

TONY KANE

HAMILTON NORTH SCHOOL

SABBATICAL REPORT 2017

“LIFE POST-SCHOOL IN THE WAIKATO”

“I, like every other human being, have the right to decide how I want to organise my life. I want people to really listen to me and respect me for who I am. I would, as much as possible, want to do things that make me happy.” A client at the Twente Care Centre.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Ministry of Education for selecting me for this sabbatical and the Hamilton North School Board of Trustees for their support. A special thanks to Leonie and Michele who ran the school extremely well in my absence.

INTRODUCTION

As Principal for 15 years at Hamilton North School, a U5 Decile 4 Special School in Hamilton, I was awarded a Primary Principals' Sabbatical Award for Term 3, 2017.

In my role as Principal of a Special School, I relish the challenge of educating students with intellectual and physical disabilities. I have developed a particular interest in, ‘**Life After School**,’ for students who turn 21 and leave school looking for purpose and fulfilment in post-school life.

While there was the obvious benefit of refreshment from this sabbatical, the main benefits were to use the information gained to stimulate and encourage parents of young adults within the Waikato Region to band together and look at ways they could help with the formation of an After-School organisation that assists these school leavers with options for work/employment. By formulating/establishing an organisation, the possibility arises where they can be offered employment and training for future employment placements. Over the next five years, I envisage the formation of an organisation that would cater for employees with intellectual disabilities who wanted to be in purposeful work. This enthusiastic umbrella group of individuals making up the organisation would have a real desire to be part of a group making a difference in the lives of these young people. In this way, a pathway would be forged for students leaving school with an intellectual disability.

GENERAL REPORT

The sabbatical leave was for the following activities:

- Professional refreshment
- Study and research
- Visiting and discussing possibilities for the Waikato.

FINDINGS:

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN.

“Towards the end of the 1800s and early 1900s, countries around the world opened nursing homes and facilities to house the intellectually disabled [idiots and posterior (backward) children]”.

In the Netherlands in 1891, the **Vereeniging** had opened such an establishment, the estate of 'Heeren Loo' in Hengelo. It was a facility for children with intellectual disabilities and became the blueprint on which others were based. Care for these clients followed the philosophy of that time which was to separate these persons from the general public. Therefore, these facilities were built far away from towns and villages. They were in large uninhabited areas, usually in a forested area or on the coast.

In 1907, Hengelo *Groot Emaüs* started to assist young people with mild mental disabilities. In 1911, an institution for girls opened in Hengelo, *Lozenoord*, which in 1934 would merge with the first institution to become **S Heeren Loo-Lozenoord**. Other institutions in the Netherlands were set up and some (like Tokanui here in NZ which will be referred to later in this study) closed through pressure and with little fore thought to the future).

Over the years, the care given at **S Heeren Loo**, evolved from a medical approach which involved treatment by drugs, to an orthopedagogic approach, this time involving the surgical repair of deformities. The buildings were renewed and improved, programmes were made more stimulating and structured so that what were once closed off and secluded environments became normal living environments for people with intellectual disabilities who were now welcomed in the local community. The experts, such as the once-powerful doctors, resorted to the areas in which they had expertise and limited themselves to this. The majority of such institutions have all increasingly evolved into communities and neighbourhoods with a mixed population. At the same time, a greater number of these residents lived and worked in small groups in towns or villages.

The New Zealand Conundrum:

Here in New Zealand, the Waikato had **Tokanui Hospital** which was opened in July, 1912. The first patients travelled from another psychiatric hospital in Wellington by train. The hospital was self-sufficient in its early days, with its own farm, bakery, laundry, and even a sewing room where patients' clothes were made. Well ahead of its time and at its peak, there were over a thousand patients living in the hospital. By the late 1960s, the beginning of the end was coming. In 1974, the government decided no more buildings were to be erected in the larger psychiatric hospitals, and small psychiatric wards began to be opened, attached to general hospitals in urban areas.

Patients who had lived for much of their lives at the hospital were thoroughly institutionalised and saw the hospital as home. Other patients who came for shorter periods, suffering from clinical depression, anxiety, OCD, etc., felt isolated and missed their families and friends. The catchment area for Tokanui hospital extended to New Plymouth on the west coast, Gisborne on the east coast, north towards Auckland, and across to the Bay of Plenty. Patients from these areas found it difficult to maintain contact with their families and over time, became isolated from them.

The Hospital Board was seen as forward thinking and put aside money in the early 1990s to set up residential services in the community for both intellectually disabled and the chronically mentally ill. Therefore, two trusts were formed to develop these services (Rakau Ora, now called Pathways, and the Waikato Community Living Trust). The move towards closure gained momentum, and by March 1998 the last long-stay patient had left the Tokanui hospital site for "Community Care". Tokanui closed at this time in March, 1998.

New Zealand was following the world-wide move to de-institutionalisation with community care gathering momentum in the 1980s. The government produced a white paper on de-institutionalisation, and the Principal Nurse of the time travelled overseas to look at facilities in the UK. Many staff found it impossible to believe that the hospital which had been a major employer in the rural area, and provided jobs for entire families over generations would ever close. Opinion was divided as to whether it should stay open, with some staff strongly believing it ought to, and others thinking it was time for a different way of doing things.

Unfortunately, Tokanui had not evolved from its early days when it was a hive of industry and well ahead of its time in offering structure and security to clients (patients). There are many stories of mistreatment of patients throughout the time Tokanui was open and New Zealand was short-sighted regarding future planning, losing sight of those who would be most affected - the clients.

The comparisons between what happened at Tokanui Hospital with 'S Heeren Loo in the Netherlands from historical documentation and photos, show numerous similarities. However, 'S Heeren Loo has evolved over the years to show that their clients receive a high standard of care and stimulation. One is left wondering what could have been with such a place as Tokanui had it been allowed to develop and grow from its early beginnings. Yes, there were short comings and numerous stories of mistreatment but it was set in an ideal environment and locality that offered security and comfort to its patients.

The local community that had enveloped the centre also may have been short sighted as to the future benefits of employment and economic diversity that a continued operation and evolving Tokanui could offer, if it had been allowed to continue. A stronger and more inclusive community possibly could have been the outcome of a unified endeavour.

Win - Win for All

Unfortunately, this is all in hind-sight and the Tokanui clients were sent back to their local communities which in many cases were unprepared for them and still are!

At about the same time, **Sheltered Workshops** were operating throughout the country and catering to the needs of many people with disabilities. These clients performed many of the mundane tasks that others found tedious and boring but to these people, they offered employment and a purpose plus the ability to tell others that they had a job and were pleased to be able to work with many of their friends. They didn't actually care what they earned but valued the fact that they were paid. The same situation was occurring in other countries as well but the governments of the day tended to compensate firms that employed disabled workers.

Unfortunately in the 1990's, the Government of the day bowed to pressure and insisted all employees be paid the minimum wage for work they carried out. This meant that virtually overnight these safe working environments were forced to close down as they could not operate and be self-sustaining. For the majority, this was the end of employment for the disabled people in this country.

Examples of this included organisations that employed disabled people to cut rags on an hourly rate. In these places it became feasible or affordable to provide employment as the required product produced in the hour was insufficient to cover wages. This, in turn, meant that these businesses closed, due to their loss of income to cover expenditure.

So by the end of the 1990's, there were very few opportunities for disabled workers who simply wanted to have a job, be with friends and work in a friendly environment.

Unless individuals had managed to be accepted into the Hohepa Community in the Hawkes Bay or the Altrus Enterprise Organisation in Auckland, there was little chance of gaining employment and so the advent of day programmes began.

WHAT IS!

Today, throughout the country parents of Intellectually Disabled young adults are being offered little when their children leave school aged 21. There are Day Programmes in many cities but these, for many clients are not purposeful nor are they structured for those with higher ability who want to be gainfully employed.

Again, I will make reference here to the research I carried out in The Netherlands and other European Countries where there appears to be a far more supportive and inclusive population and workforce.

In the area of Wente (The Netherlands), the Aveleijn organisation runs many supported homes with young and old intellectually disabled people. The Aveleijn organisation has also been instrumental in establishing a number of employment avenues for their more able clients. These include Supermarkets, Farmlets and Cafés where the

employment of intellectually disabled employees occurs and is supported. The employees are part of the staff and are trained in the skills required in a supermarket or café. From my observations, these people were well versed in how to communicate and operate in often busy environments. They had a structure to follow and support and purpose in what they were achieving.

Throughout The Netherlands and England, this type of organisation is fostering employment for disabled employees. However, the businesses are also supported by the governments of the day which give partial funding to these businesses that employ people with special needs, giving a real incentive to employ some 'characters' who would otherwise miss out and are then restricted to day programmes that give little incentive or purpose to their futures.

People who look and behave differently still have difficulty being accepted in the work force and in today's competitive markets, businesses have difficulty with employees producing below expectation.

Here in New Zealand, there is no incentive for businesses to employ people with disabilities and there has been a declining number of active businesses that actually go out of their way to employ people with disabilities. Within New Zealand there still exists the stigma of people being different.

Recently in the Canterbury and Waikato Regions, a pilot scheme, "Enabling Good Lives" (EGL) has been operating which gives more autonomy to the parents and guardians of special needs young adults. The parents have the ability to apply for funding to operate the programme for the young adult themselves or engage a provider to develop a programme and employ the support needed for the programme to function.

This, however, does not create employment but merely allows a day/week programme to be developed that allows the person to attend a number of weekly activities which reinforce some skills already gained or just fill in the day!

Never-the-less, there do exist some well-established organisations in Auckland and the Hawkes Bay that are providing pathways and employment for numbers of employees in competitive business areas. The Hohepa Trusts in Auckland and Napier and Altrus Enterprise in Auckland are two well established organisations at the forefront of employing large numbers of challenged employees. These organisations offer employment and are often advertising for people as they grow their expertise and client base of businesses seeking specific tasks to be fulfilled. Again, these are often repetitive tasks unable to be handled by machines and often laborious for the average employee but ideal for people with disabilities who enjoy repetitive tasks in a safe working environment. Once again, it is not the financial outcome these people crave but the desire to have employment with like-minded people where they will not be bullied or picked on because they are different.

The Auckland Hohepa Trust is an off-shoot of the well-established Hohepa Trust in Napier that was established in 1952 and began as a school and then branched into agriculture and became a farm school in order to cater for their diverse range of young people.

Today, the Auckland Trust works with schools and families within the area to forge pathways from an early age so that by the time they are ready to leave school there is a well-supported plan in place. This can begin with Supported Living that fosters independence and goes on to assist in supported employment. This, as explained above, is becoming increasingly difficult to procure and therefore the Hohepa Trust is looking at developing pathways in the Micro Industry Field; examples being the making of Dog Biscuits, lawn mowing and section maintenance, and recently the baking of breads. There are some agricultural activities but unlike the Hawkes Bay Trust, no small farmlet or agricultural emphasis. The whole purpose of the Trust is to have Young People working in their local communities.

In all cases, for any programme or organisation to be successful, there needs to be a strong driving force that makes things happen. In all the examples above, this has been very evident. Looking at the formation of the Hohepa Trust, many years were spent fundraising and fighting for acknowledgement that organisations such as Hohepa were needed to cater for a growing number of children displaying often difficult behaviours. Supportive communities and families were required to foster these organisations and to remain functioning as the Governments often sidestepped the issues of the day, much the same as they do now.

In New Zealand today, we offer very little for the 21 year old school leaver who has moved through the schooling system with support of the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS). On leaving school, these students have an array of abilities and skills depending on their intellectual and physical abilities. For some of the lower functioning students, day programmes may be the best option for keeping them stimulated. However, for the more independent and social young adults, there needs to be greater purpose and variety in their lives. For the majority, unfortunately, this is not an option and they too are simply encouraged to attend day programmes that do not actually build on the skills already learnt from their schooling days under teacher guidance.

So, what could be done in the Waikato Region to give more purpose and independence to the young people leaving our schools who have been supported with ORS funding throughout their schooling lives?

WHAT COULD BE!

Here in the Waikato, we are void of employment opportunities for young adults leaving school with disabilities. Apart from day programmes that are a follow-on from school, there are few purposeful incentives for these people. At present, even gaining access to independent living takes considerable time and effort on behalf of the young adults. There appears to be a lack of funding and enthusiasm to accommodate these young adults seeking independence.

The work place is similar for them, with no incentives for local businesses to employ people who may fall short of the required 100% productivity goal. As previously explained, New Zealand is lagging behind European countries in their support of businesses that employ people with special needs.

We, therefore, need to draw together the parents and caregivers into a steering group with the prime objective of creating a work experience programme that offers skills and incentives firstly for the young people and then for businesses wishing to employ these people after they have shown themselves to be capable of being gainfully employed in an inclusive situation with minimal supervision and direction.

Too often, our ex-students are left to wander the local streets in search of activities and unless they have financial backing of their families, this will be their life.

They deserve a purposeful life where they can feel appreciated and independent because they have a regular place of employment and work with people who care.

For this possibility to occur, I see the following area established on the outskirts of the city centre, whether in Hamilton or other centres experiencing the same need of a growing population.

An ideal would be the purchasing of a small holding that could accommodate a number of young adults willing to be engaged as part of the community in the developing of skills and confidence to work alongside others. This would give some control to the young person through support.

Support could come in the form of retired people who are willing to share their knowledge and experience developed over years spent working alongside others. The number of retirees is a growing area throughout the country and many will be looking for avenues where they can add purpose to their lives after finishing full time work themselves. For some, volunteering fulfils an obligation and for others it gives reward. It is also an excellent way of developing an understanding/perception that these people are no different but that they just think and at times act differently. Through this support, the young people will gain respect and begin to form a life that is interwoven with the community.

But before this can all begin, a collective group of well-meaning and connected members needs to be formed with the sole purpose of establishing a seed fund that would be able to gain a property either by purchase, rented or bequeathed that would function as central to these people desiring to gain skills for future employment. For some unfortunately, this may never happen but at least they would have the opportunity to be involved and be given a purpose. For the latter the centre could become a life-long place for regular attendance where some of the following

activities were available with supervision and support in a semi-agricultural setting with specific inclusion of cultural, sporting and leisure activities.

Animal husbandry

Woodwork

Section maintenance

Horticulture and vegetable gardening

Painting and basic carpentry skills

The aim being to have a centre that offered the opportunity to be involved in developing the above skills and at the same time producing an end product that could be sold to the community to assist with expenses and to add incentive to the workers.

Planning for future accommodation could also come into planning as a way of growing independence in a safe working and living environment.

Such a centre would require a great deal of planning and support both from the local City Council, the Government and the local community to be accepting of a group moving into their area. Unfortunately, New Zealanders take considerable time to accept differences in people and cultures. We are not as accepting as we think otherwise the majority of our young people with disabilities would be in some type of employment. There does not appear to be as many willing employers as there once were and this, added along with the employment laws and occupational safety laws that have been recently introduced, the opportunity for employment has been greatly reduced to an almost zero percent.

In Conclusion:

New Zealand had the opportunity to provide centres within communities that would have provided purposeful opportunities for our disabled population but the foresight at the time did not occur and places such as Tokanui were closed down as they were seen as inhumane and non-inclusive.

The result today is that we have little or no opportunity for our school leavers with disabilities to find employment in the local community. Employment such as collecting shopping trolleys and sweeping floors or even stacking shelves have all but dried up for these people. Other places of employment could not afford to pay the minimum wage for less than a 100 percent production and so manufacturing positions ceased too.

Positions only exist now where there are organisations which have pro-active leaders competing for contracts that are able to be completed by people with disabilities. These are often the mundane and repetitive tasks that are not automated and seen as less of a priority by mainstream firms. These organisations are providing the employment and functioning exceptionally well. However, they are few and far spread, so places like the Waikato have extremely limited resources and places of employment available.

Therefore, the aim of providing a CENTRE that caters for these young school leavers would add purpose and incentive to their lives. Attending day programmes that entertain more than produce cannot be fulfilling. Yes, they are fulfilling for some but there are a growing number of more able youth and young adults with disabilities who deserve a better deal. This CENTRE, as I see it, would give them this opportunity and purpose.

Funding is an issue and unfortunately, until the government looks at these schemes with fresh eyes, it always will be an issue. The Government has to take a fresh lead and cater for this growing population so that they feel appreciated and valued.

There are opportunities for these people but incentives and provision for them needs to be put in place so that they can work in environments where they are able to demonstrate their abilities. These people have always been valued once employed, only nowadays, very few are employed.

Therefore, the formation of a CENTRE may just provide the opportunity for these young people to enhance their skills in a safe environment rather than have them traipsing through the local CBD to attend day programmes which offer little, apart from filling in the day. (Simplistic but never-the-less true!)

Thank you to those who have given of their time to discuss their thoughts and outline the purpose of their organisations. My thoughts have been honed but I still strongly believe there is more we can do to provide opportunities for our disabled young adult school leavers. What a pity that it would be deemed too simple to expect everyone to work together and to amalgamate the funding available to develop projects as above.

References:

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Welkom bij Schenkerij Watez – Aveleijn- In the community of Enschede, The Netherlands

Tony Kane



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