**Speech to NZDSN: 5 December 2017.**

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E ngā mana, e ngā reo, raurangatira mā

Tena koutou katoa

Ko Paula Tesoriero ahau

ko au te Kaihautu Tika HauAtanga mō te Kāhui Tika Tangata ki Aotearoa.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Mauri tangata, Mauri ora

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. It’s really exciting to be here for the New Zealand Disability Support Network. This network plays a critical role in realizing a truly transformational, comprehensive disability support system; one which enables all people to make the fullest contribution they can to their communities.

**Background**

Firstly, a little about me for those who do not know me and how I got here. The journey to me taking up this role has all been about a BIKE. When I was 5, I was the luckiest kid alive-my parents brought me a blue healing sixteen bike.

But it was far more than just a bike for me. I could not keep up with other kids running and walking, and I was acutely aware I was different. I had “different” legs to others, and ultimately had part of one amputated and the other has limited movement and limited blood-flow. But I was just as fast as everyone else on a bike. And I used to ride everywhere, daring to imagine that I might become one of the fastest cyclists in the world.

But off the bike, I did not have a sense of belonging. I spent a lot of time in hospital and I grew up with a profound sense of no control over my body. My bike was always an escape from this.

During my University years, I did not ride much at all. I made a deliberate choice to shut disability out completely on the basis this would be the only way to make it in the world. Later, I was drawn back to the bike. But In order to realise that dream of being the fastest in the world, I had to confront disability.

In the end, without such a giant chip on my shoulder weighing me down, I flew on my bike. My medals and world records are not the things I am proud of. It is the journey to truly integrating disability into my world. When I stood in a Paralympic village for the first time, I finally understood that I am not who I am despite my disability- I am who I am because of it.

After retiring from sport, I wanted to give back. My sporting journey has given me an opportunity to play a part in key organisations allowing me to begin my journey of advocacy. Serving on the Boards of the NZALS, Halberg Disability Sport Foundation and Paralympics NZ, and gaining invaluable governance experience on a range of other non-disability bodies.

Working with these organisations gave me some insight into some of the barriers disabled people face in areas many people take for granted - getting a job, going to school, finding a house to live in – and made me question what I could do with my professional background and passion for disability issues to help reduce such barriers. And so here I am.

**Role of Commissioner**

I am now almost four months into the role as Disability Rights Commissioner where under the Human Rights Act, I have a statutory responsibility to protect and promote human rights for people with disabilities. I have been deliberate about listening to people for the first few months in the role to help inform my understanding of issues and also to help me firm up my priorities in the role.

My priorities sit in two categories. The first being the top 5 priorities I want to spend most of my time and resource on. The second are a set of areas I will be deliberate and purposeful in undertaking strategic advocacy on.

To arrive at these priorities and categorising them the way I did, we looked at where we are at as a country.

While there have clearly been improvements for disabled New Zealanders have come a long way, but not as far as other population groups and are not where we need to be.

* Disabled New Zealanders are behind other kiwis across a number of key well-being indicators, affecting their life-course and outcomes.
* Attitudes towards disabled people remain at best indifferent, at worst discriminatory, underpin how disabled New Zealanders are treated (and resulting outcomes) from conception to death and how they are valued for their contribution to society
* A number of recommendations from the UN and various Inquiries not yet adequately dealt with across a number of areas

So, there is a lot to tackle.

I am a firm believer on sorting out key priorities and focusing on those, rather than trying to do a thousand things. So while all these issues are important, I had to go through a process of figuring out the areas where my specific and unique role could be effective in creating change. And my priorities reflect what people have emphasized meeting after meeting.

We also looked at:

* Various data collected by Stats NZ
* Various international and domestic monitoring reports
* Complaints made to the HRC

As a result of all of this, my top 5 priorities are, in no particular order:

*Education:* Currently 42% of young disabled kiwis aged 15-24 are not in education, employment or training. Engagement with education is one of the most critical indicators of a life course. Our education system is not as inclusive as it needs to be. 17 years of reviews and reports have progressed some positive steps, but we need a systemic look at what it will take for our education system to be truly inclusive and work for all parties involved. We simply cannot afford as a country economically, socially, and ethically, to have another generation where nearly half of young people are not in education, training or employment.

I have had some positive engagement with the Ministry of Education and I look forward to building on those discussions and discussing with the new Minister of Education.

*Employment:*

The recent HLFS survey revealed that 25% of disabled people participate in the workforce, compared with 73% of non-disabled kiwis. This is simply unacceptable in a country like ours and is essential we close this gap to ensure financial and economic security for disabled people.

I want the conversation to shift from “it’s nice to have some disabled people in the workforce, and it’s the right thing to do” to “this is about New Zealand’s economic and social progress as a nation and a strong performing economy relies on disabled people being in the workforce”.

Education and employment are what I describe as the 2 top Policy priorities.

And I could simply add more policy topics to this- but I think the better thing to do is address some foundational things that will help shift a greater number of other Policy issues in the long-run.

*Shifting hearts and minds*

Attitudes are the bedrock that a lot of issues can arise from as symptoms. Disability can still be seen by many people as either an ‘other’, a source of stigma, or something to manage medically rather than something fundamental to a person’s identity.

Unless we change the hearts and minds of New Zealanders around these things, we won’t see a shift to disability being “business as usual” in how kids are educated, how employers think about disability, how services are designed -the list goes on.

To do this, I intend to find funding to run a significant social change campaign, in partnership with others.

*Supporting a stronger disability sector*

I have thought hard about what my role is in helping build a stronger sector. The Sector itself and decision-makers tell me the sector is not as strong or united as it needs to be. Part of the success of my role depends on a strong successful sector and many have suggested that the independence of my role allows me to question and guide the sector to achieve better outcomes for disabled New Zealanders.

I encourage the sector to challenge itself: are we as strong and organized as you need to be; are we as representative as we need to be- because I am not hearing the voice of young disabled kiwis or Maori disabled people come through. What can be done about this? Are we talking to ourselves, or are we prepared to talk up and out?, are we being strategic? I look forward to continuing to challenge the sector around these questions because we must ensure the sector is strong.

Finally, the 5th priority relates to data. It is well accepted that there are large gaps in disaggregated disability data in New Zealand. What can’t be counted can lead to unsuccessful outcomes and unintended consequences. We must build a better picture of disability in New Zealand so we know we are addressing the right issues in the right way.

I am building a program of work around these 5 priorities and will be working in partnership with government, DPOs, service providers, advocates, and the private sector, on all of them.

There are also a multitude of other issues in addition to these. I am committed to deliberately and purposefully advocating on these issues: Housing, accessibility to building, health services, infrastructure and information; bio-ethical issues, state-abuse, mental health, supported decision-making and the range of issues affecting those with neuro-disabilities.

*Service Transformation*

Just a few remarks about a topic of great interest to the NZDSN. I would like to thank Sasha for her presentation on the Service Transformation Work. That work is invaluable and I am hearing wonderful things about how co-design is working in a real sense in how it is being developed.

I have been watching the disability service reforms across the ditch, Australia’s National Disability Insurance Scheme with great interest. It has been a salient reminder to me that even when the principles are sound it is important to monitor all stages of the implementation for fishhooks.

**CRPD Shadow Reporting**

Another way we will be addressing key issues is through the upcoming CRPD shadow reporting happening over the course of 2018/2019. As some of you will know, New Zealand’s progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities gets reviewed every 4 years. As part of this, the Commission, as part of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism, alongside the Ombudsman and DPO Coalition made up of New Zealand’s six DPOs, has written a report to the UN Committee highlighting key issues and areas for the Committee to question the Government – and ultimately make recommendations – on. This ‘List of Issues’ will form the basis of my engagement with key stakeholders such as yourself in the near future.

I have briefed the newly appointed Minister for Disability Issues, the Honourable Carmel Sepuloni, on my priorities and the shadow reporting process, and to this end, have met with her a couple of times in my capacity as Disability Rights Commissioner and as current chair of the IMM. In addition to this, I have met with a number of Senior Officials, Chief Executives, the SSC, local government, and taken opportunities where I can in the media. I have worked to build my social media profile since this is the way people like to engage.

I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively and constructively with these individuals and groups to improve outcomes for disabled New Zealanders.