Speech: Turia - Disability Leadership

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Minister of Disability Issues

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IIDL – International Initiative for Disability Leadership
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Tena koutou katoa. Ki te mana whenua, ara ki a Ngati Whatua, tena ra koutou katoa.

I am delighted to open this International Initiative for Disability Leadership Network meeting. I want to thank Fran Silvestri, President and Chief Executive for the honour in being asked to join you at this forum.

It is my very great pleasure to welcome to Aotearoa, international leaders who are making a difference for disabled persons and their families right across the globe.

I would like to congratulate the organisers for bringing us all together this week for what is a visionary kaupapa – service innovation across the lifespan. What does it take to make an impact?

To those who have travelled from afar – I thank you for your commitment – it gives great hope for what has yet to be achieved in advancing the aspirations of people with disabilities and their families world-wide.

I mihi to my colleague, Hon Peter Dunne, for the important foundation you have laid down for this conference, relating to mental health and awareness. It is great to be able to speak as joint ministers, about the relationships and the importance that we place on addressing health and wellbeing for all.

I want to acknowledge the fifteen organisations who have joined hands, to host this symposium – People First NZ; Community Living Trust; Spectrum Care; SAMS; Imagine Better and Parent to Parent; Interactionz; Enrich+; Regional Intellectual Disability Compulsory Care Agency; Neighbourhood Connections; Manawanui in Charge; Tautoko; Whatever it Takes; Community Connections and the Ministry of Health.
I can honestly vouch for each and every one of these organisations – whether they are NGOs; service providers; state agencies; community groups – as agencies who truly care and practise ‘whatever it takes’ to make a difference.

Between them we have a range of agencies that are working hard to transform themselves from the conventional service driven model to being person driven, where people with disabilities are in the driving seat of their own lives, having choice and control over the lives that they lead.

By this, I mean they are working hard to assist disabled persons and their families to explore their goals and aspirations and even more important - to work towards achieving these.

So I have a very good feeling about the intentions and the impact that this symposium can make in improving mental health and disability services.

This exchange with its focus on ‘innovation across the life span’ – has not come too soon for any of us as we increasingly recognise the need to invest early in peoples’ lives in order to enhance opportunity and decrease reliance on formal service solutions.

I hope that this gathering has already given you an opportunity to share developments and exchange knowledge from your respective parts of the world to take us further along the path towards a new era in our understanding of how to better respond to these challenges.

In this hui we have representatives from Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland and United States.

We have government officials, consumers, clinical and community workers, indigenous peoples and people of other cultures, NGO and disability leaders, managers and CEOs. In essence, I hope there is something for everyone!

Here in New Zealand the Government is working closely with experts in the disability sector to re-design the way we support disabled people to live a good life. We call our approach – **Enabling Good Lives** : It describes changing the disability support system from providing a standard menu of services to a more individualised approach that emphasises facilitation of support in the community. This requires a transformation of thinking and practice.

It is an all embracing approach – from models of delivery to transforming attitudes and behaviours. We know that negative attitudes towards disabled people can be as much of a barrier to their participation and contribution as any physical barrier in the built environment.

The focus is based on the principles of choice, control and flexibility has challenged us all in the disability sector to look at new ways of ensuring community inclusion and recognition of the contribution that disabled people make to our diverse society.

This approach is the beginning of a shift in authority and decision-making back to those living with disabilities and their families.

It attempts to more clearly define the role of service provision as supporting the life opportunities, relationships and life aspirations of disabled people, not defining and determining these for people.
Sounds like Whānau Ora to me. Transformation in practice, transforming our families and transforming the change in themselves.

Another focus is the introduction of Local Area Co-ordinators working with disabled people and their families to better access their community - a model which we know has also worked successfully in other regions.

**Be. Accessible** is another innovative opportunity championed by John Allen and the wonderful Minnie Baragwanath. The focus is on access to everywhere – enabling persons with disability to enjoy all the opportunities available be it tourism, accommodation, travel, moving around our towns and cities. Their **Be. Leadership** programme has produced amazing leaders recognising their strengths. It’s about what they can do – not what they can’t.

In placing our priority on disabled persons determining their own direction, we have established **Enhanced Individualised Funding** which enables disabled people to choose what their support looks like - and **Choice in Community Living** which looks to offer alternative to residential care.

All of these initiatives demonstrate our changing approach to traditional supports.

But of course – this is just one nation’s experience – and the beauty of the international exchange of knowledge that occurs with this network is that it helps us to learn from the experiences of other countries who may also be grappling with change.

Employment is a major issue for those that live with disability – the right to participate in meaningful work.

In 2006, 59% of working age disabled people were employed compared with 76% of non-disabled people.

Despite the strong incentive to be in work, disabled people face a range of barriers so our **Disability Action Plan** targets barriers to get more disabled people into paid work and reduce their dependency on welfare or other supports. We are taking a collaborative approach to promoting more employment opportunities for disabled people.

And I have to say I have been absolutely thrilled with the leadership we have seen some employers taking in working with government agencies, and disability sector organisations to come together and agree on actions.

Some of our early priorities have been:
- reviewing access to work experience and apprenticeships for disabled people;
- ensuring employers have reliable and easy to use information about employing disabled people;
- creating opportunities for employers and disabled people to connect and
- identifying what government agencies themselves need to do to become good employers of disabled people.
Finally, I want to just make a personal tribute to one woman who symbolises the commitment, the dedication and the leadership that I know reverberates throughout this room.

Over the past three decades, she has been a constant source of strength and a guiding light to organisations which share a commitment to building a better Aotearoa for disabled New Zealanders.

Her work in deinstitutionalising New Zealanders with an intellectual disability thirty years ago was ground-breaking; allowing individuals to realise their abilities and live fulfilling lives. She had the foresight to involve whānau and families in this process, thus enabling natural and sustainable change.

She has provided constant leadership to Imagine Better and Access Ability, and served national working groups, reference groups, and assemblies. At an international level, she has also provided a voice for Aotearoa at the Disabled Persons International World Council and the International Initiative on Disability Leadership.

I am of course taking about the fabulous Lorna Sullivan and I wanted to acknowledge you particularly today, Lorna, amongst your peers; for the honour that you received in the New Year’s awards.

Finally, while the leadership each and every one here today must be recognised – we also appreciate that it takes a whole community to enable disabled people to be able to participate on an equal basis with others.

We must trust the families and those who experience disability to know best what is important to them.

The challenge for all of us is to ask ourselves what more can we all be doing to ensure those with disability have equal opportunities. That is the challenge that lies ahead.

We must be careful to not change the language to look as if we are committed to real change for those with disabilities. We must remember that culture counts.

Na reira, nga mihi kia koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.