



Outcome 8 - Leadership



“We have great opportunities to demonstrate our leadership”

New Zealand Disability Strategy, 2016-2026

There should be a level playing field where everyone is recognised for their skills and talents and is supported to fulfil their leadership potential. Disabled people need to be recognised as experts in their own lives. Where non-disabled leaders make decisions that are important to disabled people, they need to act as allies and work closely with the disabled community.

Strategy In Action

Robert Martin

Robert Martin is an international leader and role model for people with a learning disability. Robert’s election to the United Nations Committee on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities in June 2016 acknowledges his lifetime of advocacy on behalf of disabled people, in New Zealand and around the world. Robert is also a life member of People First New Zealand.

Robert spent much of his childhood in institutions and foster homes, and has had limited formal education. He has continued to learn throughout his adult life teaching himself to read through his passion for books.

Robert was involved in the decision-making behind, and the development of, the UN’s Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities; however, being elected to the UN Committee is a little bit different he says.

“It’s good. The other people on the Committee have gotten behind me and supported me.

“I feel pretty proud and humble about being the first person with a learning disability to be on the Committee. I want to do my best to bring the issues for people with learning disability to the table. I might be the first person but I don’t want to be the last person. I’m making a path for other people to follow,” says Robert.

Robert believes New Zealand compares favourably with the rest of the world. He says:

“In a lot of countries, learning disability is still very invisible. Most people are still stuck in institutions. I think it’s my job to make the issues for people with learning disability visible. Cause whether you like it or not, people with learning disability are part of the disability family. I don’t think institutions are part of humanity anymore.

“In many countries people with learning disability are also not part of the disability alliances. In our country, People First New Zealand is a big part of the alliance between the Disabled Person’s Organisations. It would be unthinkable for us not to be part of it. A lot of countries don’t even have self-advocacy or People First groups.

When asked what advice he has for other disabled people striving to reach leadership positions, Robert says:

“It’s about getting out there and doing it. Join a Disabled Person’s Organisation! You can get leadership training and experience with speaking up. Get involved in community meetings and join groups.

“We’re stronger when we work together.”

Resources and Guidance

Robert Martin

Robert Martin is an international leader and role model for people with a learning disability.

- book **Becoming a Person – The Biography of Robert Martin**, by John McRae, published Oct 2014. ISBN: 9781927213193.
- short film attitudelive.com/robertmartin

People First New Zealand

People First New Zealand Inc. Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi is a national self-advocacy organisation that is led and directed by people with learning (intellectual) disability.

- website peoplefirst.org.nz

Attitude Live

Attitude Live offers a large collection of videos about chronic health and disability. It works with organisations, service providers, government agencies and brands to develop online and broadcast content. The organisation promotes achievement through its annual Attitude Awards.

- website attitudelive.com