

POSSABILITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
LAW LECTURE THEATRES, SANDY BAY, WEDNESDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2019

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to open the 2019 Building Opportunities and Building Communities Conference.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

As the Patron of the Possability – which has as its practice and innovation initiative the Possability Research Institute, presenter of the Conference – I am really pleased to be directly associated with this important initiative, now in its second year. This Conference has once again brought together leading Australian and international professionals in the disability, out-of-home care and education sectors, while also showcasing service and innovation excellence in Tasmania.ⁱ

The practical focus of the Conference is also welcome, namely the enhancement of service delivery to those Tasmanians who require and otherwise benefit from the multiple services that Possability and other organisations provide.

Of course, research goes hand-in-hand with improvements in the sector and I welcome the support in this area provided by the University of Tasmania; and also the support for the Conference of NEXUS, HESTA and ACCESSPAY.

In my almost five years as Governor, I have gained a much broader understanding of disability services, supported accommodation and social enterprises that provide meaningful employment to people with a disability.

As part of our Huon Valley Municipal visit we visited Tahune Fields Nursery and met some of the employees such as Jason, who has worked there for many years and was working for his Cert 2 in Horticulture. We have also visited other impressive work places for people with a disability such as Plane Tree Studio with their beautiful hand-made paper products and Tastex Knitwear and

Embroidery in Glenorchy. And I am aware of the wonderful work at Oakdale Industries, providing niche products such as wider than usual floor-boards, which are in demand for heritage restorations.

We were very impressed to see the supported accommodation at Burnie and observed the way the students from a local school were engaged with residents in music making and performance with both students and residents benefitting.

At Government House we have been very pleased to support the transition to work program with Henry and Marcus working here with their carers training in hospitality and horticulture which gave us insights into the challenges of integrating such programs into a workplace.

For the last three years we have hosted a presentation ceremony for Oak Possability clients to receive their Duke of Edinburgh awards. This program really does exemplify goals of inclusion and opportunity for all.

For Christmas 2016 we had Christmas parties at Government House for the Department of Education's Early Childhood Intervention Service clients and for St Giles, together with their annual Walk with Me event.

Comparing what I know now with what I knew five years ago, I am well aware that there is a lack of understanding in the general community about people with a disability and the potential of every person no matter how profound their physical disability appears, to learn, to learn new skills, to learn ways to communicate and express their needs. Just what can be done was brought home to me very clearly when we visited the Southern Support School with its amazing staff, kitchen garden, playgrounds, equipment and swimming pool.

Here at this conference, participants have a broad understanding of the potential that every individual has, but I do think this is an area where the general public need a much greater understanding.

This includes a better understanding of the benefits of social enterprises providing meaningful work and of inclusive schools and integrating children of differing abilities and learning differences into mainstream schooling. At the same time of course, this can be challenging for schools.

Just yesterday I was talking to a maths and science primary school teacher from the Channel who explained that in his Grade 6 class his students demonstrated

a range of 8 years difference in their progress in maths – so that while he had some children who needed extension and were able to do Grade 8 and 9 work, there were others who were years behind their expected grade level. This makes whole class teaching impossible and requires at least 4 separate lesson plans for each class.

Clearly special skills, abilities and resources are needed for teachers to assist all children to achieve their potential. He contrasted this with teaching at another school with a much more even SES profile which had different challenges with many children with experiences of family violence and trauma and consequently with complex needs.

In conclusion, I would like to commend your work and your vision of a world where everyone has the opportunity to pursue their potential and your belief that freedom, opportunity and independence for all are fundamental human rights.

Thank you.

ⁱ Carla Johnson, Pooaablity letter (undated) to David Owen, last paragraph.