Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People

Paula Tesoriero Zoom hui transcript – 15 December 2022

**Prudence Walker**

Kia ora and welcome to this second community hui with Paula. Before we get started, I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Prudence Walker, and I am a disabled person. I have worked in the disability sector for 15 years, and for the last three and a half years I’ve been the Chief Executive of the Disabled Persons Assembly of New Zealand. Before we kick off tonight, I would like to call on Taki for our karakia. [Words are muffled]

**Taki Peeke**

Tuia i runga, Tuia i raro, Tuia i roto ,Tuia i waho. Tuia ngā herenga tāngata whaikaha ka noho ai ki te whenua, ka ora pai ai ki te ao, ki te ao Marama. E tau ana.I te timatanga, ko te kore. Nā te kore, ko te pō. Tiwha tiwha i te pō, kakarau i te pō. Ko te pō nui, ko te pō roa, ko te pō kirikiri kā piti ora ki te whaiao, ki te ao Marama. Tihei mauri ora.

Ko te whare e tū nei, ko te Whaikaha, tēnā koe. Ko te papa e takoto nei, ko Te Tiriti o Waitangi, tēnā hoki koe. E waiho kia kōrua e kawe nei ngā matāpono ā kuia, ā koro mā pērā i tātai ki runga i te marae. E kore tatou e wareware ko te Kaupapa nui, ko ngā tāngata whaikaha kia puawai ki roto i tēnei ao hurihuri, kia whakakikokiko, kia whakatinana i ngā moemoeā, i ngā wawatā kia tau ai ki te ngākau, kia tau ai ki te tangata.

Nā reira, e ngā hapori mō tēnā takiwā, mō tēnā rohe, mō tēnā poto te motu. Nau mai, haere mai. Nau mai, haere mai kii tēnei Kaupapa e tuitui nei i ngā whakairo mō ngā tāngata whaikaha ka noho pai ai ki te whenua, ka ora pai ai ki te ao. Engari, ko tēnei kaupapa, kāhore i te ngākau ngāwari. Kāhore e te ngākau e koretake nei ki tēnei, ki tēnei. E huri mā ki te upoko pakaru, mā te upoko karawhiu kia tau ai te manawanui ki tēnei kaupapa. Kia pahanui nei i ngā kaupapa e tau nei ki te whenua. Nō reira, ko ēnei kupu, ahakoa he iti te kupu, he nui te kōrero ko tāku reo.

He mihi atu rā kia koutou i tēnei āhiahi pō kia whiriwhiri nei nga whakaaro o tō tatou whakarei o te manatu ko Whaikaha. Me pēhea te whakamua ki te whakakikokiko i nga moemoeā kia puawai kia ora nei i tātou. Nō reira, utēnei tāku reo ki koutou katoa kia hono tahi nei kia koutou.

Huri noa, huri noa, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou. And it's also my pleasure for some of you who may know me and those that don't my name is Taki Peeke and I'm a member of Te Ao Mārama and it's my privilege to open up this session of the forums with Paula this evening. It's also my pleasure to start those foundations and the korero from a partnership standview, and especially their tripartite approach, Whaikaha is developing and enveloping for the future.

Bringing the tripartite approach to the forefront, Enabling Good Lives and disabled people with the foundation of the Treaty of Waitangi. But thank you once again for opening this hui to everybody. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa. Back to Prudence tēnā koe.

**Prudence Walker**

Kia ora Taki. Shortly Paula the Chief Executive of Whaikaha the Ministry of Disabled People will share with us what Whaikaha have achieved in the past six months and what their priorities are going into the new year.

If you would also prefer your video- sorry, your audio not to be captured or it is easier in terms of accessibility for you. You can put your questions and comments and the chatbox. So of course, the other way that you can ask a question is to raise your hand either physically or electronically - I'll be able to keep on top of questions better if you are able to do that and we have had a few questions that have been put to Paula before the session, so we will start off with those after Paula has spoken.

If you're able to ensure that you do stay on mute, unless, of course, you are speaking, that will just help us manage the inputs for everyone, and we're looking forward to your questions and comments. As with last session the Zoom will remain open and the chat function open for 15 minutes after the session and those questions will be collated and answered on the physical website in the coming weeks.

Now just to note that we won't have time to be able to address questions about individual situations today, you can direct those to contact@whaikaha.govt.nz but we of course can answer general questions which may indeed answer your personal questions. So without any further ado, I would like to introduce Paula, who as we all know, is the Chief Executive of Whaikaha the Ministry of Disabled People. Kia ora Paula.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Kia ora Prudence E nga mana, e nga reo, rau rangatiratanga ma, tēnā koutou katoa. Ko Paula Tesoriero tōku ingoa, ko taku tūranga mahi, he Tumaki mō Whaikaha - the Ministry of Disabled People. Talofa lava, kia orana, warm Pacific greetings to everyone. Thank you Prudence, for your welcome and ngā mihi ki a koe Taki for setting the foundations for this kōrero and later for closing us out and making sure that we do this in the appropriate way. So I'm wearing a very dark navy t shirt with silver chain around my neck.

I'm sitting in front of our pull up banner that says Whaikaha the Ministry of Disabled people, which a purple banner. And I have short brown hair, kind of swept back off my face and my sign name is referenced by two fists moving in a forward direction like a bicycle as I'm a cyclist. So firstly, just thank you all for being back here.

This might be the first time you've engaged in one of these with me, or you might have come to the previous one. But I really want to thank everybody for taking time at this time of the year just to connect with us. I also want to acknowledge those of you who have shared your stories, frustrations and aspirations with the team and I at the last hui, those things matter and they help inform what we do here at Whaikaha particularly as we shape our work plan for next year. One of my top priorities since starting in the role, has been getting around New Zealand in-person and online listening to the community. I've had many, many public engagements around the country hearing the voice directly of disabled people and their families. We met with all of our staff to understand more about the work that we do at a detailed level.

Met with peak bodies, provider groups and ministers, and it's given me a really good sense of the depth and breadth of the work that we do, but actually the work that we really need to do moving forward. Recently, we marked the International Day for People with Disabilities, which was a good opportunity to reflect on what we've achieved, but how much more work there is to be done in Aotearoa to make us a truly inclusive country.

So I'm conceptualizing our work into three main blocks of focus. The first is around building the foundations of Whaikaha. Six months in and three months for me as the Chief Executive, we're still a very new entity, still building our foundations and building our functions and ways of operating. Secondly we're ensuring continuity of the disability support system and other core functions.

Thirdly, we're leading transformation of the support system and over time influencing the way that agencies do their work. We are moving on all three of those platforms and I want to talk about each of those platforms, what we've done and what we planned to do. I can't cover everything in this short space of time, but I just want to connect with you and give you a sense of some of those things.

Firstly, we are building Whaikaha. In our first six months we have progressed building our systems, our policies, our ways of operating and starting to fill out our structure and confirm our leadership team. This will continue next year as they're all important foundational things for our organization. Thinking about the technology that we need, the systems that we need are really important.

Building our tripartite partnership, which Taki touched on, is vital for our success. Authentic partnering takes time, and it needs time spent on how it works and how the community is appropriately resourced to be at the table. I'm really pleased to have just recently confirmed the appointment of the Chief Advisor Māori, who next year will be working in partnership to build our Te Tiriti o Waitangi framework, our tikanga principles and helping us to get on the starting journey towards being a treaty based organization.

It's really important we get those things right now, and I'm really pleased to have our Chief Advisor on board starting on the 19th of January to help us do that really important foundational work for Whaikaha as part of our tripartite approach and honoring us wanting to be a good treaty partner. Next year, we have to build our statement of intent.

This is basically a detailed strategy confirming our approach over the coming years. It's important because it sets out what we intend to do and how our success will be measured. We then each year have to report to Parliament on that and front up and answer how we've performed. And also obviously part of that is reporting to our community. We look forward to developing that statement of intent in partnership.

Yesterday I advertised a deputy Chief Executive organizational culture and that's an important role to add to our leadership team here, because it's a role which will, early next year, start shaping our people strategy, our recruitment strategy. We want to make sure that Whaikaha is a great place to work and that we have the right kind of workforce here with the right kind of roles to support disability leadership growth and capability development.

You'll see vacancies coming up in the first part of next year, and I encourage you to apply. Next year we will also be putting money into building community capacity, capability building and leadership, and I'm really looking forward to that coming to fruition. The second platform I touched on is about ensuring continuity and improvement of disability support services and the other core functions that we have at Whaikaha around policy development and stewarding change across government.

We support more than 44,000 people on any given day. The number of people accessing our supports is increasing and as such we have work underway to develop a more sustainable way of funding the system. We know that long standing pressures have been influenced by low unemployment, emmigration and increased demand for services. We are pleased to have just started developing a workforce strategy to address this and we're working really closely with Te Whatu Ora, ACC and other government agencies to make sure that we're being consistent in how we approach the development of that workforce.

We also contract with Te Pou to provide a range of workforce initiatives. We're also looking at how we can take dedicated approaches to workforce availability, including things like centralized recruitment, ways of better supporting providers and we're working with MB on emmigration settings. We have also this year invested funding in reducing wait times and improving access to some services like child development services and there's much more work to be done there. In the past six months, we have also confirmed that our more flexible approach for disabled people to engage family and whānau to provide supports is here to stay. That expanded flexibility was put in place as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it gave disabled people and families more options about who could be paid to provide that support.

We have listened to that feedback from whānau, carers, disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori who have told us that that flexible approach is what is needed. So I'm delighted that that flexible way of funding will now be permanent. We also have a policy work programme with existing commitments and we're working really hard to stand up our policy team.

Today we finished interviewing for our deputy Chief Executive Policy and I'm really looking forward to being able to make an offer before Christmas. The policy work programme is relatively large with some existing commitments. Next year we have to report on the Disability Action Plan. We have to review the Faiva Ora - National Pacific Disability Plan. We have to work to prepare for the potential introduction of the accessibility legislation.

We are looking at policy options for funding care by family members and we are working to introduce the New Zealand Sign Language Amendment Bill with MSD (Ministry of Social Development). We are also making sure that we have, as part of establishing our permanent funding, making sure we have what we need to run Whaikaha successfully into the future. When we were established, we were given a certain amount of money and the government asked us to make sure that we're really clear what the sustainable funding is that we need so we're doing a lot of work in that. The third platform that I touched on is around transformation. That's both in respect of disability support services that we provide and also influencing how other government agencies work. We're working on the disability support system model to meet the conditions for the budget contingency drawdown. What that means is that the Government has set aside a portion of funding, $100 million, and we have to show we have the right plans in place to access that funding.

We know that people have been waiting a really long time for transformation of the system and we will be using that funding to bring in an Enabling Good Lives experience for more disabled people and their families. And we will be discussing the options for how to spend that money with ministers in February next year. We're also looking at how we establish what's called our system steward role.

So already we are proactively engaging with government agencies across the board. We know and you know, that agencies like education, employment, health, transport, housing all make such a difference to the lives of disabled people and our families. And we have a really important role in influencing the way their work is done to meet the needs and achieve better outcomes for us.

Some of the things that we've been working on in that space, is reviewing MSD's Youth Health Wellbeing Survey, the Ministry of Health's recent health survey results and the work required as part of the Mahi Aroha Working Group and Carers Strategy Action Plan. We've also been working on improving the availability and use of disability data and I know that for many people that that sounds not particularly exciting, but actually it is so important that we have a much better understanding of data and evidence because those things matter when it comes to understanding best solutions and also it matters when it comes to seeking more funding. Hopefully that gives you a little bit of an update on some of the things we've done, but there's a lot more to do. I look forward next year to involving our partners and involving our community at large on thinking about things that we need to prioritize for the year ahead.

I want to quickly touch on some of the things that I'm proud of having delivered in the past six months. It's hard to believe that many of us will be breaking soon for a well-deserved summer break. I've been in this role for three months, but Whaikaha has been here for six months. This year we had a responsibility to go to Geneva and listen to the advice from the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and people will have seen that the committee made 60 recommendations to New Zealand on how we can improve compliance with the CRPD.

So in March next year, we'll be sending a paper to Cabinet for some decisions around how the government will respond to those recommendations. The other really important big piece of work that I'm really proud of us contributing to is the Waitangi tribunal Kaupapa inquiries. And it's really important that we take our obligations towards tāngata whaikaha Māori really seriously and address the recommendations that the tribunal will be making.

And thirdly, we gave evidence and information to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into abuse in state care. And I just want to acknowledge and share their stories to the Royal Commission. We have to make sure that we get ahead of those recommendations and really think about what we need to do to make sure that abuse and harm never happens under our watch.

So we really committed to making sure that we work on safeguarding approaches, and that's one of the responsibilities for us to deliver under the Violence and Abuse Action Plan across government. Those three really important inquiries and reviews have given us a really solid foundation for moving into next year and thinking about how the government responds to the recommendations from all three of those important reviews and inquiries and starts to prioritize meaningful change for disabled people and our families.

Clearly, we won't be doing that alone. We'll be doing that with our partners and with a high degree of consultation around New Zealand. Finally, it would be remiss to not acknowledge Covid. It's still here and for many disabled people and our families, it continues to create concern and angst. So as we head away, we will make sure that on our website we provide some key public health information and places that you can go, and numbers that you can call for any support that you need.

So Whaikaha is still very much in our infancy and next year across those three platforms, we'll continue to build. So much more to do to establish our processes, our systems, our structure, and filling vacancies. And secondly, making sure we improve the services that we already deliver. And thirdly, start to transform those services. So lots on and really important that we get it right.

So I wish you all a really safe and enjoyable period over the upcoming holiday. I'm really looking forward to sharing more information with you in the early new year and I look forward to working with our community partners on thinking about, following the election, following any election, agencies are always required to brief the incoming government, even if it's the same government, and we all have to be thinking very carefully about the big strategic priorities that we put in front of an incoming government and that will be informed by community.

Ngā mihi nui kia koutou katoa I'm going to stop talking now and I will put the information that I share tonight up online and I'll hand back to you, Prudence, for questions.

**Prudence Walker**

Kia ora Paula I don't think any of us underestimate what a big job it is at the ministry currently with getting established and getting everything in place.

But we hope that that will continue to build in the new year for the betterment of us all. So I see a few questions starting to come in and feel free to raise your hand electronically or if you're not able to do that, you can raise your hand physically. If you would like to ask your question by voice or sign, but Paula, we did have a couple of questions in advance that we had, and hopefully you might be able to provide us with some answers for them. The first one was how can we ensure the Accessibility for New Zealanders Bill is taken seriously.

**Paula Tesoriero**

So I think there's perhaps a couple of ways of responding to that and thank you for whoever asked that question. I think firstly we have a really key role here at Whaikaha to really advocate strongly, not just across central government but also local government and in the private sector around removing barriers and improving accessibility for disabled people and our families so we'll continue to do that.

The legislation that's before the House will be considered by MPs in the new year. So hopefully a number of people will have made submissions on the legislation and the submissions and the summary of of the sort of themes that that I'm aware of have certainly signaled some really clear messages about what disabled people and our families think of the legislation and suggestions on ways to strengthen it and improve it.

So ultimately Whaikaha will have a role in talking with the Ministry of Social Development, who are leading that legislation at the moment. We'll have a key role in making sure that we bring the perspectives of the community and Whaikaha to that process and then, whatever form the legislation is passed, we'll have a role in implementing that and making sure that we do all we can so that everybody takes that legislation really seriously and removes barriers.

**Prudence Walker**

Thanks for that Paula. Another question that we had in advance was how do you plan to ensure people with disabilities who have mental health issues get an appropriate standard of care?

**Paula Tesoriero**

Yeah, that's a really good question, a really fair question, and one we need to give some really considerable weight to. So having seamless support across government is important and we've started work on that here.

It's an ongoing piece of work with Te Whatu Ora and the Ministry of Health, who have that sort of primary responsibility. We've also started to co-commission and purchase services for people who are accessing both disability and mental health services, and we'll continue to look at ways to do that and continue to work with Te Whatu Ora and the Ministry of Health who lead on that.

So joining that up and trying to create a seamless support and looking at people as individuals rather than sort of channels in which they access support is something we will be working really hard here to change for the future.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you. So kind of following on from that, what plans are in place to address the issues that are coming out of the Royal Commission of Inquiry, which states the care of people with disabilities and neurodivergence has been a catastrophic failure?

**Paula Tesoriero**

Yeah, so much to learn from the Royal Commission and when the Commission releases its recommendations next year, the Government will have to consider how it best responds to those. I think you know, my expectation and aspiration is actually that any person or organization providing supports and services to disabled people now, whether that's in residential or community care, are really thinking about the lessons learned from the royal commission.

But we've got that collective responsibility between us at Whaikaha and those we support. But I think next year is going to be a big year and I think I touched earlier on this that the government is going to-, the ministers will have to make decisions about responding to those recommendations and other really key recommendations affecting disabled people.

So I don't have a perfect answer to that now, but next year, when the commission releases its report, a lot of work is going to have to go into addressing those recommendations.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you Paula. I mean, I think the questions that we're seeing come through, there is a lot of overlap with the responsibility of other ministries and I acknowledge that you may not have much of an answer for some of the questions that I will ask.

But perhaps if you need to come back to that later, you can just let us know and and those can be included in the questions that are followed up on the website. So this one's in relation to Te Whatu Ora and it asks, why is the age set at four years old for accessing the services they need within Te Whatu Ora?

**Paula Tesoriero**

It's a little bit difficult to answer Prudence without understanding the type of services, what what I would suggest is if the person who asked that question wants to email contact@whaikaha.govt.nz, we could, with a bit more specificity, we could probably answer that a bit more fully.

**Prudence Walker**

Yeah Okay. Now I think this is quite a good question really and I know there's been a lot of confusion in the community over the years about the development of Enabling Good Lives. But the question is why is Enabling Good Lives still taking time to launch when in reality it's been running for years?

**Paula Tesoriero**

Yeah, great question. So there's a couple of ways to talk about Enabling Good Lives. One is, people will definitely be aware of the three pilot sites in the Waikato, Midcentral and in Christchurch, where an approach to Enabling Good Lives was taken slightly differently in all three sites.

We're really fortunate that we have, you know, evaluated all those sites and got really good lessons and indicators of success. So those pilots and those ways of working remain in place. The other important thing about an Enabling Good Lives approach is that it's not necessarily about a site or a place, actually everybody who is engaging with disabled people and our families, any provider, any organization has a responsibility to apply the Enabling Good Lives principles to ways in which they work with disabled people and I think one of the opportunities we've got at Whaikaha next year and with our community is actually to be raising awareness of those principles at every level.

So government agency level, local government, working with providers to continue raising that awareness and to support the community to build their local infrastructure up and raise awareness of Enabling Good Lives at the local level. Then just finally, I touched before Prudence on the $100 million that government have set aside. So Cabinet have been really clear in decisions made that that funding is about bringing that Enabling Good Lives experience to more people, and the $100 million sounds like a lot of money, but it's a start. And so what we'll be doing is taking options to ministers in February for them to make some choices about how that money will be applied next year.

And then alongside that, we'll be working on a much bigger case for further investment and taking that approach to more people in the following years, so it's a bit of a phased approach.

**Prudence Walker**

Thanks for explaining that Paula, I hope that's answered some of the questions that people have. Now somebody here talks about the Disability Issues Commission, but I think maybe they're talking about the Office for Disability Issues and they say - It seems that we are going around in circles. Why do we have the Disability Issues Commission, which has been running for years, why can't you look at what they've already brought on board? So I wondered, assuming that it is about ODI, I wondered if you can just explain a bit about the place of ODI in relation to the ministry.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Sure, so the Office of Disability Issues is part of Whaikaha now. It used to sit in the Ministry of Social Development and it had a core responsibility of working across agencies to provide advice on cabinet papers going out to ministers, working with disabled peoples organizations and advising government agencies.

But it was a relatively small team and so that team is now part of Whaikaha, but it also sits within a larger group of people who will be doing the policy work and really, I guess, hopefully increasing the influence that we can have across government. The other important thing about Whaikaha is to remember that we have a very big service delivery operation as part of our agency and that sets us apart from other population agencies, you know we are the only one with a big service delivery part of our organization and that came from the old Ministry of Health and that was part of the health and disability reforms, but it was part of recognizing that actually disability is not a health issue. You know it's a all of life journey. And so the establishment of Whaikaha is to recognize that and give us responsibility for providing those operational supports, but also strengthening the role that the Office of Disability Issues played really well across government. It's about increasing that voice and maximizing those opportunities of influence across government.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you for that Paula. So I think this question is about trust and I know that you know that disabled people have less trust in the system generally, there's research on that and statistics about that. So Denise says it's hard to trust anything that is said after years of abuse and neglect. How do you plan to rebuild the trust?

**Paula Tesoriero**

I think one of the things I now often say when I speak to different audiences is, you know, I made a deliberate choice to take on this as a disabled leader. And, you know, I've done roles in the past in our sector with the most immediate one being around advocacy. And those five years in that role gave me a really deep appreciation of the lack of trust, frustration, pain, hurt, trauma, desperation, all of those things that exist in our community. And it wasn't an easy decision to come into this role, but it was important for me as a disabled person to put myself forward, take this role, and try and work within the system to bring about the change that we all want.

And that's what I'm committed to doing, and the community will hold us to account over the coming years as to whether we have done that or not. But most certainly as a disabled person, it's visceral to me that we achieve and we're not going to get it right overnight. We're still very early on as an agency, but I'm very committed, as is the team to get this right and building trust. You know, doesn't happen overnight tt takes a long time to build trust and it happens.

**Prudence Walker**

Yeah thank you Paula. I think that it does take a long time and so we we're not going to automatically trust systems are we when we've been let down by systems for so long. So, I mean, I think things like this help to build some trust and that engagement with community, and hopefully over time we can we can build that.

The next question sort of relates to the differences, real or perceived between ACC and other funding for disability support services. So it says why does ACC get different funding from disabilities? Why do they get more?

**Paula Tesoriero**

Yeah, really good question and it's been a big topic of conversation over many years, you know, that inequity between the two systems. I mean, fundamentally there are different legislative frameworks for them both, and I think that's a really big and important conversation that needs to be had with ministers about about those differences. And that creates real challenges for many in our community where, the supports we get, you know, are determined by the cause of impairment and, you know, we know the difficulties that creates.

And I think that's, you know, one of those big strategic discussions with ministers and, you know, and community advocacy around that as well. We also want to make sure we try and close those gaps as much as possible as well.

**Prudence Walker**

Yeah I mean, I think the question that has been posed really talks to that. And we hear from the community often and I suppose from the community's point of view, it doesn't really matter where your impairment experience comes from, that doesn't necessarily make a huge difference to what your needs are. You just need support to have your needs meet and we shouldn't have to worry about different systems or differences in those systems. Please keep your questions coming. And if anyone would like to ask a question themselves verbally, please just raise your electronic hand, which you can do by clicking on reactions and the raise hand button.

Or you can raise it physically, but I might take a little longer to notice that. So I do have another question here. I'm not entirely clear exactly what it's talking about, but you might-[fire alarm siren] Have we got a fire alarm? [Fire alarm siren]

**Paula Tesoriero**

We have to leave the building I'm sorry. Ngā mihi. Thank you for your time today.

**Prudence Walker**

Sorry everybody that that has been cut short. Paula will be scheduling more of these in the new year. And I thank everybody for coming today. We will need to cut it short because obviously, Paula is the the main person that we want to talk to in this. But we will leave the Zoom and the chat open for another 15 minutes or so, providing that we can, assuming that the people who can do that are not in the building with Paula. Taki, could I ask you to close early in karakia.

**Taki Peeke**

Unihia, unihia. Unihia te reo rongomai whiti o tēnei hui, o tēnei wānanga. Waiho te riri, waiho te oi. Tihei mauri ora. Kia ora. Thank you everyone, go well and we will see you in the new year.