



LIFESTYLE TRUST
interactionz
Tari Whakawhitinga
EMPOWERING LIFESTYLES
ATAMAI WHAKATINANATANGA

Issue 1, December 2009

At the beginning

Interactionz began forty years ago as a traditional sheltered workshop, set up by people with disabilities as a way for them to be employed in their communities. Today's vision – people with disabilities leading lives that have meaning to them, with no limits on what might be possible – has a broader perspective than just work, while retaining the original intent of people being in the driving seat.

The organisation had many names over the years. The latest – Interactionz – reflects relationships as the essence of everything we do. Enduring relationships are the key to people living the lives they choose. We recognize that services can be the barrier to people utilizing the relationships they already have, such as those with families, friends, neighbours or work colleagues. Often, people with disabilities are encouraged to look to services to provide them with solutions which might enable them to be engaged in work or community life, or simply as a

way to fill in their days. While there is a place for services, we believe these should be the last point of contact, not the first, as is common practice. Our work is about interacting with people and, in turn, about people interacting with their community.

Person Driven Practice is the focus of our current work. Our challenge is to change from a culture of being a service and providing for people, to a culture of people being in control of the decisions that have an impact on them. The shift in power is not easy to achieve, nor is it easy to sustain in practice. While the shift is difficult for paid employees, it is equally difficult for people who use our services and for their families. People are not used to being asked to decide for themselves, or to seeing the service on which they have come to rely stepping back into a facilitative role.

The Interactionz Board established a clear vision for the future. It is undertaking strategic projects to achieve this vision. Our story is



Interactionz CEO, Lynda Rangitaawa.

one of a traditional service model transforming into a facilitative person-driven model.

The purpose of this publication is to tell the stories, demonstrate how our vision is being achieved and share our learning. You can find out more about Interactionz and our work on www.interactionz.org.nz.

-Lynda Rangitaawa



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“We’ll get by with a little help from our friends.”



Veronica with Joshua - a friendship which began when Joshua helped Veronica load prepay onto her cellphone.

The only way ahead was to call in a support team.

When the president of the Rotary Club of Fairfield asked for a couple to look after a teenaged orphan from East Timor who was coming to New Zealand for surgery to correct club feet, Ian and I knew this project had our name on it.

“Veronica will be with you for about three months – and she’ll be in hospital for much of that time,” said President Ken. What could be easier than that?

Veronica’s surgeon explained the level of risk involved in the complicated surgery to turn Veronica’s feet around. She was clear - she wanted her feet to be like other people’s.

Veronica needed to be at school and with people her own age. Sacred Heart College took on a student in a wheelchair, with very little English, whose attendance at school would be erratic. Staff took exemplary care of Veronica, emotionally and educationally. Best of all, they introduced Veronica to her new best friend, a recent immigrant.

Starship provided Veronica with a new network of people. She lost her heart to fellow patient, Joshua and hospital staff warmed to her courage and to her smile. Her surgeon gave her money to choose some trendy clothes.

“Let Veronica choose something like her school friends would wear,” said Dr Terri.

Four months down the track, the surgeon told us that one of Veronica’s feet was not healing properly. We were looking at five more months minimum of operations and recuperation. A bone infection delayed walking, soft tissue was becoming gangrenous and either amputation or a complex tissue grafting operation lay before us.

Long periods away from home at Starship in Auckland, being up several times a night giving Veronica medication when we were at home, while trying to keep working, took their toll on us. Ian and I had to decide if we could continue with our commitment.

We could not let Veronica down. We knew we must keep going. By now we had come to love the young woman who was also deeply attached to us.

Interactionz helped me understand the role people around us might play. It was a massive step to acknowledge that the only way ahead was to call in a support team. The special group of people who became Team Veronica selected themselves.

There were six drivers, each with their own day of the week, who would do the school run. Veronica formed a special bond with them all, including the ice-cream lady, the chewing gum man, and the one who would get lost as Veronica teasingly gave him the wrong directions for coming home, became part of our journey. Sister

Raewyn drove Veronica to school and to her physio appointments.

Rotarians took Veronica to the beach, to shows and movies, away for the weekend, or to their homes for dinner. A retired school inspector worked with Veronica on her maths and a musician downloaded the lyrics of her favourite songs. Ian and I caught up on sleep.

We sent regular email messages to all involved with Veronica’s care – key people in Rotary, those who were providing both regular and intermittent help, the Sacred Heart staff and the Starship team. We thanked individuals by name, we voiced our anxieties, shared the milestones, and sent out a big wahoo the night we went into Veronica’s room and found her taking her first steps with her feet facing the right way.

Nine months after she arrived in New Zealand, Veronica chose her first-ever pair of shoes. Two hundred people had shared our journey. They provided practical help, education, medical treatment, gifts, food, financial help, transport, prayers, and love.

Veronica said it all: “I waited all my life for someone to love me. When I came to New Zealand, I didn’t know anyone. Now there are lots of people who love me.”

- Diana Wood

Nga mihi Kaumatua and Whaea



Kaumatua Pakira Watene and Whaea Wairahi Taiapa lead Interactionz staff in waiata.

Kaumatua Pakira Watene and Whaea Wairahi Taiapa are helping Interactionz people absorb and develop a Maori world view and to understand what is involved in engaging with a whanau-centred approach to well-being.

Pakira and Wairahi give Interactionz staff an understanding of tikanga Maori so that they can serve people in a sensitive and culturally appropriate way.

They have an affinity with Interactionz Person Driven Practices approach - an approach which sits comfortably alongside the views expressed in a discussion paper on whanau ora prepared by the taskforce fronted by MP the Hon Tariana Turia.

"Whanau, hapu and iwi have critical and distinct roles to play in facilitating whanau ora. These roles, relationships and responsibilities are based on whakapapa and Maori connectivity and lie outside government," says the taskforce.

Current approaches are focused on individuals, do not necessarily offer value for money, and are hampered by lack of cohesion across government agencies. Whanau are frequently brought into planning interventions too late in the process.

"Their participation is compromised often to the point where disengagement from the process is inevitable."

Pakira and Wairahi are bridge-builders, enabling Interactionz people to better understand the strengths and capabilities present in whanau.

In addition, they have an important ceremonial role, undertaking blessings, leading powhiri, and helping staff acquire an understanding of tikanga through karakia and waiata.

"It's a nice way to get to know staff," said Wairahi.

They are also cultural advisors who see themselves as like a

ABCD WORKSHOP

Asset Based Community
Development
- "building community from
the inside out".

9.30am-4.30pm
4-5 February 2010
St Peter's Cathedral, 51 Victoria
Street South, Hamilton
\$500 + GST (includes morning
tea, lunch and afternoon tea)
For more details go to
www.interactionz.org.nz.

brother and sister, at Interactionz to answer questions and provide encouragement.

"Interactionz staff are interested. They want to know cultural aspects and they drop by and ask us what to do in various circumstances. They want to know what to do at hui and tangi," said Pakira.

Pakira and Wairahi also work to build relationships with the various local councils and with corporate bodies.

They bring specialised knowledge around Te Tiriti O Waitangi and will work with Interactionz to see the Treaty incorporated in the organisation's policies in the new year.

"We move towards working in a bicultural way," said CEO Lynda Rangitaawa.

Reference: Whanau Ora: A Whanau-centred approach to Maori wellbeing. A discussion paper by the Whanau Ora Taskforce. September 2009.

"The culture of an organisation, the commitment and the motivation of the employees, the way the people go about interacting with each other and those they serve is not moulded by rules and regulations, but by the nature and strength of relationships."

Karen Gillum, Interactionz Board Chairperson.

SBS Bank Manager advocates strong relationships



Nicki Bennett, manager of the Hamilton branch of SBS Bank, joined the Interactionz (then Lifestyle Trust) board about three years ago. Her key areas of interest are fiscal responsibility and strategic direction.

Intending to study business management, Nicki decided instead to learn from actively involving herself in the governance of organisations. She gains satisfaction from helping people to live better lives.

"It makes a difference, and you can see it," she said.

"The ultimate aim for Interactionz should be that the people who are supported by the organisation are those who lead it. That is my goal," said Nicki.

Left - Board member Nicki Bennett integrates good relationships with sound business practice.

"Leadership of Interactionz by the people it supports can be a reality when communities are ready and when there is appropriate government funding."

The process has the potential to save society millions of dollars, rather than being an additional cost.

Organisations would still need to exist to provide day services and relief for families, said Nicki. However, this would be in the context of people making their own choices.

"People with disabilities can be in charge of their own life. To help people do this, Interactionz is strongly focussed on encouraging people to build strong relationships that will only make their lives better."

Assessing the effectiveness of Interactionz work

Interactionz embarked on the journey of engaging in person-driven practice over the past few years. Recently, the organisation decided that it wanted to know what the impact its new way of operating had on the lives of people they served and their natural supports.

Mark Benjamin, CEO, and Dr Christine Wilson of Standards and Monitoring Services (SAMS) accepted the invitation to partner Interactionz in assessing the extent to which person-driven practice in Interactionz Day Services and one-to-one facilitation were beneficial to those who use such services.

Mark stressed the importance of organisations bringing in someone independent to the review.

"There is a direct link between an individual's vulnerability and their fear of negative repercussions if they say anything that is not overtly grateful. We often underestimate that," he said.

"SAMS is interested in people's experience of the effectiveness of the service, rather than what the organisation writes about itself," said Mark.

"Our bottom line is that if our process doesn't result in people getting a better life, then why are we doing this?"

He commended Interactionz for seeking out an independent evaluator, saying it showed integrity and credibility.

"Interactionz is open, enthusiastic, and wanting to do a good job."

Janelle Fisher of Lifestyle Transitionz, the research and development arm of Interactionz, said the SAMS report was positive.

"There were no surprises in our baseline position or what is needed to progress towards our vision," she said.

Strengths identified by Mark included the pioneering and courageous directions being undertaken by Interactionz, the organisation's

willingness to start from scratch rather than mimicking other organisations, the way Interactionz invested in finding out what is leading edge in international best practice. He said Interactionz was willing to learn from those overseas who were doing well and to make it real for New Zealand.

There was a risk that those working in the disability sector could alienate families unintentionally by taking over from existing natural supports.

"People served by Interactionz clearly identified that over the past few years Interactionz has restored trust and built relationships with families," he said.

Standards and Monitoring Services (SAMS) is a not-for-profit charitable trust, governed by people with disabilities and their families. There are 33 staff. Four-fifths of the organisation's evaluators are people with disabilities or their family members.