



# IMPACT STORIES

2015

*Six stories of transformational change*

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# Introduction

In 2014, Interactionz commissioned Point Research to look at organisational impact and critical success factors.

The objectives of this project were to:

- Articulate the impacts of bringing about long-term, positive and sustainable change in the lives of persons and communities with whom Interactionz work.
- Work alongside Interactionz to develop a theory of change
- Identify critical success factors, that is, what particular practices are making the most difference, and what areas can be focussed on to enable Interactionz to be even more effective.

## Background

Hamilton-based Interactionz is a community benefit organisation that aims to bring about long-term, sustainable change in the lives of people and communities.

### HISTORY

Interactionz was established in the mid-1960s as the Waikato branch of the Disabled Citizens' Society Incorporated. In 1970 the organisation established a sheltered workshop in Hamilton East, where members undertook contract work for local businesses. In 1976 an additional training centre was established in Te Rapa, on the northern outskirts of Hamilton, where people gained woodwork and metal work skills with the aim of getting jobs in the community. The organisation changed its name to Hamilton Sheltered Workshops and Training Centre Incorporated in 1985 in conjunction with the opening of its purpose-built workshop premises in Sunshine Ave, Te Rapa.

The two Te Rapa workshops merged in 2000, alongside another name change, this time to Lifestyle 2000. In 2003 contract work stopped and the transition to providing vocational services began. In 2005 the philosophical shift towards inclusive, person-driven practice began, and Lifestyle 2000 became a charitable trust called Lifestyle Trust. The organisation has been developing and refining the way it supports people ever since.

In 2007 the industrial Sunshine Avenue site was sold, signalling the end of the provision of vocational services. Three community centres designed to bring the organisation and its people closer to the local community were established in Hamilton's suburbs.

In June 2009 the trading name Interactionz was adopted to better reflect the way the organisation is 'of service' to persons with disabilities and of the importance they place on person-driven relationships.

## SERVICES

Interactionz now offer a variety of services to persons with disabilities, their significant others, individuals, community groups and businesses through both Interactionz, and their social enterprise Lifestyle Transitionz. These services include:

- **Facilitated life planning**, where independent facilitators use a set of tools and techniques to assist people, regardless of ability, to explore and express their aspirations and goals for a good life.
- **Circles of support**, which is a facilitated process to enable people to identify, utilise and increase natural supports and reduce their reliance on paid supports.
- **One-on-one community facilitation** to enable people to do everyday things in everyday places, with everyday people at everyday times. Community facilitators, who are specialists in providing facilitation for persons with disabilities, work in a variety of community settings including a person's home or neighbourhood, and the community hubs. The facilitators work within the scope of person driven practice, which integrates the principles of Enabling Good Lives.<sup>1</sup>
- Two **community hubs** provide day services (funded by Ministry of Health) and community participation (funded by Ministry of Social Development). Persons with disabilities can choose to come to the community hubs to connect with their peers and participate in volunteer-supported activities in the hub or in the community.
- **Volunteer coordination and support**. Most volunteers work with individuals to achieve an aspiration or with groups doing supported activities in a wide range of settings.
- **Student Placement** for students seeking work experience.

## About this project

This is a strengths-based project designed to articulate the challenges and successes inherent in transformational change, in particular a fundamental philosophical and organisational shift in the way Interactionz has provided services over the last decade, and more recently, a commitment to the principles and practices of Enabling Good Lives.

This is not an evaluation.

## METHOD

In total, 18 people were interviewed for this project. All but two of the interviews were conducted in person.

An iterative approach was used for story identification. Following the first round of interviews with representatives of the Interactionz Board, staff and volunteers, we identified a number of individuals and

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<sup>1</sup> *Enabling Good Lives* is a partnership between government agencies and the disability sector aimed at long term transformation of how disabled people and families are supported to live everyday lives. See <http://www.odi.govt.nz/what-we-do/improving-disability-supports/enabling-good-lives/> for more information

their families who were asked to participate in an impact story. Their participation was facilitated by Interactionz.

All participants in these stories have had the opportunity to read, check, and change their stories if necessary. They were also given the option to not allow use of their story. Some participants have chosen to change their name.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Point Research would like to acknowledge the support and active participation of Interactionz Board and staff.

Special thanks to our interviewees, their families and support people.

## Impact story: Transformational Change

### Impact at a glance

Interactionz has undergone a number of radical changes aimed at long term transformation of how persons with disabilities and their families are supported to live everyday lives.

The change has taken some time; Interactionz has undergone two restructures and halved the numbers of staff from 30 to 13.

As a result of the change and restructuring, there is now more emphasis on the 'frontline', rather than administration. New staff are more likely to be university educated or have community sector experience, and are more likely to share the organisation's vision and values.

Whilst it has been tough, the values or mana enhancing principles of self-determination, relationships, facilitation and independence and inclusiveness that Interactionz has been striving towards now permeate through the organisation.

### Interactionz Board and Staff

Organisational change can be difficult to manage. Transformative change which requires a significant shift in attitudes, ways of working, vision, priorities for staff, management, clients and their families, even more so.

Change, adaptation and renewal are central to the Interactionz story. What was originally the Waikato branch of the Disabled Citizen's Society has now transitioned into an organisation driven by a vision of "persons leading lives that have meaning for them with infinite possibilities for active citizenship," which is informed by the belief that people with disabilities have power and control over their own lives, along with their families.

This belief, which Interactionz calls "person-driven practice", has helped to inform the government's Enabling Good Lives approach, which is aimed at long term transformation of how persons with disabilities and families are supported to live everyday lives. The mana-enhancing principles behind both these approaches, which include self-determination, relationships, facilitation and independence, influence not only how Interactionz works with the people they serve, but also how the organisation works as a whole.

Implementing these principles and the vision behind person-driven practice, and more recently, Enabling Good Lives has taken some time.

"We have transitioned from providing the segregated environment of sheltered workshops, where we did things to people and for people, to putting the person in the driving seat," says Quality Practice Leader Janelle Fisher.

Interactionz has transformed from a provider of disability support services to an agency that focuses on

the facilitation of goals and good life planning for people with disabilities, as well as offering them opportunities for participation in volunteer-supported activities and engaging them in 'everyday' relationships with 'everyday' people.

"The changes have come from our desire to do the right thing," explains Chief Executive Lynda Millington. "We were trying to undo what we believed were some wrongs and we had the foresight to see that change was inevitable. We knew that changes in how we perceive people with disabilities and their roles in our community were coming, so we thought why don't we just get on and do it anyway."

Funding pressure also necessitated a need to do things differently. The need to remain financially viable after the closure of the vocational services workshops meant that Interactionz had to carefully examine their core vision and values.

"Our values were about the only thing we could afford to keep", explains Board member Tegan Morris. "It really pushed us to think "okay, what can we do with these limited resources, how creative can we be?".

The transition from an organisation which did things 'to' and 'for' people with disabilities to one which assists people with disabilities to make their own decisions about how they want their life to look was not an easy process. Some staff found the changes difficult to accept and chose not to reapply for their jobs during the restructuring processes.

"Change and re-education can be quite difficult", explains a staff member who was around during the changes. "Some people just found it so difficult to change. They left because they couldn't see where we were going."

The changes required remaining staff to bring intentionality to their practice. They had to be prepared to learn, and unlearn, and to grow and change in their own philosophies and practices.

"We needed to be open to change" explains Community Facilitator Sarda Devi. "It takes courage to live your values and to keep growing."

At times, it was a tricky juggling act for the Interactionz Board and leadership team to balance the needs of staff with the desire to keep moving towards their vision of empowering people with disabilities to live the life they want. The changes were neither small nor unsubstantial. During two restructures, the organisation halved the numbers of staff from 30 to 13.

Whilst incredibly disruptive at the time, the long term impact of the staff changes appears to have been positive. First, roles and responsibilities shifted, so there was more emphasis in the 'frontline' of practice than in administrative functions. Teams became more self-managing, and roles opened and became wider, rather than more defined.

"We have done away with the labels," explains Sarda. "Of course we understand what our roles are and what we have to do but we say 'we are with the people for the people, alongside them'."

As Interactionz began their philosophical shift towards person-driven practice and the principles of Enabling Good Lives, they began to attract staff who shared the same vision and principles.

“We were one of the first organisations to change from ‘support workers’ to ‘facilitators’,” says Janelle. “Just in that one change of language we were suddenly getting applications from a totally different calibre of person, we were getting people who were university-educated or who had lots of experience in the community sector.”

As a result, Interactionz now has a number of qualified staff who are committed to the vision and principles of practice. Operations Leader Jenny Calley notes: “We are building a team that is highly qualified, enthusiastic and focussed on learning and development. They have passion, they've got love and drive for what they do and that makes a total difference.”

“We have fantastic staff”, says Board chair Elaine Bliss. “We have a real appreciation for the necessity to keep developing our staff and investing in staff and for people to understand what we are doing and why we are doing it.”

A commitment to ongoing quality practice and constant reflection around how Interactionz’ practice aligns with their vision means the transition is a work in progress.

“We’re not there yet, because just when we think we have the end point in sight, what a good life looks like for people, it just takes a step further all of the time”, says Janelle.

For Tegan, having the values of person-driven practice and Enabling Good Lives permeate across all levels of the organisation is what defines their practice.

“You can’t truly have the philosophies of personalisation and genuineness and trust and care truly in your organisation unless you apply them across the organisation. It’s about being human and seeing others as human and treating people as valuable individuals rather than numbers or boxes to tick” she says.

Tegan thinks that whilst transformational change hasn’t been easy, it’s been worth it.

“As tough as it’s been and as much jeopardy as we could have potentially been in over the time I just keep thinking ultimately how much good has come out of it.”



## Impact Story: Governance and Leadership

### Impact at a glance

Tegan Morris was just 20 years old when she joined the Board of Interactionz.

Tegan, who has a rare form of Muscular Dystrophy, has impacted the board in terms of both her lived experience and her dedication to youth development and social justice

Joining the board formed a key part of Tegan's transition to university and participation in the disability community in Hamilton

Tegan has found the impact of steering Interactionz through a period of significant organisational change both personally and professionally inspiring.

Board Chair Elaine Bliss believes that high calibre board members like Tegan have helped the board maintain integrity in a rapidly changing environment.

### Tegan Morris

Disability advocate Tegan Morris joined the Interactionz Board whilst she was studying for a Social Sciences degree at Waikato University. At first, it was a tough gig for a 20 year old uni student.

"I really felt like a fish out of water" Tegan says. "There was a very limited way in which I felt like I was a credible contributor."

For Interactionz, however, there was never any question around Tegan's involvement.

"We recruited Tegan on to the Board because she came with lived experience and some knowledge around youth and disability," explains Chief Executive Lynda Millington. "When she first started with the Board she was shy, and a bit timid, but over time she has become a valuable contributing member to our Board, particularly around the areas of youth and social justice."

The support from Interactionz and the other members of the Board gave Tegan the confidence to stick with it.

"Everyone was so great about encouraging and validating my participation and reassuring me that I was there for a reason and they valued my contribution."

Tegan moved to Hamilton from the Bay of Plenty to study and found that her initial involvement with Interactionz formed a key part of her transition to university and participation in the disability community in Hamilton. As someone who has coped with a rare form of muscular dystrophy since childhood, Tegan found herself in the interesting position of being both a 'client', and a member of the governance board. For Tegan, this dual perspective was critical to her understanding of the potential of the service.

“Over the time I've been involved with Interactionz it's really felt like a maturing process in terms of understanding that it's about our humanity and treating people as valuable individuals. The organisation has really grown and blossomed in terms of leading the changes around how disabled people in the community are engaged and brought into the centre of things.”

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*“Being part of a leading edge organisation is inspiring and motivating and stimulates me to want to develop my own knowledge and involvement further.”*

Tegan Morris

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As time has passed, Tegan's confidence in her abilities as a Board member has also grown.

“It has been really good in terms of opportunities for me to meet new people and develop connections and also work on my own skills.”

For Tegan, the impact of seeing Interactionz apply their models of community facilitation, participation and empowerment has been both personally and professionally inspiring.

“Being able to be part of an organisation that is really leading edge and has been for so long is really inspiring and motivating because it stimulates me to want to develop my own knowledge and involvement further and really try and place some of those thought strategies into my own work and presentations.”

“It is great to be involved with an organisation like Interactionz because it frequently reminds me of why I do what I do and how I see the world and brings me back to those basic things that I can sometimes get distracted from.”

Board Chair Elaine Bliss believes that high calibre board members like Tegan have helped the board maintain integrity in a rapidly changing environment.

“It's important to get people who have those skills but also share the vision, and who can also come at a problem that we are facing from a different perspective,” she says.

Tegan believes this shared vision is crucial to being an effective Board member.

“We are focussed on seeking the highest potential and the highest good for the people we are involved with,” she says. “We look at each person and each situation as potential rather than as a limitation and encourage the creation of networks and connections to limit the dangers of isolation and segregation.”

“It is encouraging to be part of an organisation that's always striving and trying to create positive change”

## Impact Story: Learning Organisation

### Impact at a glance

Sam has autism and limited verbal communication.

For Sam, staff changes during the transition were very unsettling. This manifested itself in physical behaviours.

Community Facilitator Shelley Blignaut believed that Sam's behaviour and experience at Interactionz could be improved if the focus moved from having consistent staff, to consistent activities and routines.

Both Interactionz staff and Sam's mum Lorraine have noticed that these changes have impacted Sam's behaviour. He is happier, now uses speech rather than behaviour to communicate, and has started 'joking around' with staff.

The impacts are wider than just Sam, with Interactionz now using the same consistent approach with other people they serve, with positive results.

### Sam and Shelley

Sam first joined Interactionz in 2013. Sam, his Mum Lorraine and sister Heidi had looked at a number of other organisations, none of which appealed to Sam.

"He couldn't get out those other organisations fast enough" explains Lorraine. "But when we went to the Interactionz Tattersfield Hub, he just walked in and that was it. He said 'come on Heidi, let's go', and they went off to have a look around. He couldn't wait to start."

Lorraine thinks Sam, who has autism and limited verbal communication, enjoyed the laidback attitude and the mutual respect and connection evident between the Interactionz staff and the people they serve.

As Interactionz began their second restructure, Lorraine began to notice the change impacting Sam and his behaviour. The loss of a number of staff in a reasonably short period of time combined with the recruitment of new staff who didn't know how to deal with Sam was very unsettling.

"Sam's behaviour issues came on big time because he never knew what was happening" explains Lorraine.

For Lorraine, these impacts may have been mitigated had some of the staff who worked with Sam simply read his file. As a Mum of three adult sons with autism, this is an experience Lorraine is familiar with.

"Despite everything being on file I always have to go into meetings and repeat myself. I've done that for the past 25 years, and it's like 'but hang on a minute, it's in front of you' and they say 'but we want to hear it from you' when the reality is that people don't have the time to sit down and read."

“When Interactionz went through all those changes a lot of the staff didn’t know Sam’s file, they hadn’t read it, so they were going into the deep end”.

Community Facilitator Shelley Blignaut, who joined the Interactionz team in 2014, took a close look at Sam’s file and concluded that the behaviour that staff found challenging was a result of a lack of routine and consistency. Sam had also moved into residential care in mid-2013, which was unsettling.

“There was nowhere at the time that Sam felt quite stable,” explains Lorraine. “It had all been turned upside down.”

Shelley’s experience with people with autism suggested that Sam’s behaviour less challenging for staff if his activities and interactions with staff were consistent and routine-based. She brainstormed solutions with Operations Leader Jenny Calley, who coached her through applying consistency with activities, rather than through staffing.

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*“Sam has less of what we would perceive to be behavioural issues. He is using speech rather than behaviour to communicate. We have seen his personality come out”*

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Shelley Blignaut

“Instead of having consistency around Sam being with one person or two people, we could make the activities consistent, instead of the people,” explains Shelley. “And we would be consistent in our approach, for example with his personal supports and the way we talk to him.”

As a learning environment, Interactionz was open to Shelley’s idea, but encouraged her to get buy in from other members of staff.

“I had to convince the team that we just need to try this and if it doesn't work we can change” says Shelley. She felt that person-driven practice for Sam needed to start with his needs, rather than his wishes.

Shelley also needed to convince Sam.

“If we asked Sam, he would choose to go to the library every single day, but he had already chosen his goals and aspirations and we needed to pursue those as well. So we would have to say things like ‘you committed to being a volunteer on a Monday and you have to do that, even though you want to go to the library. You can go on Wednesday, your normal library day’ - which he didn't like in the beginning.”

Soon, Shelley and the other staff began to notice the impact of the changes on Sam’s behaviour.

“He has less of what we would perceive to be behavioural issues and he is happier, joking around, less negative communication because he now uses his words. He is using speech rather than behaviour to communicate. We have seen his personality come out.”

Sam’s Mum Lorraine also noticed the changes.

“Once Shelley came on board, and people started to connect, they started to look at what was actually required and people started to listen. We all started to understand Sam’s behaviour and started to really look at what was happening around him.”

The way that Interactionz staff work with Sam has also impacted on other areas of their service.

“It seems that when a new person comes in, there is less fumbling about,” says Shelley “I felt that there was a lot of fumbling because we didn't know what was going on. But now there is so much consistency to pass on.”

Lorraine believes that Sam is in a good place now.

“Now we’ve sorted everything out he is just blossoming,” she says.

## Impact Story: Sector Leadership

### Impact at a glance

Since 2013, the Te Awamutu Residential Trust has been supported and mentored by Interactionz on its journey towards Enabling Good Lives.

Aligning with the principles and philosophy of Enabling Good Lives has required a radical shift from the Te Awamutu Residential Trust in terms of their vision, principles, structure, policies and ways of working.

The support of Interactionz has been crucial in helping the Trust understand how to navigate the necessary changes and understand what they need to do in order to achieve their vision of communities where people are empowered.

Over time, the support from Interactionz has moved from mentoring and encouragement to practical support such as help with developing processes and policies, staff training and recruitment, and PATH facilitation.

The Te Awamutu Residential Trust are now starting to see the impact of the changes on the people they support, who are becoming more self-determined, are building strong community and natural supports and have greater access to opportunities for learning, employment, housing, family and social participation.

### Te Awamutu Residential Trust

“Communities where people are empowered” is the vision of the Te Awamutu Residential Trust, a residential and whole-of-life support service for people with an intellectual disability. Founded in 1989, the Trust currently supports 42 people and employs around 60 staff.

In 2013 the Trust began its journey towards aligning itself with Enabling Good Lives, a partnership between the disability sector and government agencies aimed at long term transformation of how disabled people and families are supported to live everyday lives.

Interactionz have been supporting the Trust on their journey.

Trust Chief Executive Fern Ryan could see that change was both imminent and necessary.

“When I started at the Trust, the people we support couldn’t even have a relationship with somebody, they had no say about where they live,” she says. “People with disabilities want to have more say about who supports them, how that support looks, and how they spend their budget. As an organisation we needed to be responsive to how people live and are supported.”

Fern could see that aligning with the principles and philosophy of Enabling Good Lives would require a radical shift from the Trust in terms of the vision, principles, structure, policies and ways of working.

Changing the Trust so that it aligns with the principles of Enabling Good Lives has been a significant undertaking.

“We’ve changed our structure, we’ve changed our strategic direction, we’ve got new values, and we’ve got a new brand, a new name.”

Interactionz has walked alongside the Trust from the beginning of their change journey. Interactionz Chief Executive Lynda Millington provides leadership and governance through her position as Chair of the Te Awamutu Residential Trust board, and there is much sharing of resources, processes, policies and professional expertise.

The road hasn’t been an easy one.

“It’s a tough journey,” Fern says. “Changing the culture of an organisation takes a long time. We have gone through some incredibly tough times.”

It is, however, necessary.

“If you want to exist in the future and enable people to have a say in what they want in their lives then you need to be attractive to people who want to come and be supported by your organisation and you need to do what it is you say you are doing. Making sure that people are walking that talk is the biggest struggle.”

Fern believes the support of Interactionz has been crucial in helping the Trust understand how to navigate the necessary changes and understand what they need to do in order to achieve their vision of communities where people are empowered.

“It’s been a way that we’ve been able to get some insight from another organisation that’s going on a journey similar to ours. Although Interactionz are a lot further down the pathway than we are, our beliefs and our philosophies are similar,” Fern explains.

Eighteen months down the track, and Fern and her team are starting to see a shift in culture. The people they support are becoming more self-determined, are building strong community and natural supports and have greater access to opportunities for learning, employment, housing, family and social participation.

“The people that we support have more choices and more say. They’re coming to us and saying ‘this is what I want, and I want you to do something about it.’ And that’s good. We now support people who live with their partners. We are supporting someone to advertise externally to get a non-disabled flatmate.

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*“The people that we support have more choices and more say. They’re coming to us and saying ‘this is what I want, and I want you to do something about it.’ And that’s good.”*

Fern Ryan

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So those are some of the shifts we are looking at, and that's just the beginning of our story. While these are examples, we want that to be the norm in the future."

Over time, as the changes at the Trust have started to become embedded, the support from Interactionz has moved from mentoring and encouragement to practical support such as help with developing processes and policies, staff training and recruitment, and PATH facilitation. Both organisations are now looking at convening a conference to support others beginning this journey. For Fern, this is partially about paying it forward.

"Implementing cultural change is a tough thing to do. As a CEO, it's a really lonely place sometimes, so it's good you can have people there you can talk to, and be honest with, and they know where you are trying to go. The support we've had from Interactionz and their influence in reinforcing my thoughts and where we want to head and their encouragement has been really great."



## Impact Story: Person-Driven Practice

### Impact at a glance

Margaret, who is in her mid-40's, wanted to travel independently to and from her volunteer job at a food bank

Interactionz, as part of their commitment to person-driven practice, supported Margaret to learn how to catch two buses to her job, and two buses home.

Margaret continues to use her new skills to travel home from the food bank each week.

Learning to travel independently has opened a new world for Margaret. She attends exercise classes, computer classes, swimming, ten pin bowling, a local 'Knitter Natter' group and spends time with her friends at the Interactionz Dalmont hub.

Margaret is proud of learning to travel independently, and says she is not ever scared.

### Margaret

All her life, Margaret has challenged expectations. She learned to read when she started school, and by age six could recognise more than 50 words. Two years ago, Margaret left home to live in a Community Living house with two flatmates. Neither of these achievements would have been considered possible when Margaret, who has Down Syndrome, was born in 1970.

When she was born, Margaret's parents were encouraged to put her in an institution, which they firmly refused to do. As a child, Margaret attended mainstream schools and was partially integrated into the mainstream schooling system. As a young adult Margaret worked at a sheltered workshop run by Lifestyle Trust (later to become Interactionz), where she worked for two to three days each week until the workshop transitioned into a vocational service in the early 2000's.

The transition from a sheltered workshop into a vocational service signalled a change in the way that Interactionz worked with the people they serve. It marked the beginning of a philosophical shift in the organisation which culminated in person-driven practice, where power and control rests with the person with a disability, and they set the pace and direction of what they want to do.

"Underpinning the whole concept of person-driven practice is the belief that everyone has gifts and strengths to share and that every person has the right to a good life", explains Independent Facilitator Laurel Stevens.

Margaret's goal was to travel independently to and from her weekly volunteer role at a local food bank. This involved learning how to catch two buses to get to the food bank, and another two buses to get home. At first, Margaret's parents were unsure whether this was a good idea. They knew that Margaret was capable of negotiating public transport on her own, but were concerned about factors outside of her control.

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*“When we ask the people we serve ‘if you could do anything, what would you want to be doing?’ a number of them say ‘wow – no one has ever asked me anything like that before.”*

Laurel Stevens – Independent Facilitator

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“I had my doubts,” explains Margaret’s Mum. “There is always a little bit of worry at the back of my mind about other people on the bus, sometimes it’s not very pleasant.”

Despite this, Margaret was determined to reach her goal of travelling independently. The process was relatively complex.

“Initially we assessed where Margaret was at with what she could do,” explains Interactionz Community Facilitator Carissa Mumby. “We had lots of discussions with mum and dad around her capabilities, and put together a number of strategies in place to ensure safety like an ICE [In Case of Emergency] card and a cell phone.”

Carissa shadowed Margaret on the bus for eight weeks. In this way, Margaret had the security of knowing someone was there, whilst experiencing travel on her own. Margaret continues to use her new skills to travel home from the food bank each week.

“If you can connect people with what they want then that gives them a reason to keep going,” says Laurel. “It gives them a reason to push through the hard stuff and to draw on those resources that they have.”

Learning to travel independently is something Margaret is very proud of. “I’m not ever scared,” she says. It is also something which has significantly changed the way she experiences her life and her role in the community.

“Before, doing an activity or seizing an opportunity to do something was largely dependent on whether or not there was going to be someone available to do that with Margaret and now that doesn't matter,” says Carissa.

These days, Margaret attends exercise classes, computer classes, swimming, ten pin bowling, a local ‘Knitter Natter’ group and spends time with her friends at the Interactionz Dalmont hub.

Having Margaret live independently from them is not an outcome Margaret’s parents could have anticipated during her early years. “It wasn’t done then” explains Margaret’s dad. “We were told that we may as well put her in an institution because she’d never be any good.”

“It’s taken a load off us” says Margaret’s mum. “Also she’s happy and quite settled.”

For Laurel, the process of implementing person-driven practice is inspiring.

“When we ask the people we serve ‘if you could do anything, what would you want to be doing?’, a number of them, particularly adults that have an intellectual disability, say things like ‘wow – no one has ever asked me anything like that before’, or ‘I didn’t realise I could do this.’ That’s a goose bump moment for me.”

## Impact Story: Volunteering

### Impact at a glance

La Mer has been a volunteer for the Interactionz Lifestyle Trust since 2013. She initially approached her volunteer role with some trepidation, unsure about what it might entail.

On average, La Mer volunteers for about 5-8 hours a week.

In addition to her extraordinary amount of volunteer hours, La Mer has had an impact on how Interactionz induct future volunteers into the principles of person-driven practice and encourage them to become part of a learning organisation.

La Mer says that since becoming a volunteer she has become more confident and less quick to judge people's abilities. She feels that she has found a vocation and has recently taken the first steps towards a career working with people with disabilities.

### La Mer

La Mer started volunteering for Interactionz when her son started school in mid-2013. A keen swimmer, she saw an ad in the paper for someone who needed a volunteer swimming partner.

At first, La Mer didn't realise the volunteer role was with people with disabilities. "About four years ago I had an opportunity to volunteer at Interactionz but I was too scared so I didn't", she explains "I was very naïve. I wasn't sure what it was going to entail".

It didn't take long, however, for La Mer to realise she found something she enjoyed, and was good at. On average, La Mer volunteers for about 5-8 hours a week.

"La Mer is our ideal volunteer" explains a Community Facilitator. "She is really good at communication, and she is punctual and reliable. She is also very open to learning, which is what Interactionz is all about."

It is the aim of Interactionz that all the people they serve have at least one volunteer. Volunteers host activities or work one on one. They are inducted into the values behind person-driven practice and are expected to work with people in a way which facilitates their independence. However, as one of the Community Facilitators notes, it is a constant challenge for Interactionz to help volunteers understand that they have moved away from "doing for people" to "working alongside them".

Importantly, La Mer understands the values behind person-driven practice, and strives to incorporate these into her interactions with the people with whom she works.

"Everyone has different goals, or a different idea of a good life" she explains. "Our role is to help facilitate those goals and help the people we work with to be as independent as they possibly can."

The differences in the person-driven approach are apparent to La Mer when she is at the pools with her swimming partner, Sarah. “There are always other people there from other [disability] organisations. They just work differently; I guess you could say they are more hands-on, whereas I see myself more as a companion than a helper.”

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*“Don’t be scared to volunteer. Just go and do it because once you have tried it you will realise actually it’s not this big scary thing.”*

La Mer

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It’s a full day when La Mer and Sarah go swimming. “We have to catch a bus into town, and then a bus from town to the pools. Then we get some floaties and I go into the pool with her in case anything happens and then we have our lunch and then take the two buses back.” In addition to swimming, La Mer and Sarah also go to fitness classes, craft activities and bowling.

Whilst Sarah finds it difficult to put her thoughts and feelings into words, La Mer believes she enjoys being together. “She still wants to keep going so I must be doing something right,” she says.

La Mer originally volunteered with the idea that she had something to offer. What she didn’t anticipate was that she would eventually gain more than what she would give.

“I feel like my life has changed – it’s less shallow”, she says. “I’m more confident. I don’t judge people. I feel like I am less of a selfish person. Before, I was quite shy and didn’t really talk to people I didn’t know. But now I feel like I can start up a conversation with anyone.”

Life has changed in other ways for La Mer. She has found a vocation.

“I didn’t even expect to be here for a full year”, she says. “I thought I would just give it a go for a bit until I found a job, but then I just stopped looking for jobs, I have to keep doing this.”

La Mer has recently taken the first steps towards a career working with people with disabilities and has signed up with Interactionz as a casual worker.

She has advice for others considering volunteering. “I would say to other people – don’t be scared. Just go and do it because once you have tried it you will realise actually it’s not this big scary thing.”

She is thankful she took that brave step in 2013.

“I am really glad. I love it.”

## Critical Factors for Success

### CLEAR VISION, VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

The interviews with remaining staff and board members showed that the organisational vision, values and principles of practice appear to be embedded throughout the organisation. It appears that both the staff and board genuinely believe in the vision, values and principles of practice, indeed, many stated that this was the reason they sought employment or involvement with Interactionz.

*“Our principles have to be linked, not the same, but you can't work somewhere [if] you don't truly believe in what they are doing”.*

Interactionz staff member

*“My work here is just an extension of my values of equity and social justice.”*

Interactionz staff member

During the restructuring processes, the vision and values became the foundation which underpinned the changes. Having a strong vision and values gave Interactionz something to test their activities against; activities were chosen and decisions were taken if they upheld the vision and values, and abandoned if they didn't. This vision-driven way of working enabled the Interactionz to think creatively, facilitate learning throughout the organisation and develop a shared commitment to the changes.

As stated in the impact profiles, one of the impacts of having a clearly stated vision and shared principles of practice has been the recruitment of highly qualified and experienced people who have passion and drive for the work that Interactionz does. Moreover, most of those who have been with the Interactionz since prior to the restructure appreciate how the restructure has allowed the vision, values and principles of practice to pervade the organisation and frame the way that the organisation works with the people they serve.

### SHARED LANGUAGE

It was evident that all those interviewed, including the leadership team, frontline staff, volunteers and even families share a common language around the work undertaken by Interactionz. The people Interactionz works with, for example, are not “clients”, they are “persons we serve.” Interactionz staff and volunteers do not “assist”, “support” or “help”: they “facilitate”.

The power of this common language is that it creates and sustains momentum around how individuals see themselves in connection with the organisation. There is a sense of shared identity among staff members related to their shared language, which then becomes a shared understanding about their principles of practice. As a result, individual staff members become part of a ‘whole’ and the organisation becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts.

## LEARNING ORGANISATION

Learning is valued and shared across the organisation, and staff are encouraged to regularly share what works, and what doesn't work.

Many staff talked of the benefits of belonging to an organisation which values learning and reflective practice. They felt the communication between leadership and frontline staff was such that they were freely able to discuss ideas, thoughts or concerns with either each other or the leadership team, with the knowledge that these discussions would be used as part of a learning process, with no negative consequence.

*"I think it is really good that we are able to have that space where we talk about how we are feeling about our position in the organisation and what we think is and isn't working. The great thing about that is seeing the actions that are taken when we do tell them what's going on."*

Interactionz staff member

*"Well we have meetings every week about what we think can change or what needs to be changed...all staff have to be involved."*

Interactionz staff member

An impact of being a learning organisation is a constant cycle of intention – planning – checking. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their practice (or organisational practice) and understand how this practice meets the Interactionz intentions and vision. If there is something that can be changed or improved, then staff are free to discuss this with other staff members and the leadership team, and make (and are coached through) a plan. They are then encouraged to check that a) that other staff members are on board and b) the plan is working.

One of the impact stories – Sam's story – highlights this way of working. In this story, a staff member was free to question current practice, explore ideas about alternate ways of doing things, and supported and coached through the process. Importantly, part of the coaching process involved getting commitment from other staff members to a change in practice.

## FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are critical to the work of Interactionz, and good relationships form the foundation of the organisation's work. One of the impact stories – Margaret's story – illustrates the importance of person-driven relationships with Interactionz and the people they serve, however other critical relationships include inter-organisational relationships, relationships between Interactionz and the families of the people they serve, and relationships within the wider services sector.

*I think it is important to build those relationships. I have quite a good relationship now with (the family member of a person I serve) and she now knows that I am just human and I care about my job and I care about the persons I serve. There is a human element*

*to it. It's not just strictly business. I think that makes her feel more like she can trust me and my colleagues.*

Interactionz staff member

*(We have a) good working relationship. I have deep respect for them and they have a deep respect for me, so we are able to go 'okay what do we need to do?' and we work through it.*

Family member

*There is a good relationship and collaboration between our organisations. Interactionz has shared many of their processes and policies and documents and how they work with people. They've always been willing to come in and help us develop those things, give us feedback on how it's working.*

Sector representative

Interactionz also works hard to build and maintain relationships between the people they serve and their families and communities. This is done through identifying networks, and facilitating and encouraging connections.

*For us the bigger picture is about the good life principles, making it simple, easier for building networks, building relationships, making mainstream support.*

Interactionz staff member

*We're all about relationship building. Getting as much of the family involved as possible is good, keeping as natural ties as possible.*

Interactionz staff member

*One of the biggest things about the way we incorporate volunteers is about trying to find genuine matches and opportunities for people to form connections rather than just finding any old person who has the right skills for the job.*

Interactionz board member

## Effectiveness

Overall, there were very few suggestions from interviewees as to how Interactionz could be more effective. Moreover, interviews with the leadership team suggest that they are well aware of any issues that were raised in the interviews, and have already taken steps to address these. The points in this section are therefore presented here not as recommendations, but instead as learnings that Interactionz might share with others.

### COMMUNICATION

The issue raised most frequently by interviewees was communication during the restructuring process, particularly the first restructure. Staff and families who had been through the restructuring process believed that there could have been better communication between staff and the leadership team, and the organisation and families. At times, families were unsure what was happening, and why, and felt that more frequent communication from Interactionz about what was going on may have helped to relieve some of their worries. A minority of staff who were around during the first restructure felt that they were left behind at times in terms of understanding the vision and philosophy behind person-driven practice, and as a result had struggled to adopt new ways of working into their practice.

There is a balance point between needing to be action-oriented during a restructure, and the necessity to stop and reflect and make sure that people are on board with what is happening. Interactionz were able to take time and reflect during the two restructures, and as a result were able to facilitate a participatory inquiry process with staff prior to the second restructure. Most of the staff interviewed who were present for this process believe that it helped to embed the changes to their practice, and gave them confidence around communicating what was happening to the persons they serve and their families.

The leadership team have identified internal and external communication as a priority for 2015.

### TECHNOLOGY

One of the impacts of the restructure is that staff work more closely together. Staff frequently communicate with each other about what is happening for each person they serve so that their care is consistent and everyone is working towards the same goals.

A number of staff identified a lack of technology as a barrier to their practice. The staff members who have come from other organisations or who have a university background find the lack of technology particularly frustrating.

The leadership team are aware that the current technology needs updating, and are currently investigating options.



## Conclusion

These stories capture the impact of radical and transformative change on Interactionz, its staff and Board, and on the persons they serve and their families. The changes have taken place over a long period of time and have resulted in radical change aimed at long term transformation of how persons with disabilities and their families are supported to live everyday lives. Interactionz are now supporting other groups and organisations who wish to apply the same sorts of changes to their own practice approaches.

Feedback from remaining staff, the Interactionz Board and families suggest that whilst the process of change was disruptive, the outcomes of adopting an approach which centres on person-driven practice and embracing the principles of Enabling Good Lives are largely positive.

# Appendix One: Interactionz Theory of Change

## INTERACTIONZ THEORY OF CHANGE

