

# Touch Compass

## Your Touch Compass Update!

### People pursuing strength 🦵

#### Inside:

- AIGA news! Next stop ... Nelson!
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  - \* and more!
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**Kia ora!**

**Nau mai haere mai from your friendly neighbourhood leader in professional disability-led arts.**

**Before we get to our latest exciting updates for you, we're gonna get real with you.**

**Really real!**

**We'll preface this by acknowledging the mana and aroha from our artists, allies and advocates individual and collective, disabled and non-disabled who have shared their hearts with us and all those impacted. If you'll indulge us, this isn't about the art. It's about the heart.**

**Warning:** You are about to read the real opinions of real people with a real lived experience of disability



**ID: (above) A solitary wheelchair sits atop a small rocky outcrop as the waves of the seas move their way towards it. The sky in the background is overcast with little daylight. The image evokes isolation.**

## Pursuing Strength

If you're feeling isolated and all at sea at the moment, an artist or an ally, we're with you.

Arts have always been a reflection of life; and right now, we're reflecting on how many lives have been impacted by decisions that neither engaged, considered or included them. We've spent the past month, like so many across the motu, reflecting on and reviewing the move to de-power a core Ministry in the lives of us all - Whaikaha - The Ministry of Disabled People and the erosion of individual power. Added to the previous moves made, it feeling like a pile-on.

As a Disability-Led arts organisation, [this announcement](#) made by Minister Louise Upston has affected us all. Our arts leaders, our trustees, our whānau, artists, associates and allies.

Whaikaha, meaning "to pursue strength" is not just a Ministry title, it's an ethos of empowerment, enhancement and engagement. NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US. Sadly, in this decision to downgrade we saw little to none of that ethos in action, and it's affecting real lives.

IYKYK, [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \[UNCRPD\] \(2006\)](#) guides signatory countries in their internal policy and decision-making. Guess what? We, Aotearoa New Zealand are a signatory country.

What does that mean? That means our nation and its leaders are obligated to honour that convention and the articles within it.

Dr Suzanne Cowan, Artistic Direction Panel shares her concerns:

"My concerns about this announcement [from our Minister], are first - the way

it was communicated; and second - the thinking and facts behind it. They're contradictory to the obligations of this government under the UNCRPD."

**Lusi Faiva, Artistic Direction Panel says:**

"A big bah bah bah! The government decides to keep us in [their] control. It's how I'm going through it right now, every single week. I had, and have, high hopes that Whaikaha will be able to deliver what is needed for the disability community, providing the support and advocacy that we hugely rely on to make our lives better! It is a big disappointment indeed!"

**Suzanne adds:**

"As a signatory to the UNCRPD which specifically affirms the rights of disabled people, our government is bound to the following:

1. Recognising the importance for people with disabilities of their own individual autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices; and
2. Considering the persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision making processes about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them."

"Moving DSS to the jurisdiction of MSD, and pausing the roll-out of Enabling Good Lives is completely contradictory to the principles of the UNCRPD and the NZ Disability Strategy."

**Rodney Bell reacts:**

"Firstly I'd like to acknowledge the Mana of d/Deaf, low-vision, blind, Disabled People and Families, Tangata Whaikaha and Whaanau, Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti, across ages, abilities and locations of Aotearoa. I believe the recent announcements made by the Minister regarding the decision to move Disability Support Services contracting from Whaikaha to Ministry of Social Development was done with little to no consultation with Disabled Peoples,

**Families and Whaanau and limited consultation with providers.**

**As a Tangata Whenua representative on the Waikato Enabling Good Lives Leadership Group I have witnessed the successes of the EGL approach. One of the primary goals of Enabling Good Lives is equitable outcomes for all with disabilities. We believe that all disabled individuals have the right to care and support while still retaining self-determination, choice and control over their lives. Through the Enabling Good Lives approach, based on all eight principles, including self-determination, disabled people are able to choose how they want to be supported and use their funding in life enhancing ways, meaning they are in control of their own lives. We Strongly believe that the best way to achieve equity for disabled people is through the roll out of EGL nation wide and we cannot accept the reversal of the progress that's been made. Let's keep united my creative Friends and my motto in reaction to interesting bends in my river of Life is "Dance Everything."**

***Note: The NZ Disability Strategy specifically states its objective is to transform the Disability System and the transformation will be based on the [Enabling Good Lives \(EGL\)](#) vision and principles, and informed by evidence of 'what works'. The EGL approach is based on disabled children and adults and their families having greater choice and control over their supports and lives.***

**Final thought from Te whanau o Touch Compass:**

**This stalling of EGL, its transformative potential, and the de-powering of a Ministry that was "of" not "for" Disabled People, runs the very real risk of catapulting us back to poorly delivered services where disabled people are done "for" not "with".**

**We will continue our mission to be Aotearoa New Zealand's leading Disability-Led Arts organisation and the kaupapa inherent within that commitment. Come on NZ, join us!**

On with the BIG news!

If you're still with us, ngā mihi mō tō tautoko -well, keep reading.

# BIG ANNOUNCEMENT: AIGA



🔥💖🔥 AIGA! Exciting Announcement! 🔥💖🔥

We are thrilled to share that 🌸 AIGA 🌸 is coming to the Nelson Arts Festival this October!

Experience the warrior spirit of Lusi Faiva in this powerhouse performance that embodies strength in every heartbeat.

Disability-Led, Pasifika-Led accessible awesomeness!

Supported by a stellar ensemble featuring Forest V Kapo, Iana Grace, Fiona Collins and Jake Arona it's a stunning work of artistry, access and culture. More than just a show, it's a celebration of resilience, creativity, and community.

Don't miss out on this unforgettable event—book it into your calendar for 29 October at the Theatre Royal Nelson and be a part of something truly powerful.

Join us in celebrating this not-to-be-missed performance ✨

Get your Tickets at this link here 🖱️ <https://nelsonartsfestival.nz/event/aiga/>



**ID:** In this image, Lusi is the central focus, sitting in her power chair and smiling with joy. She wears a costume designed by LIndah Lepou made from paper and cardboard, consisting of a large pleated skirt with a train that touches the floor. On the right side of her head, she has a paper flower, inserted in her hair, and a thick card mask placed across her eyes, evoking mystery. The combination of her outfit and her happy expression is eye-catching and captivating. The black background highlights Lusi and ensures she remains the center of attention.



**IN DEVELOPMENT: WHITE NOISE**  
(formerly working-titled titled Pearls)

Alisha McLennan Marler conscripted choreographic collaborator Jessie McCall (*say that five times fast!*) and hit the studio over the past few weeks for creative development of Lish's future solo performance work "White Noise".

Lish says: "I'm exploring material that deeply connects with themes of motherhood and parenting as a person with a disability, while also revisiting ideas on disrupting assumptions."

Jessie says, "I am stoked to be working with the TC whānau this year, in studio with Lish and dive into the next stage of development to help form WHITE NOISE into the provocative, tender work that it's shaping up to be."

Producer Fiona Saunders shares:

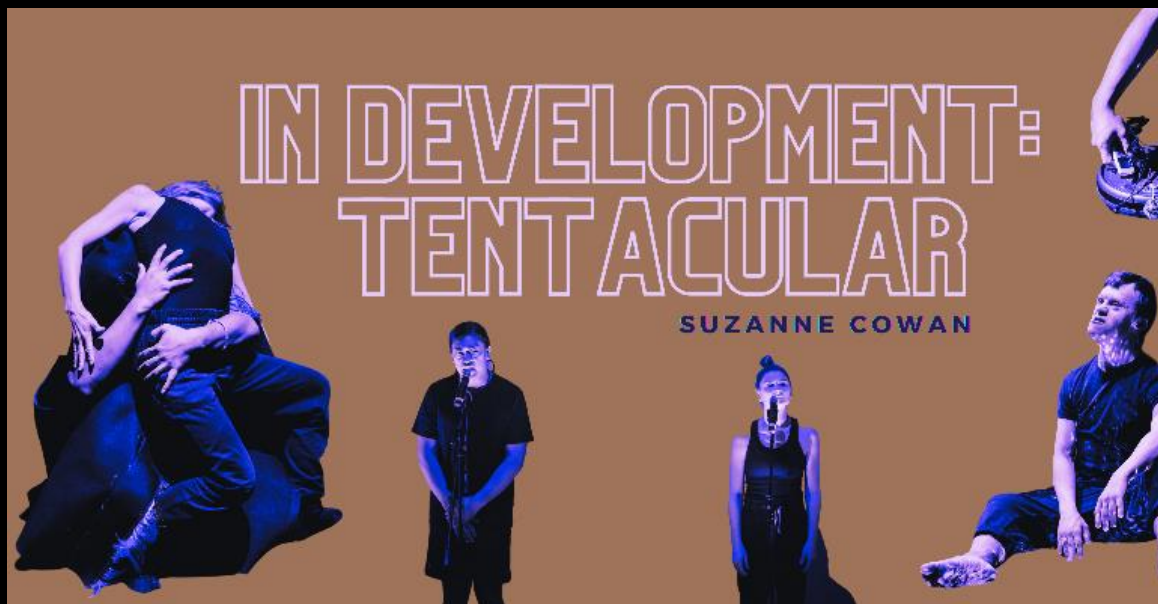
"Lish and Jessie are doing lots of great work coming up with really solid ideas and creation. Even in just the first few days of development, things have



started to shape up beautifully. Last week we were exploring aerial ideas. The next phase of workshopping this November will see us in a blackout space and have the ability to explore aerial performing further. We might even have a development showing at the end of those weeks."

Lish shares: "It's been great working with Jessie so far. I have a lot of agency in this process."

Stay tuned for more updates on this exciting solo collab journey! 🔄❤️🌟



[AI, equity, and ableism through the lens of a Roomba?](#)

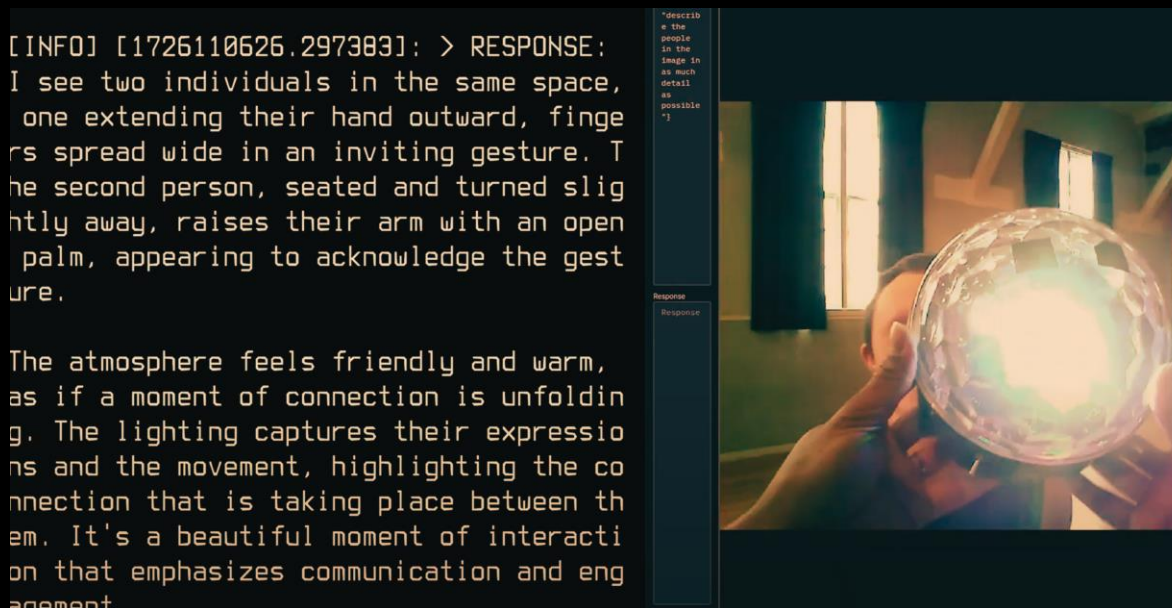
Suzanne Cowan - Artistic Direction Panel

'Tentacular', Suzanne Cowan's post humanist performance piece has been exploring choreography, creation, connection and collaboration with ... a

robot!

A truly collaborative effort in development, Robotics designer and creator, Adam Ben-Dror, has been working alongside Sound designer Kristian Larsen to bring Suzanne's vision of a working robot stripped of anthropomorphism to life. Controversial and creative, this version is embedded with Artificial Intelligence language systems (AI) 🤖 🧠 AI 🦾 and Computer Vision, creatively catapulting the show into new territory.

The cast - Duncan Armstrong, Raven Afoa-Purcell and Julie van Renen - have been working with Suzanne, Adam and Kristian to put the unit through its paces this September, exploring its capability to communicate, move, engage and choreograph, building a unique and performative human/object relationship in more depth through accessible dance and performance.



**ID: A juxtaposed side by side image. On the left appears the text language of the AI robot's "thinking" as it experiences a dance an movement scene created by Raven and Duncan. To the right of the text is the image from the AI robot's onboard camera system showing here Raven's hands reaching from**


behind the robot almost resembling the 'arms' of the robot reaching out towards Duncan. In their hands they hold a lighted sphere that obscures the view of Duncan. The robot's thinking text to the left describes the scene - as it happens!


Suzanne says: "Performance is a dreaming space and WE want to dream BIG for Tentacular."

Watch out for the Tentacular 'space' to emerge throughout 2025!



We've got class! The new Dance Collab

 Dance Collab continues fortnightly at Sunderland Lounge, Hobsonville on Fridays, 7.00pm – 8.30pm and the collaborations just keep growing.

 Dance Collab is a vibrant and inclusive dance experience that invites participants to explore movement in a supportive and creative environment. Led by experienced instructors Suzanne Cowan and Lee Mcgarva, each session offers a unique theme and most recently new tutor collaborators.

**COLLABORATORS COMING UP:**

**October 4 - Dance Collab with Rachel Ruckstuhl Mann**

**October 18 - Dance Collab with Clare Luiten**

**About Dance Collab: It's about guiding dancers of all abilities to discover new ways of expressing themselves through music and movement. From exploring the spirals in our bodies to the paradoxical forces of moving towards and moving away, Dance Collab delves into the depths of human expression, inviting participants to connect with themselves and others in a meaningful way.**

**Dance Collab is more than just a dance class—it's a journey of self-discovery and community connection. Join us and experience the joy of movement!**



**To register for a class please contact Suzanne Cowan directly [suzannec@touchcompass.org.nz](mailto:suzannec@touchcompass.org.nz) or follow the Dance Collab Facebook page [here](https://www.facebook.com/DanceCollabNZ) > <https://www.facebook.com/DanceCollabNZ>**



**We've got class! Lets Dance together weekly!**

Exciting news! 🌟 Our weekly class programmes are getting ready for Term 4, and our Tuesday Creative Class can be seen performing at this year's Interact Festival in October.

We love supporting our creative community with a range of engaging activities and we were thrilled to be invited to celebrate all abilities again at Interact. 🙌

Our Saturday contemporary class continues under the guidance of Joanna Sylvester while Sue Cheesman takes a well earned break for a few months.

Tuesday creative classes will kick off again this October! These programmes help teen and adult individuals express themselves, make new friends, and create lasting memories through accessible dance and movement. 🦸‍♀️ 🦸‍♂️ 🦸‍♀️

Whether you're disabled or non-disabled, our classes offer a diverse and accessible space where everyone is welcome to join our whānau.

Our classes provide a fantastic opportunity to grow connections, learn with others, and explore your creativity in a safe and supportive environment. Recommended for ages 12 and over, our classes are open to all who want to experience the joy of movement. 🦸‍♀️ 🦸‍♂️ 🦸‍♀️ 🎵

If you or someone you know would benefit from our welcoming and creative atmosphere, we invite you to join us! [Click here to join a class or for more information!](#) Let's dance together!

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### **Breaking News!**

✦ **New Leadership at Touch Compass!** ✦ The past couple of months have seen a seismic shift for Touch Compass as the disability-led kaupapa ushered in under Chair Guy Ryan rolls forward into its next iteration. Touch Compass announce Andrew "Drew" McMillan and Beckie Lockhart are the new Co-Chairs of the Board of Trustees replacing Guy after seven years as a trustee, four as Chair. A succession plan guided by Guy to ensure our disability-led kaupapa keeps embedding itself at all levels, that we stroll and roll our talk. Drew and Beckie rolled in to their new roles on 20 August. A special edition full feature on our incoming new Co-leaders and departing board members will be shared with you in the coming week. Media enquiries can be directed to [office@touchcompass.org.nz](mailto:office@touchcompass.org.nz)

✦ **WoW** ✦ The World of WearableArt performance show Dream Awake which runs till 13 October at the TSB Arena in Pōneke features some fine and fabulous TC alums, the famous fashionable flying-man himself, Mr Rodney Bell collaborating once again with choreographic superstar and artistic direction legend Malia Johnston.

**FYI You can read a great recent article and interview on Malia and her career here > <https://thebigidea.nz/stories/the-wow-factor-career-tips-from-malia-johnston>**



**ID: Rodney Bell centre, looking composed and powerful, sits in his wheelchair wearing a pink shawl-like outfit. Flanking him on either side are two standing dancers/models obscured by the large disc shaped designed circular shields they are holding. One a whirpool pattern in blue, the other a spiralling snowflake shaped pattern. This is from a World of WearableArt work entitled Changing Perceptions from Rebecca Bond of New Zealand.**

**✦ What it's like as a trustee: Touch Compass ✦**

**Caroline Tate, Board trustee reflects:**

**Recently I was on a panel of speakers to discuss the role of younger directors.**

**It was a good opportunity to reflect on my role as a trustee of Touch Compass and more generally about the role of Boards. Some of my key insights were:**

**- You need to love an organisation and its purpose if you are going to serve as a trustee, the same as any day-to-day role. Board packs can be weighty, and some decisions can be tricky. But the belief in doing good and contributing to the organisations' purpose and goals carries you through. I was excited when I saw the advertisement for Touch Compass trustee roles when I applied almost three years ago. Since getting to know more about the organisation and connecting with fellow trustees, that excitement hasn't waned.**

**- One trustee on their own doesn't have to know everything. This is particularly true for younger trustees who might be grappling with learning financial essentials or understanding governance. The Touch Compass Trustees have different backgrounds and skills that they bring to the table as well as in some cases, hands on experience in the creative environment. We're better as a collective and I'm glad that we have each other's strengths to rely upon.**

**- Being curious, open to learning and enthusiastic counts for a lot. At the panel event there was general agreement that we'd each rather serve with others of any age who have those characteristics, rather than someone who comes to the Board table believing they have all the answers.**

**- We can't rely upon younger directors for having all the answers in relation to technology, so that upskilling yourself isn't needed. Some things are moving rapidly – AI for example. The more everyone can learn and bring along the better.**

**- Many people who serve as trustees may not ever get to govern a NZX listed company, and that's ok. Interestingly the obligations on not-for-profits are similar these days to big companies. At Touch Compass we have had the opportunity to be trained in certain aspects of corporate governance which is a real gift and has helped us navigate through when to make decisions and when to step back and leave our wonderful General Manager to keep doing**



great mahi.

Onward and upward.

Caroline

Check on our socials @touchcompass for more on our upcoming activities and educational opportunities, feel free to reach out to us at [office@touchcompass.org.nz](mailto:office@touchcompass.org.nz)

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Help us continue to shift the narrative for disabled artists

**DONATE TO EMPOWER TODAY!**

Share in the empowering artistic journey as we make our disabled dreams a reality.

Make a difference and support our disability-led and accessible practice.

Doesn't have to be big but it all makes a big difference.

Let's all celebrate all that makes us unique and remove the barriers to access,  
one act, one performance at a time.

Give a little NOW [donate directly to to our programming and the people who make it happen by clicking this link here.](#)

All donations over \$5.00 are tax-deductible.

Touch Compass Dance Trust is a registered charitable trust and organisation.  
Charities Services #CC23088

We welcome your support, alofa and aroha to make a difference.

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A massive ngā mihi nui to our KAITAUTOKO - our core funders who share our journey to empower, enable and shift the narrative for disability arts:





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