who is taller than her and wears a camouflage hat and khaki jacket.



Image description: Paula Tesoriero next to the Disability Connect team who are holding their awards. Everyone is dressed up for the event and smiling brightly.

Our mahi to represent our disability community is reflected in the awards we've been honoured to receive:

- Diane Rangi Innovation Award - Kai with Kindness (2021-22)
- Federation of Disability Information Centres Information Specialist of the Year - Asoka Gamage-Mendis (2021-22), Yoky Yao (2022-23)
- Federation of Disability Information Centres Student of the Year - Building Inclusive Communities - Yoky Yao (2022-23)

Preparing for Transition

Supporting school leavers

In March 2022, we hosted our first Facebook live streamed discussion panel: *What Will Be Available When I Leave School in 2024?*, featuring panelists:

- Adri Isbister, Deputy Director General DSS - Ministry of Health
- Anne Hawker, Principal Disability Advisor - Ministry of Social Development
- Sara Williams, Business Analyst - Tertiary Education Commission

Approximately 100 parents, providers and schools from around the country tuned into the discussion to learn about each expert's take on the near future.



Image description: A screenshot of the livestream. Mike is in the top left corner wearing a headset. Scott the NZSL interpreter is in the top right corner wearing a black top and signing. Adri is at the bottom of the screen, smiling.

Later that year, our Transition Expo returned bigger and better than ever before, with a Disability Connect record of 750+ attendees. We were honoured to have Paula Tesoriero open it as her first engagement as CEO of Whaikaha.

Our Chill Out Zone, a sensory space to assist people overwhelmed by the crowds and noise, was a major success. We also premiered our captioned video series showcasing five businesses started by young disabled school leavers and their whānau. These stories have since been shared around the country as a resource to help school leavers better understand the opportunities available in transition.



Image descriptions: A collage of photos showing families featured within the "Starting a Social Enterprise" video series, some showing the young person creating their product at home or smiling with their family members.

Our Events

Seminars & Workshops

Webinars with Nan Jensen

We hosted a total of 19 popular seminars with legal expert Nan Jensen, now offered exclusively on Zoom so families, professionals and community supports around the country can access them:

- *Planning for Adulthood* - covering the PPPR Act, Welfare Guardianship and Power of Attorney.
- *Education Legal Issues* - covering ORS declines, access to Special Schools and extra-curricular activities.

We're grateful for Nan providing this service. As our children, siblings, whānau and parents go through life stages, it's wonderful to have the best possible legal information to navigate and prepare.

WINZ Seminars

We held 5 WINZ seminars to help families understand the range of disability support available to them. Where possible, we hosted these in the community so questions could be asked kanoahi ki te kanoahi (face to face) with community supports too.

PATH Workshops

In May 2022, we hosted Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) workshops in partnership with Imagine Better. Six handpicked families, most of whom have challenges navigating support systems with English as a second language, benefitted from our support to craft a vision and plan to move forward.



Image description: Tony McLean (facilitator) and Erin (illustrator) draw on a long sheet of paper on the wall to assist a family with a person-centred PATH plan.

***"We feel very lucky
that we can attend
the PATH program..."***

***It gives us very
useful information.***

***We feel more
confident and
strengthened about
my son's future.***

***Thank you for
choosing us."***

Our Support Groups

Our Support and Social Groups played an important role meeting the 'social' and respite needs of families post pandemic, floods and the cyclone in Auckland.

We're pleased to consistently offer a diverse range of information based on the needs families express to us.

We've covered various topics and activities:

- Speech Language Therapy
- Individualised Funding
- Managing Anxiety & Back to School Behaviours
- Transition Options
- Autism
- Managing Behavioural Issues
- Enabling Good Lives and Systems Transformation
- Behaviour Therapy
- Puberty and Sexuality
- Who are we? Reshaping the Identity of Parents of Neurodivergent Children
- Bollywood Dance Party
- Sexuality and Intellectual Disability
- Water Safety and Intellectual Disability
- Consent and Healthy Relationships
- Floral Inspiration
- Census 2023
- Positively Managing Screen Time for Neurodiverse Young People
- Scented Candle Making
- Dance Movement Therapy
- MSD Social Housing Applications
- ORS Funding and School Transitions
- Ministry of Education Learning Support
- A Mother's Experience

A number of regulars also rely on our online Zoom Support Group as a lifeline. Hosted every Monday evening at 7pm, this group is promoted through our website, newsletter and social media.

For families with little to no spare time, including working professionals with disabled family members, the opportunity to get the best information possible to navigate life is a godsend.

On behalf of the families and communities who benefit from your time each Monday, thank you Robyn for your dedication and faithfulness.



Image description: Andrea Smart from Ministry of Education sits in a chair, with a presentation behind her that reads "Ongoing Resource Scheme". Mike also sits at the front on the other side of the TV.

In the Community

Community collaboration

For the first time ever, we hosted both WINZ and Taikura Trust for a combined seminar in a community collaboration with The Pride in Manurewa.

Over 100 people from the local community attended the event in June 2023. Content covered the range of disability benefits available through WINZ and the assessment process for disabilities.

Of greatest benefit for attendees was the availability of WINZ, Taikura Trust and Disability Connect staff to answer specific questions afterwards.



Image description: Manurewa families and professionals sit in a room, listening to WINZ and Taikura Trust presenting at a combined community seminar.

We also met many people from the South Auckland community with disabled whānau with limited understanding of disability supports at Manukau's Fun Fest in January 2023. We were an invited community provider in the "wellbeing zone" put on by The Pride from Manurewa. Other community events included Level Up Aotearoa's Summer Hookup in Papatoetoe and Manurewa and lots of visits to Specialist and Satellite School events throughout Auckland.

Modelling care with Te Ora Puawai



Image description: Mike at a Te Ora Puawai meeting, with other members also in the room and three people joining online via video call.

Te Ora Puawai provides free support for whānau with long term health conditions and disabilities, mostly in South Auckland. We help guide their community navigators and connect them to resources for disability equipment, information and services.

This model of care is led by a governance group, chaired by a disabled person and including two people with disabled whānau members. Representation within leadership for community initiatives is breaking down barriers for more disabled people and their whānau to follow.



One Phone Call Away: Navigating Life's Changes

Jade's three-year-old cousin lives with Cerebral Palsy.

After a year at Starship, he was about to move back home. Jade called and reached out to us worried as her whānau didn't yet understand the process or have supports in place for his next stage in life.

We advised Jade to approach her paediatrician for a potential Social Worker referral, connect with Taikura Trust for an updated assessment, and introduced her to our free, weekly Zoom Support Group.



Image descriptions: A collage of photos showing families attending our various Parent Support and Social Groups, such as watching a presentation or taking part in a hands-on floral arrangement workshop.

Our Advocacy Work

A voice for disabled whānau

Community Housing Collective

Disabled people, their families and whānau are frustrated and hurt that their voices are not being heard. If we don't listen to them, we run the risk of missing a once in a lifetime opportunity to build homes that address true social and economic poverty in our country.

Disability Connect provides leadership on this issue through the Community Housing Collective with the purpose of giving a voice to disabled people their families and whānau, raising awareness of the issue with housing stakeholders and advocating for change with government.

Kainga Kōrero, our Housing Forum in April 2023, featured three families telling their social housing journeys, how families prepared for their disabled loved ones to leave home and find a place of their choice in social housing or flatting. Over 100 people attended, including disability housing providers encouraging families and whānau to have a vision and a plan.

Community Housing Collective Members:

Disability Connect, ME Family Services, Otara Health Charitable Trust, Complex Care Group, Yes Disability, Autism New Zealand, IHC, Cerebral Palsy Association, Te Manawa Respite Care, Spectrum Foundation, Level-up Aotearoa Charitable Trust, Te Ora Puawai, and Auckland Disability Law.

Follow up Housing Zoom Support Groups provided opportunities for families to share their journeys, assess different models of appropriate housing and find support.

“Inspiring to hear these three stories. Very good sharing and connecting.”

“Amazing. I learned so much. Thank you for organising.”

“Thank you to everyone involved, esp those who share their stories. So good to hear.”

Our Advocacy Work

Over the past 18 months we advocated for the needs of disabled people and their families to:

- Auckland Council - Regional Parks Management Plan, The Landing, Waiheke Island, Stancombe Rd Playground Flat Bush
- Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment's EV Charging Strategy
- Ministry of Education's Higher Needs Review
- The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission's first national strategy
- Social Housing/Kainga Ora Masterplanning for Universal Design alongside CCS-Disability Auckland and Living Well Centre Dunedin
- NZDSN - Housing White Paper
- Banking with individual retail banks and New Zealand Banking Association
- Home and Community Support Services - Professionalisation of Carer Support and Immigration Settings
- Parent Family and Whanau Networks, Ombudsman - Floods and Cyclones
- Auckland Emergency Management, Office of Disability Issues - Covid-19 settings.

Two highlights from our advocacy:

- Auckland Council has committed to one accessible walking track in each Auckland park.
- A change to the new Pae Ora legislation governing Health New Zealand from "*disabled people*" to "*disabled people and their families and whānau*" in the annual Health of Disabled People Strategy for New Zealand.

James Can Make His Own Purchases

Samantha is among the many parents who've told us of their challenges with banking. As a Welfare Guardian for her son James (27), she was told that due to James' intellectual disability, he shouldn't be granted access to a card if he can't use a PIN. Samantha asked for a separate debit card for James to use as this would give peace of mind to families via accountability and an audit trail.

We took these concerns to the New Zealand Banking Association, engaging with ASB, Westpac, BNZ, Kiwibank, and HSCB. ASB has since appointed a Disability and Inclusion Manager and Samantha has been able to have a conversation with her bank and receive a debit card for James.

We're encouraging families to have informed conversations about Welfare Guardianship and Power of Attorney to give their disabled children greater autonomy, choice and control.

Final Words From the CEO

As someone said to me recently “mate you guys do #!@! good work, don’t stop!”.

This report highlights that Disability Connect is more than a trusted information source for disabled people, their whānau, and the sector.



Image description: Mike smiling. He has short brown hair and a blue shirt.

We also carry an important voice for families to government, and work with our communities to make them better as places of belonging for our members too.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who supports us, especially our funders **Whaikaha, Te Whatu Ora, Ministry of Social Development, Foundation North, Lotteries, COGS, Lion Foundation, P H Lister Trust**, and our donors who make our work possible.

Over the past 18 months, we distributed over 15,000 RATs, 12,000 masks and 1,000 bottles of hand sanitiser through our communities. We wouldn't be able to do this without our volunteers, including our wonderful board, Mark "The Intern" Hoffman, Serena Low, and support from Taikura Trust, Merkle, I AM Mangere, The Pride Manurewa, Rotary St Johns and Mercury.

We've also received more questions about Enabling Good Lives during this time: *When is it coming to Auckland? How do we plan for it? What will it offer my family? What is the new Ministry offering to make our lives better?*

Our answer is that the principles of EGL are already here. Personal budgets are on the way and we can take the initiative now to have the best lives possible. Our commitment to disabled people and whānau is to provide you with the very best information possible so you can lead your lives the way you want.

We'll continue our mahi, anticipating another impactful year ahead.

Ngā mihi nui,

Mike Potter

CEO, Disability Connect

"I love engaging with Disability Connect, they are passionate about what they do and have a lived experience. I also love attending the courses as they enable me to live my life to the fullest and in turn be a positive contributing member of the community. May our heavenly God continue to bless this organisation and its dedicated staff members." - Miriam

Thank you to our partners who make our mahi possible:



Image description: Nine Disability Connect team members smile together, standing or sitting next to a branded pull up banner.

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connect.**
helping families