

**Presenter** Paul Gibson

**Title** Sorry: celebrating New Zealand's global success, and acknowledging our past

**Abstract**

New Zealand led in the development of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) through the government, its agencies, the non-government organisation sector (NGO), and disabled individuals and their families. A kiwi with a learning (intellectual) disability told his story, and that of his friends, and linked it to a strategic vision for change. This transformed the United Nations environment, ensuring the voices of the real experts, the people with the direct lived experience, were heard and shaped the convention. Our global leadership needs to be better acknowledged and celebrated.

The disability convention covers people with physical, sensory, mental, and intellectual impairments. This includes older disabled people acquiring impairment, late in life, that is likely to be “long term”.

Now we as a nation are committed to the Disability Convention, what needs to change here? How do we now understand disability? What might a modern support system consistent with the disability convention look like? How do we get there?

Ten years ago, those kiwi experts with learning disability and mental illness at the United Nations told stories of institutionalisation, violence, and abuse. In 2008 a select committee inquired into the support system as a result of so many instances of abuse. Have we acknowledged and learnt enough from these experiences to learn, and to prevent violence and neglect in future? The current stories emerging in the media suggests not. We may be institutionalising younger disabled people less, but are we really? And what about older disabled people? To get the necessary evidence, into the debate, and give disability issues the energy, priority, and resources they deserve, it's time for a national conversation which may ultimately lead to a national apology. It's time to say sorry.