

# StrongVoices

EMPOWERED LIVES

Autumn 2026





# Guest Kōrero

Phil Clarke - IHC Library

On the shelf opposite my desk in the IHC Library I can see copies of every magazine published by IHC, going back to 1954. The first issue was called *Our Newsletter*, published by The N.Z. Committee of The Intellectually Handicapped Children's Parents' Association (Inc.), as IHC was then known. It is just six pages long and printed in small type with a few black and white photos. There are some other obvious differences from today, particularly in the terms then used to describe people with intellectual disability.

Over the years the title changed from *Our Newsletter* to *The Intellectually Handicapped Child*, *IH Review*, *Community Moves* and now *Strong Voices*.

Those first issues were published when the main sources of news were radio and the local paper. Members looked to the magazine to find out what was happening in and around the organisation and in turn the magazine reflected the information IHC identified as important.

The IHC Library itself started as a list of resources in the pages of an early issue.

A decade ago, the IHC Library digitised the early print copies to more easily research the organisation's history. Some of the scanned copies were part of the timeline in our anniversary exhibition *Nothing about us without us* marking 75 years of IHC.

We now find ourselves planning for the next 75 years at IHC in an age where we are all bombarded with information. While government's most recent Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) report points to an existing digital divide, more of us now get our information digitally and increasingly rely on a number of different platforms and channels. Artificial intelligence is also changing how we find and absorb that information – and sometimes the accuracy of it.

The curation of concise and correct information for those whose lives are affected by intellectual disability is a big part of our responsibilities at IHC.

In this issue of *Strong Voices*, we have included a reader survey. We would like to gauge your thoughts on our magazine: what we're doing right, what's missing and where you think it should be heading. It will only take a few minutes and you can return it to us in the prepaid envelope provided, or you can fill it in online at: [www.ihc.org.nz/svsurvey](http://www.ihc.org.nz/svsurvey)

We appreciate you taking part and giving us your feedback so we can best align with our mission – to advocate for the rights, inclusion and welfare of all people with intellectual disabilities and support them to live satisfying lives in the community.

**Phil Clarke**  
Head of Library and Information Resourcing, IHC

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### Join the conversation:

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**Cover image:** Tessa Haanen, the first female member of Wellington karate class the Downright Dragons to earn her blackbelt.



# An inclusive education for all disabled learners

IHC

**In December 2025, IHC signed a landmark agreement at Parliament that marks a huge step forward for disabled students and their whānau. This would not have been achieved without the remarkable dedication and resilience of IHC's members, supporters, staff and Board.**

The agreement reached between IHC and the Government resolves IHC's long-running legal claim regarding access to education for disabled children, first taken to the Human Rights Commission in 2008. Our complaint to the Commission emphasised that access to education for disabled children was a human right and the education system had failed to ensure that right. IHC argued

that policies had contributed to disadvantage for, and discrimination against, disabled learners in mainstream schools. Our case was backed by evidence gathered over decades, including the testimony of many brave parents who fought the system.

Kataraina, a mother who spoke at the signing of the agreement, described how her daughter with 'takiwātanga' (autism) had to attend school part-time for three years because she wasn't understood or supported.

"For our children to be respected and valued in society, they need to be respected and valued at school," she said. "Belonging means that our children are welcomed, understood and accepted for who they are; it means that they have friends, and it means that even if our children are

different, everyone puts in the effort to make sure they feel the same."

The experience of Kataraina and her children is sadly common across Aotearoa New Zealand. Now IHC and the Government have settled this legal action, the work ahead is to change the policies and systems to create the sense of belonging and a meaningful education that all students need.

“**For our children to be respected and valued in society, they need to be respected and valued at school**”

## What this agreement will change

The agreement commits the Ministry of Education to implement a Framework for Action – a set of nine priority areas based on evidence, including Ministry and Education Review Office reports, collected over decades. The Framework was designed by IHC and informed by families, teachers and disabled people themselves. It focuses on fundamental shifts in how the system:

- Understands and responds to learners' needs through better data collection and reporting
- Provides what disabled ākonga (students) and schools need for learning and wellbeing through a data-informed funding policy
- Improves access to specialist support services and coordinated support
- Encourages curriculum changes that result in disabled ākonga learning alongside their peers with individualised assessment of that learning
- Investigates and develops better and more effective funding to ensure learners and schools receive what they need for successful outcomes
- Moves to ākonga-centred and strengths-based funding policies that focus on what is needed for better access to learning and participation at school.

The Ministry has also agreed to establish an external stakeholder

monitoring group of up to eight people to ensure full implementation of IHC's Framework. IHC will chair the group, and members will include disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, Pasifika, whānau and others who understand how education system policy settings affect schools, ākonga and their whānau. This group will monitor and guide work on the Framework over at least the next six years.

## What this means for students and whānau

This is a win for all disabled students, based on recognition of their fundamental human right to education on an equal basis to their non-disabled peers.

This is the start of long-term improvements to how the Government supports disabled students, so they have what they need to participate in school life and learn with their peers. For whānau, this means that their choice to enrol their child at their local school will be a positive one. Everything their child needs to thrive at school will be in place, including access to the right support at the right time, from the right people.

It won't happen quickly, though. The agreement represents the Government's confirmation that the system is not working for disabled students and must be overhauled. The work to start that wholesale system starts this year and IHC and our supporters will continue to hold the Government accountable to its commitments.

## A shared vision of inclusion

The intent of the agreement and Framework are clear: children with disabilities going to their local school with their siblings and friends, learning alongside their peers and participating fully in school life – not on the margins, not part-time, not separated or disadvantaged. This outcome will align the education system with human rights principles and create positive outcomes for all learners, including learners with a disability.

As Kataraina reminded us: "Belonging is a fundamental human need." When policy-makers, schools and communities embrace that principle alongside practical system support, we can truly make meaningful education accessible to all.

**Note:** we purposefully use the term "disabled students" rather than "students with disabilities" here. That's because these students are disabled, not by their nature but by the systems that focus only on their deficits (what they cannot do) rather than their strengths. IHC's long-running legal action aimed to change that systemic discrimination.

**Previous page: Minister of Education Erica Stanford and IHC Chief Executive Andrew Crisp after signing the landmark education settlement in December 2025.**

**Below: Kataraina (right) with IHC Inclusive Education Lead Trish Grant (left).**





# Family camp creates connections

IHC

**It was an action-packed 24 hours for a group of families with children with intellectual disability at Whenua Iti Outdoor Education Centre in the Tasman District.**

Towards the end of 2025, six families raising children with intellectual disabilities met for a family camp at Whenua Iti Outdoor Education Centre.

The camp was an initiative of IHC's Community Programmes team with Whenua Iti and funded by generous IHC donors.

This first family camp was a pilot created to give families a supported outdoor adventure. "We're now looking at what partners we could work with in the future to facilitate others around New Zealand," says IHC Member, Events and Relationship Manager Danette Wilson.

Among those attending this first camp was Ma'ao Vaireka and his family. Ma'ao's eldest daughter, Tatiana, has Williams Syndrome. Although the family weren't quite sure what to expect, they arrived on a bright Saturday morning to find their tents already set up and waiting.

"All the hard work was done before we even got there," Ma'ao laughs.

One by one, the other families arrived. The programme began with

a whanaungatanga ice-breaker – an energetic 'mix and match' challenge designed to help parents and children meet each other in a relaxed way.

"It really worked," Ma'ao says. "It helped us forget ourselves a bit, loosen up and just enjoy getting to know each other."

Then it was off to Kaiteriteri Beach for sea kayaking. Parents teamed up, unloading kayaks and holding boats steady while the children got into their safety gear. It was in these small practical tasks, Ma'ao noticed, that parents naturally began to connect.

"We were all helping each other – floating the kayaks, getting the kids settled. It just happened," he says. "Those little moments opened the door for bigger conversations later."

For Tatiana, it was a first.

"She'd never been in a kayak by herself," Ma'ao says proudly. "But she loved it. She went a long way out with the others, and they were all encouraging each other the whole time."

After kayaking, the group split into teams to build inflatable rafts – another chance for some teamwork and a lot of laughter. Despite the full schedule, Ma'ao says the day never felt rushed.

"Everyone was so laid back. We were busy, but it was good busy. Fun busy."

There were plenty of firsts for some of the children with intellectual disabilities, who were able to push themselves and achieve goals in a safe and supportive environment.

Ma'ao says the unique strengths of siblings stood out. "When kids have a sibling with intellectual disability, they instinctively know how to act around other kids with intellectual disability. It's natural for them and it makes everyone feel accepted.

Back at camp, families gathered for a catered dinner before the children went to play an evening game of volleyball. For parents, it was one of the richest parts of the weekend.

"Everyone started talking about their experiences accessing funding, navigating supports, what the journey with their child had been like," Ma'ao recalls. "We all had the same story really. Just different places and different stages."

The night wound down with everyone toasting marshmallows over the fire.

Would Ma'ao and the family return to Whenua Iti?

"For sure!" says Ma'ao. "Absolutely!"

**Above: Sea kayaking at Kaiteriteri Beach.**



# Downright Legend

“ I think Tessa fought 40 people!  
exclaims mum Heather. ”



## Thirty-four-year-old Tessa Haanen is the first female member of the Downright Dragons to gain her black belt. The Downright Dragons is an inclusive karate programme for young people with intellectual disability that's been running for 17 years at Wellington's Seido Dojo.

In karate, a black belt is a symbol of skill, respect and dedication. And it's not easy to earn – it takes years of hard work and training.

Luckily Tessa Haanen is very fit. As well as karate classes she plays walking netball and is a boxer. She also goes to Shut Up and Dance classes and, along with Mum Heather, joins in with Parkrun – a friendly 5 km community event around Wellington's waterfront every Saturday morning. When we chatted, Tessa was getting ready to take part in the Round the Bays run. Tessa also works as a cleaner for Spectrum Care.

Despite her good fitness level Tessa still had to train hard in the six months leading up to her black belt grading. This meant reorganising some of her other activities so she could add in extra karate training sessions.

Instructor Ang Brown, who also trained 2024 Downright Dragon black belts Jevan Walls and Dan Howard, was delighted with how Tessa embraced the rigorous training schedule.

"She actually blew me away," says Ang. "She's got so much determination and is really disciplined. I sat down and gave her a training plan at the beginning of the year. And she never backed out of anything. Never complained. Never made any excuses. She just quietly got on with it."

Fellow Downright Dragon black belts Jevan and Dan were keen to give Tessa some tips. "They did help me a bit," says Tessa.

Mum Heather is quick to point out that Tessa's black belt involved a big commitment from a lot of people. "Everyone at the dojo," she says. "Plus, her Spectrum Care support worker Mamata Dahl also does karate, so she was a huge help. And her instructor Ang of course."

The turn out at the dojo on the day of

Tessa's grading was a further show of support with a hundred or so members all there to cheer her on.

"I was a bit nervous," says Tessa about the grading day. "I was the only one doing it."

For those who are unfamiliar with the world of martial arts, a grading is a big deal. For Tessa, it involved warming up for an hour, then an hour of her repeating a series of movements as part of her syllabus. And finally, an hour of sparring.

"These gradings are cool," says Ang. "Anybody who is green belt or above lines up to spar."

"I think Tessa fought 40 people!" exclaims mum Heather.

"Dan and Jevan pushed to the front," says Ang. "They were really eager to spar with her."

Part of the grading also involves demonstrating original self-defence sequences, and Tessa created five or six of her own with the help of her support worker, Mamata. "She enjoyed doing them," Ang says. "It was a chance for her to shine."

Although the Downright Dragons programme adapts learning where needed, Ang says the karate remains authentic. "The biggest challenge is usually recall, especially since many students train only once a week. But Tessa was training three days a week – her determination stood out."

After hours of intense effort, surrounded by a dojo full of people who believed in her, Tessa finally got to tie on her black belt. And how did she feel?

"Proud of myself," she smiles.

**Opposite: Tessa Haanen demonstrating her karate moves.**

# From Data to Dignity 2026



IHC

Above: Sasanka Mendis.

**Sasanka Mendis works as a library assistant in Auckland and lives with learning and intellectual challenges, autism spectrum disorder and ADHD. He says his favourite part of the job is being surrounded by books and people and encouraging kids' love of reading. Some days are challenging, but “as long as I’ve got a purpose and I’m working towards something, I’ll get there”, he says.**

Sasanka, 33, has three diplomas, including in IT HelpDesk and animation. Yet finding a job took years. He applied for more than 200 jobs and received just 5 responses. Yet he is one of the success stories.

Only 21 percent of adults with intellectual disability are in paid employment, compared with 78 percent of the general population. That is just one of the many findings of IHC's latest report *From Data to Dignity 2026: health and wellbeing indicators for New Zealanders with intellectual disability*.

The report, produced with research organisation Kōtātā Insight, uses the government's Integrated Data

Infrastructure (IDI) to track more than 70 indicators across health, education, housing, justice and income. It builds on IHC's groundbreaking 2023 *From Data to Dignity* study, which was the first to use government data systematically to examine outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

The 2026 update delivers what IHC Director of Advocacy Tania Thomas calls “a reality check.”

“The numbers are distressing, but sadly not new,” she says. “IHC continues to provide government with evidence that shows they need to do better.”



The data shows inequities remain entrenched – and in some cases are worsening. Some of the insights include:

- People with intellectual disability live on average 17 years less than the general population
- High emergency department use and injury-related hospitalisations, particularly among women with intellectual disability
- Evidence of barriers to ACC access, with lower claim rates despite higher injury prevalence
- A concerning rise in young people leaving school without qualifications
- Greater exposure to housing pressure with rising placement on social housing waiting lists, particularly for Māori and Pacific children with intellectual disability.

Taken together, the figures paint a picture of systemic disadvantage.

“This update is a reality check,” says Tania. “The Government’s Disability Strategy can be enhanced by including urgent action to address these persistent inequities.”

IHC is calling on the Government to deliver regular public reporting on outcomes, targeted action to address inequities for Māori and Pacific communities, and improved disability-aware health services.

Tania says the new report will form the basis of ongoing advocacy to create systemic change for people with intellectual disability. IHC members and supporters will be invited to help those advocacy efforts by networking and amplifying the calls for policy change.

For families like Sasanka’s, these statistics are not abstract. They represent years of persistence, barriers and resilience.

Behind every indicator in the research is a person with strengths, ambitions and rights.

You can find the report on IHC’s website at: [www.ihc.org.nz/fromd2d](http://www.ihc.org.nz/fromd2d)



# Beauty & Bloom – world famous in Aotearoa

## IDEA SERVICES

**There was both excitement and some nerves in North Canterbury in January when TVNZ's Seven Sharp crew arrived to film the team behind Beauty & Bloom.**

**Beauty & Bloom is a range of handcrafted home and beauty products created by people supported by IDEA Services. Founded in 2021, the initiative was developed with the backing of the IHC North Canterbury Branch Committee and the expertise of local cosmetic chemist, Stacey Fraser.**

What began as a creative idea has since grown into a meaningful social enterprise – and the Seven Sharp visit was a chance to showcase the people and the products of Beauty & Bloom.

Filming began early on the day. The crew went to the homes of team members – many of whom live together – to capture them getting ready for work and their journey to the lab.

“Some people were understandably nervous,” says Service Manager Renee Davis. “But as the day went on, everyone settled in and became much more relaxed.”

At times the experience was a look into the weird and wonderful ways of the television industry. Alicia Cockroft was filmed carefully packing her lunchbox, placing it into her bag and heading out of the door. But she had to do it three times until the crew were satisfied that they had got the perfect take. Still, Alicia kept her cool and followed instructions calmly and confidently, even when nerves crept in.

Cam Pearce was filmed in his bedroom, which – he proudly confirms – was tidy. He had made

his bed and was fully prepared for the arrival of the camera crew.

The day's filming then moved from home to the lab, capturing the manufacturing process and highlighting the professionalism and pride behind every product.

Cam's role was to carefully wipe down the bottles of pillow spray after they were filled then passing them along the production line to Alicia, who added the labels.

Team members Emma Twohill and Jared De Joux, who are both passionate about sharing Beauty & Bloom's story, were also part of the Seven Sharp shoot.

Jared played an integral part in instigating the Seven Sharp appearance. After Beauty & Bloom's official launch in November 2025, Jared set a clear goal.

“I wrote down that our next step was promoting Beauty & Bloom and getting on Seven Sharp,” he says. “We need people to know about Beauty & Bloom and start buying the products. They're amazing products and they're all homemade.”

Jared and Emma, a couple who have been together for nine years, enjoy working side by side. “Work keeps us focused,” Jared says.

Emma says she took the filming day all in her stride. “I just got out there and did it,” she laughs. Jared nods: “She handled it like a champ.”

They both agree it feels amazing to have brought Beauty & Bloom to screens across Aotearoa.

“Thanks to Renee – the best manager in the world!” exclaims Jared. “We couldn't do it without her.”

Renee is quick to share the credit. “The hard work has been shared equally,” she says firmly.

The busy filming day ended with heartfelt thanks to the Seven Sharp crew members, who each received gifts of Beauty & Bloom products.

The team celebrated their Seven Sharp appearance with a viewing party alongside their friends and whānau when the episode aired on 12 February.

Before the item had even finished airing, Beauty & Bloom had received 88 orders. By the following day the orders numbered over 250 along with numerous messages of support and encouragement.

And now it's all hands on deck as the team works to fulfil the nationwide interest in their products.

“We've all worked extremely hard to get Beauty & Bloom to where it is today,” says Renee. “Thanks to Seven Sharp. A special thanks to Stacey Fraser – this wouldn't have been possible without her knowledge – or without the continued backing of the IHC North Canterbury Association.”

You can watch the episode at: [www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/seven-sharp](http://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/seven-sharp)

**Opposite page (from left clockwise): Amanda, Cam, Alicia, Jared, Becca and Emma.**



# Enriching the language of intellectual disability

By Waata Houia

IHC

**Teacher and author Keri Opai recently met with the Chief Executive's Advisory Group to discuss whaikaha ā-hinengaro – a new Māori term for intellectual disability.**

Because Māori do not think about people in terms of disability, there were no te reo words for it. Keri Opai has created Te Reo Hāpai, a glossary of te reo terms for the mental health, addiction and disability sectors.

Te Reo Hāpai means the language of enrichment and is about creating new te reo words for concepts used today. Keri said he wanted to create “cool language so people don't feel stink.” He wants to make words about disability better for us and give us words for here in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is because “he mana tō te kupu – words have great power.”

Keri and I have a lot in common. We are related through whakapapa (family history) from Ngāti Porou. We are both from Reporua marae in Ruatōria. He knows my uncles who are kaumātua there. We both learned in the same way, doing our noho (to sit), practicing whaikōrero (formal speech) and cleaning toilets. We work in the marae at the grass roots first. I speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves, and Keri speaks up for people too.

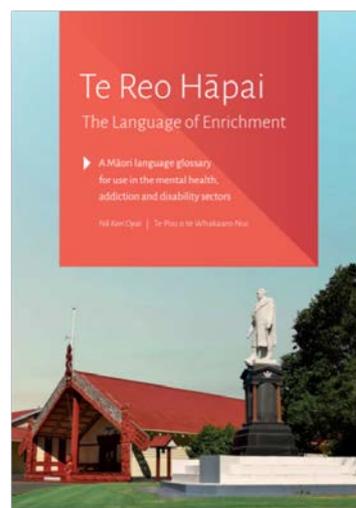
At the meeting, Keri shook everyone's hand, starting with me. He is humble, honest and easy to talk to. He laughed a lot when someone said “labels are for jam jars”, and he talked about spending time with his friends with intellectual disability at school. Then he wrote whaikaha ā-hinengaro on the whiteboard. It means ‘to be otherly abled’ and ‘the mind, mental ability, or what you are thinking about’. The ā is important because there is so much more to a person than intellectual disability. Basically, it means “you might have an intellectual disability, but you're more than that,” Keri said.

Keri wanted to know what the Advisory Group thought of the term. Everyone loved it. One member, Alex Rowe, asked, “can we put that on the front of our folders and on our website?” Chairperson David Corner said he would practise the words over the Christmas break. For me, I like that term. I am going to use it when I do my whaikōrero and kapa haka. It is good for Māori. It is a big step forward for people with disabilities because we have not had our own name until now.

Later, Keri said “I had a great time with you all and it was my privilege to visit. Thank you for all your manaakitanga.” You too Keri, we had a great time with you too.

See the whole glossary at <https://www.tereohapai.nz/> and order a free booklet at <https://www.tepou.co.nz/resources/te-reo-hapai-the-language-of-enrichment-glossary>

**Waata Houia is a member of the Chief Executive's Advisory Group at IHC and of Te Ao Mārama Aotearoa (TAMA), which advocates for Māori with disabilities.**



**Pictured: Keri Opai with IHC's Chief Executive Advisory Group L-R IHC Director of Advocacy Tania Thomas, IHC Inclusion Advisor, Nicolina Newcombe, Neville Pugh, Waata Houia, Diane Pelvin, Hamish Taverner, Keri Opai, David Corner, Alexandra Flutey Rowe, Craig Bellis.**

# Busy hotels opening doors for Choices internships

## Choices

### Georgie Loft and Chris Goode are relishing new roles in Christchurch hotels.

Twenty-three-year-old Chris is about to begin an internship in the busy kitchen of Sudima Christchurch City where he'll be working as a kitchen assistant. Thirty-one-year-old Georgie finished her internship at Sudima Christchurch Airport last year only to be immediately offered a job as a room attendant.

Georgie and Chris are both participants in the Open Doors Internship Programme, a partnership between Hind Management Group, Choices NZ and the Recreate NZ charitable trust. The programme provides a structured six-week internship with Sudima Hotels for people with disabilities.

For the interns it's a chance to bring their existing skills to a real hospitality environment and gain hands-on experience. It's also an opportunity to build transferable skills and explore career pathways that interest them.

"Open Doors internships bring fresh perspectives, and genuine heart into our hotels," says Christine Hurring, Director of People and Culture for Hind Management/Sudima Hotels. "You uncover people who are committed, capable and deeply proud of the work they do. This makes us a stronger, diverse and more resilient business."

The kaupapa behind Open Doors is one of inclusivity. "We want (Open Doors) to simply be part of how we do business," says Christine. "Not something special or separate."

The programme means the interns get to go through the full recruitment and employment process.

The many and varied working parts that make up a hotel, from customer service to front desk, hotel maintenance, food and beverage, administration, housekeeping and

more, make it an ideal environment for the programme.

Georgie's journey began with a six-week internship as part of the housekeeping team. Her enthusiasm, reliability and genuine willingness to help were quickly noticed. Before long, it was clear Georgie wasn't just fitting in – she was making the team better.

"Our teams become more patient, more supportive and more connected," says Christine. "You see empathy and kindness show up in everyday moments and that's exactly the kind of workplace we want."

Georgie's workday starts early – at 7:30am – when she prepares hotel rooms for the housekeeping team so they can work faster and more efficiently. She gets into the rooms first, strips the beds, puts on pillowcases and collects all the used towels and laundry. By the time the rest of the housekeeping arrives, everything is ready to go.

"The other room attendants absolutely love it when they go into the room and the beds are already stripped for them," says Georgie. "I'm really fast too."

That appreciation runs deep. At Christmas, Georgie's co-workers even gifted her a watch – after quietly checking what her favourite colour was.

Like Georgie, Chris' workday will also start early. He'll be required in the busy kitchen of the inner-city Sudima Christchurch City hotel at 8am. A self-described 'foodie' Chris is looking forward to being in his element.

Kitchen work isn't new to Chris. He's previously worked at Burwood Hospital through the former Project Search programme and at Hell Pizza where he impressed staff with his memory, and where he'd been so good at making pizza dough, they asked him back for their busiest shifts.

Chris' new workplace is a high-producing kitchen that prepares food from nine different menus, but this doesn't faze Chris. "I like food preparation and being able to help," he says.

The kitchen staff are reportedly excited to have Chris because of his extensive experience.

For Sudima Hotels, the Open Doors programme is just the beginning.

"The future is about continuing to remove barriers, create meaningful opportunities and making sure our hotels reflect the community they serve," says Christine.

For Georgie and Chris, when the early alarm goes off it's a reminder that they both have somewhere they need to be where they're essential and valued parts of a team.

**Pictured: Georgie Loft at work.**





# I learned how to say hello and thank you in Korean

IHC

Lachlan Oakes and Joel Forman are dance teachers with Ōtautahi-based inclusive dance company *Jolt Dance*. In November last year they travelled to Korea for a residency with Korean inclusive dance company '*Light Sound Friends*'. Here is their travel diary.

## Day 1 – Getting there

We got to Christchurch airport to meet Lyn Cotton (*Jolt* Artistic Director) and Rachel Tully (*Jolt* General Manager) who were travelling with us. The flight took 20 hours from start to finish including waiting around. We flew to Seoul via China. We had a long wait in China, and it was cold.

We arrived in Seoul in the early afternoon, we felt pretty chill. It was a nice day and mild. The first thing we did was get to our accommodation by taxi; we dropped our bags there and got settled in. We were in the same room. We actually went out and tried to find something to have for dinner.

**Lachlan:** First thing I ate was a bibimbap. It was similar to

dumplings – a traditional South Korean dish. I thought it was alright, a little bit weird. I didn't want another one.

**Joel:** I ate fish eggs, it was weird. I didn't want to have it again, but I did try it.

**Lachlan:** Seoul was amazing, really busy. It felt like the biggest city in the world. Incredible in terms of its size.

**Joel:** There were lots of things on, like the markets. The bullet train was very busy, in and out. In the hotel the beds were different. The TV was in the bedroom. The showers were very different as well. We had to hold the showerhead with one hand and wash ourselves with the other hand. It was quite an odd way. We had to stand by the sink side-on and use the showerhead to wash our hair. It was tricky but we got used to it.

## Day 2 – Residency

We started teaching the very next day. We taught *Jolt* activities. We also got the dancers used to the '*Jolt* way' of dancing – the way we teach and the way we dance. It's different from what they do because they wear traditional costumes when they perform. They dance with fans. We got to learn from them too. We learnt one section of the fan dance, and we got to see them perform a couple of times.

**Lachlan:** I thought it was quite spectacular.

**Joel:** We taught them about musicality, and we showed them how we dance as individuals.

The most important thing we taught them was about *Jolt's* vision – empowering the voices of dancers with intellectual disabilities.

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### Day 3

We went to the Jogyesa Temple. There were different shapes and pathways. People can go there to pray as well as rest on a cushion. We got a cushion and sat down and relaxed for a wee bit. You can also go and light a candle and look at the Buddhas. They were amazing.

Later, while we were waiting at the subway, an announcing tune came on and we did a little dance to it.

We also spent our per diems.

**Lachlan:** I bought Rachel an ice cream.

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### Days 4,5 and 6

We spent five days with *Light Sound Friends*. We did our *Creative Spirit Workshops* teaching them how to build on their strengths as dancers. We taught them to dance more using the whole space. How to stand up and be confident. We learnt to sign and use movement for them as they didn't speak English and we didn't speak Korean.

Over the last few days, we worked on our performance *The Showing* which was held on the Saturday.

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### Day 7 – The Showing

*The Showing* was a performance at the *Light Sound Friends* studio.

This year it was all about us being in a dance with them. We were dancing

together as a celebration at the end of our residency. The audience was mostly family members, and Directors Choi and Rika from *Light Sound Friends* were also there. There were a couple of family members that came up and said 'well done' in Korean.

At the end of the celebration, we felt pretty stoked. We went out to dinner with the family of one of the dancers, Eunsuung (but he likes to be called Sonny).

**Lachlan:** We went to an Italian pizza place and I had a really nice Margherita pizza and some pasta as well. I was hungry from all the hard work.

**Joel:** I had pizza, chips and a beer.

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### Day 8 – Exploring Seoul

The next day after *The Showing*, we were tourists. We went exploring in Insadong – a boutique hub with lots of different shops. We bought some souvenirs.

**Lachlan:** I bought a bag for Mum.

**Joel:** I bought a hat and t-shirt for me and a South Korean hat for my brother Jacob.

**Lachlan:** We also went to the Gyeongbokgung Palace and explored around there. I bought myself a pen.

**Joel:** I liked the palace and some people were praying, I loved that. I loved the culture.

We then took a train to Busan.

**Lachlan:** Getting to the train station was stressful. I ended up spilling my drink bottle and I had to get my suitcase out and dropped it on my toe. I was very frazzled. We almost missed our train. The train was fast. We wanted lunch on the train but there was no food, so we ate from the vending machine.

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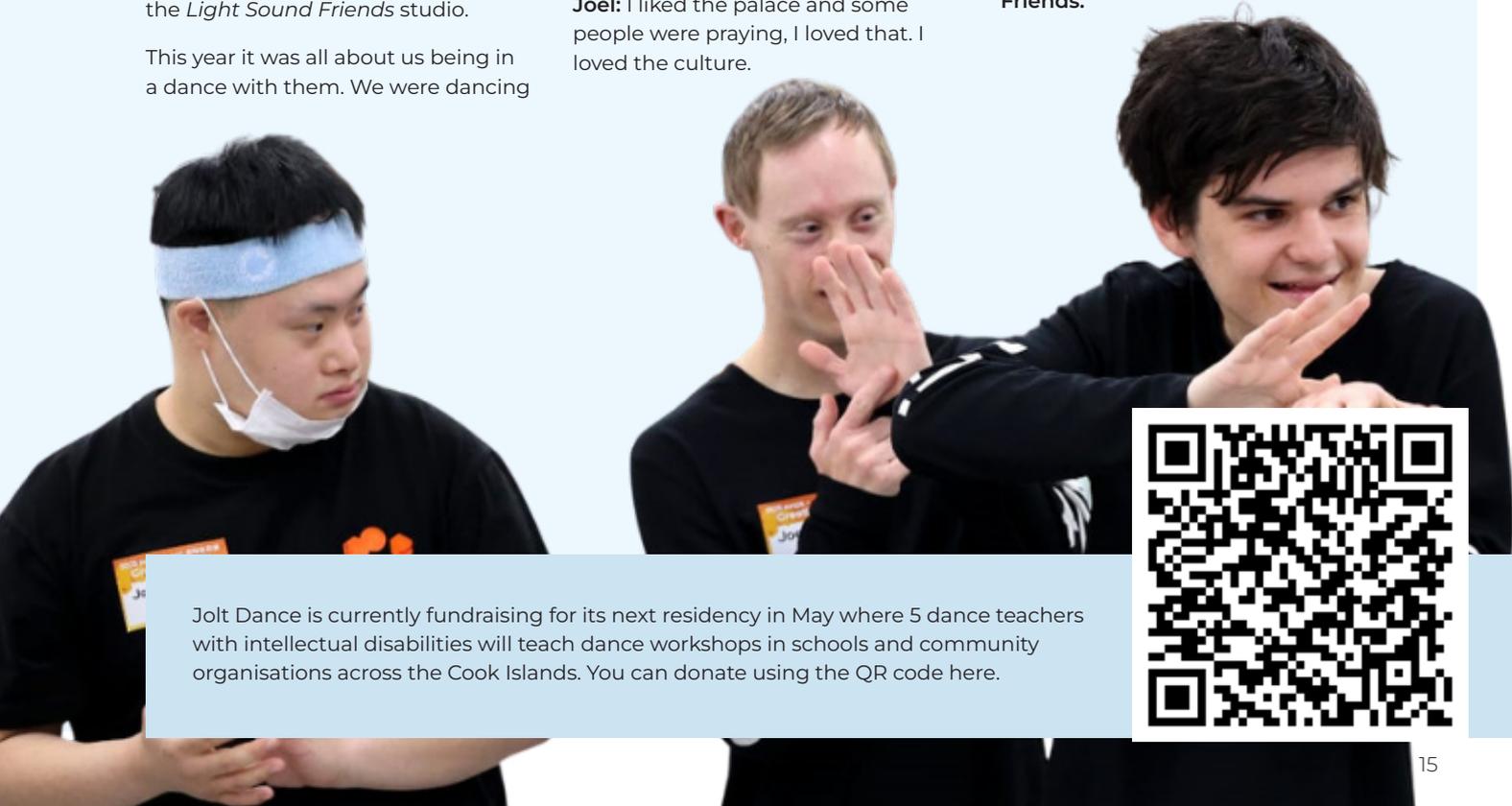
### Our favourite things

**Lachlan:** My favourite part of the whole experience was hanging out and feeling at home in the studio with all the dancers. They were all amazing people to work alongside. All our Korean friends' personalities and musicality was next level. The language barrier wasn't too bad – I learned how to say hello and thank you in Korean.

**Joel:** I loved dancing with *Light Sound Friends* and learning the culture and encouraging them to press themselves. I liked going out to buy lunch and then walking back to the studio to start teaching. I loved the culture and how different it was.

**Opposite page: Joel (left) and Lachlan (rear center) working with Light Sound Friends dancers.**

**Below: Joel (centre) and Lachlan (right) demonstrating the 'Jolt way' to Jonghyeon from Light Sound Friends.**



Jolt Dance is currently fundraising for its next residency in May where 5 dance teachers with intellectual disabilities will teach dance workshops in schools and community organisations across the Cook Islands. You can donate using the QR code here.



# My brilliant career

By Noeleen Rawiri



IDEA SERVICES

**West Auckland Service Manager and Te Anga Paua Northern Area Representative Mary Bradfield (Ngāpuhi) said haere rā to colleagues and people we support at an emotional farewell in early February. Here she reflects on her 30-year relationship with IHC.**

Mary Bradfield's career with IHC began on a long weekend – Auckland Anniversary Weekend in 1995.

"It was a beautiful day," she smiles. "I met five really cool ladies and I had a great support worker orientating me. We went out to the beach for a BBQ."

That beach day was to evolve into a long, vocational career dedicated to improving the lives of people with intellectual disability. But Mary insists her time with the organisation has vastly improved her life also.

It was during time spent working in the Waikato that she began to understand what she calls 'the deeper layers of my work' and particularly the Māori aspects of care and connection.

There was a morning when she noticed one of the men who was always cheerful – always smiling from the back seat of the van – was quiet.

"His face held a heaviness I had never seen before," says Mary.

When she asked if he was okay he whispered, "No. Been sad." His grandmother had passed away, and he'd missed the funeral. No one had told him.

"I pulled over, stepped out, opened the door and sat with him. "My heart broke. Information – something so simple, so vital – had been lost."

Mary learned of others whose birthdays, whakapapa and

connections had slipped through the cracks during institutional transitions.

"These gaps weren't just administrative oversights – they were blows to a person's identity, their sense of belonging," says Mary.

From that moment, she decided to make information preservation a personal mission.

As Mary moved into advisory roles, she found herself surrounded by others who felt the determination to honour cultural identity and strengthen connections as strongly as she did.

Their work grew from local to regional to national, and with it developed the



“Kua tawhiti ke to haerenga mai, kia kore e haere tonu. He nui rawa o mahi, kia kore e mahi tonu

You have come too far not to go further, you have done too much, to not do more”

- Ta Himi Henare

wider understanding of how crucial the smallest details can be.

Mary has been a Northern Representative for Te Anga Pāua o Aotearoa, IDEA Services’ Māori advisory group, since the group’s inception in 2014. Te Anga Pāua o Aotearoa aims to improve cultural practice and promote ways for staff to build their confidence and understanding of te ao Māori, ultimately benefiting the people we support.

Further responsibilities for Mary came in the form of her supporting iwi registration in her area. “Not because others couldn’t,” she insists, “but because I wanted whānau to feel comfortable, understood and respected during deeply personal conversations.”

There have been challenges – times when she has witnessed injustice and felt compelled to fight for the people she supports. But according to Mary,

“Those challenges only strengthened my resolve.”

Other challenges were of a more personal nature. When Mary stepped into kapa haka leadership, she wasn’t fluent in te reo Māori, so pushed herself to learn.

“I wanted to give back to the people who showed up with such pride and enthusiasm.”

Looking back on her long career, Mary’s greatest pride lies in watching the people she has supported stepping into leadership roles themselves. The Northern Region’s higher learners’ kapa haka group is one example. The higher learners are a group of people with intellectual disability who are able to articulate and pronounce te reo Māori. The group has been acting in an advisory capacity, going into local kapa haka groups in the Northern Region and supporting tutors to connect and nurture kiritaki (people we support).

“It’s a pathway to leadership for them and benefits community,” says Mary.

As Mary looks toward the future, goals include continuing to strengthen her reo and helping her husband pursue the dream of building a marae. And despite stepping away from her day-to-day role at IDEA Services, she knows one thing for certain: connections endure. They always will.

Luckily for IHC, Mary will continue to share her dedication on IHC Media as a presenter on Tu meke reo time, Tuesdays at 11am. You can register at: [www.ihcmedia.org.nz](http://www.ihcmedia.org.nz)

“ I wanted to give back to the people... ”

Above: Mary chatting with friend Levi Pikaahu about what is next.



# Strong Voices Survey 2026

Tell us your thoughts on IHC's Strong Voices magazine. Fill in the enclosed survey and send it back freepost or fill it in online at

[www.ihc.org.nz/svsurvey](http://www.ihc.org.nz/svsurvey)

or scan this QR code



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# My Voice

– Mark Campbell  
IHC Board Chair

My Voice is where we get to know some of the people in our community.

Mark Campbell has recently taken over as IHC Board Chair.

Incoming IHC Board Chair Mark Campbell, has been on the IHC Board for almost four years and has worked in the disability sector for twenty-five years. He has also worked as a trustee and a director in governance positions in the public and private sector. Mark lives in Auckland with his wife Jean and they have three adult children, including 27-year-old Harriet who has Rett Syndrome.

## Where do you whakapapa to? Where did you grow up?

I was born and bred in Palmerston North. I went to Palmerston North Boys' High School and then to Massey University to do a business degree.

## What's your ideal Saturday?

My daughter Harriet wakes early, so I usually have a one-on-one breakfast with her and my wife Jean gets to go and have coffee. We have breakfast, listen to some music and have a bit of banter. Then, because I'm a reasonably typical dad, I like to go to Bunnings and I'll usually buy something I don't need. The real reason I go there is to get a sausage with onions and sauce in white bread. There's always a different charity raising funds and I like to meet the different characters who turn up.

Harriet has a therapy dog called Woody and he's a big character in our house, so later maybe we'll head to the park or the beach depending on the weather and who's home. And then dinner – perhaps a BBQ or fish and chips for a treat.

## What's one of the most interesting things that has happened to you in your life?

I was very fortunate to live and work in Asia and as part of my work I had the chance to visit places I never would have gone to otherwise. Places like Laos, Myanmar and Mongolia. I was very lucky to

experience the cultures, history and diversity of Asia. It's always struck me as amazing. Having my family with me in Singapore meant we were able to provide our children with a richer cultural experience. They had friends from all over the world, and it's made them good global citizens. I've treasured that for them.

## What does New Zealand need to do better for people with intellectual disabilities?

We need to embrace intellectual disability as something every day and normal. Supporting someone with an intellectual disability is a community response not an individual one. It's good for everyone when our communities engage with intellectual disability. The impact is broad and long lasting.

## What do you hope to achieve as IHC Board Chair?

IHC has 76 years of rich history and heritage. I want to support our strategy and get the message out that we are here to support the good health, housing and wellbeing of people with intellectual disability. The reason we exist is to support people with intellectual disability and we need a purposeful approach – not a commercial one. But we do need to protect our organisation and have the people and financial resources so we can be here for the long haul.

It's a marathon approach – to make good decisions in the short term that will see us fit and productive for the next 76 years.

## What are you most proud of?

I'm proud of my daughter Harriet. I have three amazing kids who all have their own ups and downs but they don't all face the daily mental and physical challenges she does.

Every day she wakes up smiling. Her life is very difficult, but she still finds happiness in those moments that matter.

She's taught me patience and how to be resilient. It's a very emotional roller coaster to share her journey and she is such a critical and important part of the family. We (the family) are all better people because of her.



Entries opening

# IHC ART AWARDS 2026



The IHC Art Awards provide artists with an intellectual disability the opportunity to have their talent recognised, their voices heard and to sell their work.

Entries open at **9am**  
**on Friday 1 May 2026**  
and close at **5pm** on  
**Sunday 31 May 2026**



For more information email [ihc.events@ihc.org.nz](mailto:ihc.events@ihc.org.nz)  
or visit: [www.ihc.org.nz/artawards](http://www.ihc.org.nz/artawards)