Taking charge — the story of Workbridge

The journey of employment rights for disabled people in New Zealand

Janette Munneke

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Te Arawhiti mō Mahi

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Foreword

It's a pleasure for me to contribute to this book, which celebrates the development and history of Workbridge Incorporated, and its predecessors.

Workbridge has been in operation since 1990, but its history goes a long way further than that – right back to the return of soldiers who fought in the Great War, over 90 years ago.

Their return marked the beginning of vocational services in New Zealand. The organisation that was formed not long after their return went through several upheavals and name changes before the Workbridge we know today emerged.

The first organisation was set up to assist soldiers to re-establish themselves back home. Once that need was over, it was opened up to disabled civilians who needed the services to get into the workforce, and was renamed the Rehabilitation League.

Workbridge was unique when it was first formed; no other organisation in New Zealand offered brokerage for training and employment solely for disabled people. Today, it maintains that kaupapa, and is also one of the few disability services led and managed by disabled people. It's a living example of its own key philosophy, that disabled people must be the authors of their own destinies.

When I was a young soldier (Engineer) I was posted to a Unit situated at 44 Riccarton Road in Christchurch, which was next door to the Rehabilitation League facility so I've been aware for many years of the work done by the successive organisations to help disabled people realise their career aspirations.

I congratulate Workbridge on its proud history of mahi in this field, and for the many employment opportunities it has opened up for disabled New Zealanders over the years.

B J Clark, QSM JP

National President of the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association (RSA)

Introduction

Thirty-two years after its reconfiguration as an employment brokerage service, Workbridge continues to be a major provider of disability employment services across the country.

Every year it continues to build a bridge over the barriers to employment for disabled jobseekers who seek meaningful work, to contribute to society, and to make a good life for themselves, just like their less challenged friends, neighbours, and whānau.

One of those barriers, arguably the most challenging, is the perception of disability held by many nondisabled people, including employers. Most people look at any profound impairment and think, "I don't know how I could do it, therefore I don't know how anyone can."

The biggest task for organisations like Workbridge is to convince employers to take a closer look, and to take a chance on individuals. Workbridge does this by building relationships with employers and offering support and advice to help them take the plunge. It's an ongoing mission because, even in times of low unemployment, people find it hard to see beyond their own perception of what it must be like to live with an impairment.

In November 2021, Workbridge launched another campaign, 'Just Say Yes', to encourage employers to look to the pool of disabled jobseekers on Workbridge's books to meet their current skills and labour shortages.

In launching the service, the chief executive of Workbridge, Jonathan Mosen, said "plenty of employers have had success when taking on Workbridge jobseekers, but too many jobseekers remain unemployed, despite being work-ready.(**1**) 'Just Say Yes' offers a practical, business-friendly service to ensure businesses get great advice, and disabled people and those with a health condition or injury have more opportunity."

Mosen has been chief executive of Workbridge since 2019, his latest role in a long career in advocacy for disabled people. He has a career in commercial radio and gained a master's degree in public policy in 1999.

He was twice elected as national president of consumer organisation the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand (also known as Blind Citizens NZ), the youngest person to have been elected to this position.

He also served as chairman of the board of the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind. As chairman of the organisation, which employed 400 staff, he operated a $20 million budget and worked with a national team of volunteers, overseeing the implementation of a new constitution for the organisation that saw a move to a model based on self-determination.

As well as working for several international companies bringing adaptive software to New Zealand, Mosen established his own internet radio stations, the latest being Mushroom FM, with 40 staff, and listeners in 115 countries. He also has a consulting company set up with his wife Bonnie.

In his spare time, he continues to offer commentary on assistive technology and its impact on disabled people, and to test new technology.

He has been the recipient of four awards recognising his services, including being made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) in 2019.

As chief executive of Workbridge, Mosen runs the largest employment agency for disabled people in New Zealand, with 22 offices and 120 staff across New Zealand. He is motivated, capable, visionary, enthusiastic, and committed. He has a desire to improve the lot of disabled people and has learned how to play to his strengths. All of these are attributes he shares with many of the jobseekers on Workbridge's books, and with many of the members of both the council and the board of management of Workbridge.

Like them, he is a living example of a disabled person making his way in the workforce. Blind from birth, he has spent his life learning how to live, learn, play, love, and work with a profound impairment.

He does not accept that it should be a barrier to realising his life or work aspirations. Now Mosen and the members of the Workbridge council and board are lending their life and work experience to the mission of building a bridge over the barriers disabled people encounter when simply wanting to put their energy into making the best living possible to support themselves and their families.

Some of the barriers are physical, because despite signing up to the United Nations Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities in 2008, making it real is still a work in progress. Many of the barriers are attitudinal and due to lack of understanding or awareness, something the chair of the board, Pam MacNeill, says Workbridge can definitely help with. Like Mosen, MacNeill has developed a huge amount of expertise in how to live with a profound impairment, and currently runs her own business offering disability responsiveness training for businesses and other organisations.

Workbridge takes its own message about self-determination for disabled people very seriously, and the three most senior roles in the organisation – the chief executive, the president of the council and the chair of the board – are held by disabled people. In this aspect, it is quite unusual in the disability sector in New Zealand and internationally. There are very few, if any, other disability or commercial sector organisations managed by disabled people, either in New Zealand or overseas.(**2**) A recent workforce survey found that of 28 organisations employing 1,452 people, only 7 percent of the workforce (106 people) were reported as living with a disability. The number was so small that analysis of which positions were held could not be provided.(**3**)

Chrissy Fern, Workbridge Council President, Pam MacNeill, Board Chair, Jonathan Mosen, Chief Executive, July 2022

The Workbridge council is currently headed by a representative of Blind Citizens NZ, and has representatives from six other disabled persons' organisations: Deaf Aotearoa, Disabled Persons' Assembly New Zealand (DPA), Kapo Maori Aotearoa, Muscular Dystrophy Association of New Zealand (MDANZ), People First New Zealand, and Vaka Tautua, a national by-Pacific-for-Pacific health, disability, and social services provider. They sit alongside one representative from each of Business New Zealand, New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), and Human Resources New Zealand (HRNZ).

There are eight members on the Workbridge board in total, at least four of whom identify as disabled people. Lived experience is a desired attribute for board roles, in addition to business and disability sector management experience.

The current structure of Workbridge, with a council and a board, was introduced to ensure strong and influential leadership by disabled people.

Looking back to the predecessors of Workbridge, self-determination has been a theme from the outset.

Workbridge as we know it today was incorporated in 1990, following a lengthy period of review of the Rehabilitation League. To find out where that came from and why, the story goes right back to the First World War, and the subsequent beginning of disability employment services in New Zealand.

Section one: Re-establishing disabled soldiers

The Workbridge story starts in the early 1930s, with the formation of the Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League to provide disabled veterans of the First World War with rehabilitation and employment. In 1942, the organisation was renamed the Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League and services increased to provide assessment and training for returnees from the Second World War.

Section two: Rehabilitating disabled New Zealanders

There came a time when those services were no longer needed by the soldiers, and the League was re-named the Disabled Re-establishment League in 1969 (and soon after in 1974 became the Rehabilitation League) and opened its doors to others with disabilities.

The 1980s were a period of global development in terms of rights and expectations for disabled people, and an important period in the history of employment services in New Zealand, leading directly to a major change in the way those services were offered, and who directed them.

Section three: Building a bridge over barriers

In 1990, the Rehabilitation League was re-formed into a work broker service, to assist disabled people to realise their employment aspirations, and renamed Workbridge.

Section one: Re-establishing disabled soldiers

Soldiers return from the Great War in Europe

Prior to the Great War, help for disabled people in New Zealand was very limited, and there was very little expectation that they would do any kind of job.

The first wounded soldiers arrived back in the country on the *Willochra* on 15 July 1915.

The Government established a specialised department in 1915 called the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department (DSID), which eventually expanded into a large and complex apparatus dealing with the varied issues facing returned servicemen. It worked with existing departments to ensure that the individual needs of every soldier were considered. The public service assisted soldiers by treating their ailments, facilitating training in civilian occupations, and providing cheap loans and land to those who requested it.(4)

A new war pension was instituted, with different rates for incapacitation according to the severity of the injury – the loss of two limbs warranted 100 percent of the pension, total deafness 70 percent, the loss of a right hand 65 percent (a left hand was only worth 60 percent), and the loss of an index finger 20 percent. The War Pensions Board would ultimately approve or reject each case.

One estimate determined that by 1921 when the department was wound up, the public service had loaned money or granted land to 43,000 men and helped a further 31,000 to find work through various means.(**5**) The Government could be excused for thinking the need was met.

Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA)

Among those who had returned on the *Willochra* in 1915 was Captain Donald Simson. He quickly realised that there was a need for a supporting body to advocate for the returned soldiers and set about forming a number of local associations. The first one was in his hometown of Christchurch. After a preliminary meeting on 14 December 1915, the Christchurch Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA) came into existence on 22 December 1915, and Simson was made an Honorary Life President of Christchurch RSA at that inaugural meeting.(**6**)

He was instrumental in other associations forming around the country. On 28 April 1916, Simson presided over a conference in Wellington that established a national body, the New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association, to assist returning soldiers with the many problems they faced in repatriating and picking up the threads of their lives.

RSA membership had risen to 57,000 by 1920 but, as with the government services, the need for support quickly declined and membership dropped to 7,000 in the mid-1920s.

However, as the 1920s wore on, and particularly as many of the farming ventures proved to be less successful than hoped, there was a growing level of discontent about the provision of support for the returnees.

The Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League

By 1929, the recurrence of latent war injuries and the impact of the Great Depression had begun to have an effect. It was becoming apparent that for some, the need for assistance would remain for many years to come, if not for the rest of their lives. In 1929, following strong representation to the Government by the RSA, the Disabled Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment Act was passed.(**7**) Under the Act, local advisory committees were established in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin, to achieve the goal of creating suitable employment schemes for disabled soldiers.

The local advisory committees were just that, advisory bodies, with little ability to implement new schemes. At a conference held in Wellington by the RSA, a new organisation was established, called the Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League.(**8**) The new body had a 'Dominion headquarters' and incorporated the advisory committees as its local branch committees, giving them more power to create and control local employment schemes for the disabled returnees. (New Zealand became a dominion in 1907 and did not formally adopt country status until after the Second World War, hence the term 'Dominion headquarters'.)

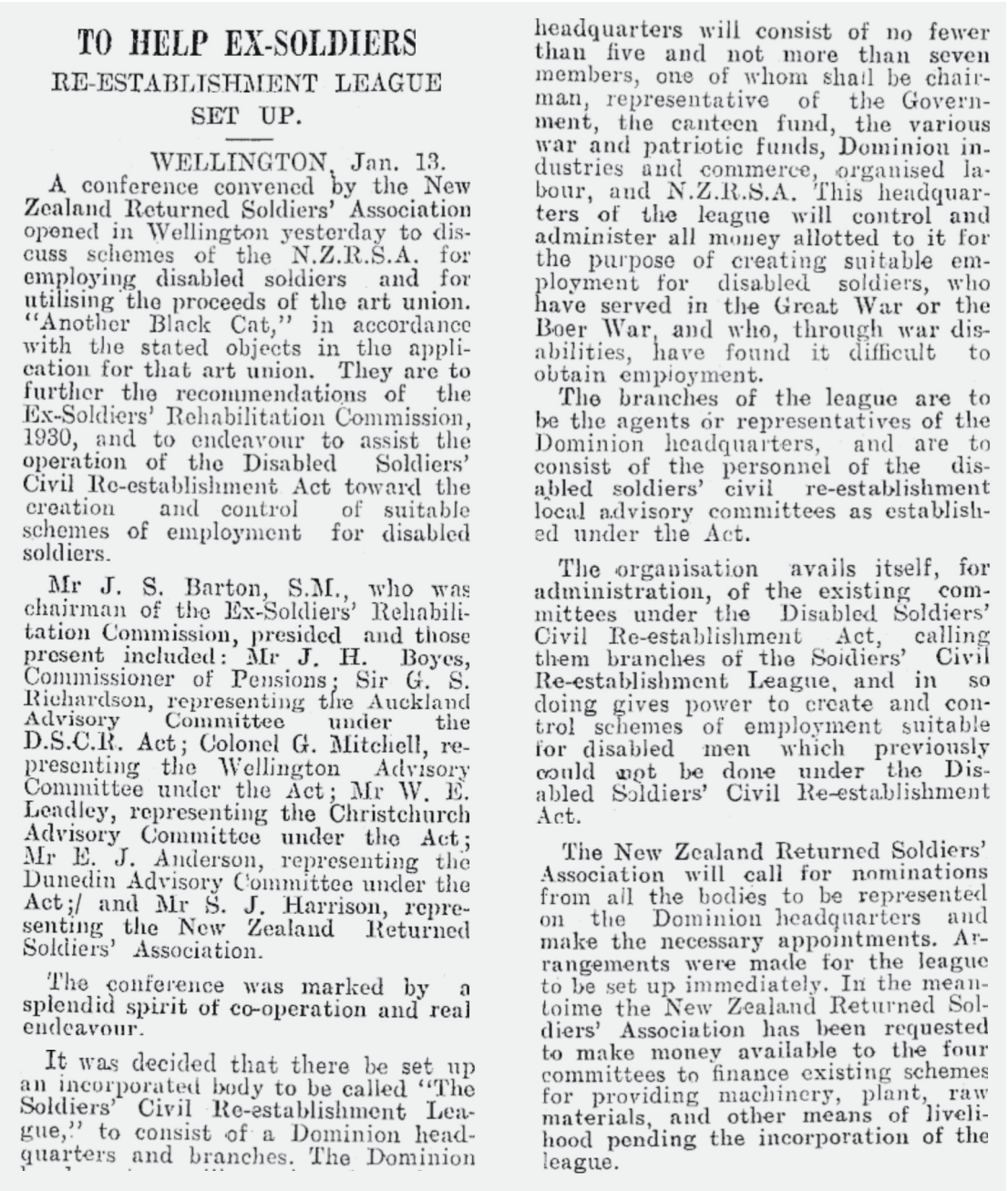
Within a short time, the League was looking to find ways to promote and fund its work. In April 1934, the Christchurch Press reported on the intention to hold an exhibition of disabled soldiers' handcrafts that was modelled on an exhibition held every year in London by the Imperial Institute. The proposal was to hold the exhibition at a time to coincide with the visit to the Dominion by Prince George, who could be asked to open it.

The article notes that the League had about £5,400 in hand – equivalent to about $2-3 million in today's terms. The committee agreed that the League would be responsible for all expenses, and should retain any fees charged for admission, while receipts from the sale of goods should go to the soldiers.

One of the key figures in the League at that time, and for several years afterwards, was Walter Edmund Leadley, known to everyone as Bill. Leadley served as a Lance Corporal in the Canterbury Regiment of New Zealand in the war, taking up his duties as a signaller on arrival at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915. During his time in active

service, Leadley developed a huge admiration for the Australian and New Zealand troops and was determined to do all he could to help the returnees once back in New Zealand.

He was secretary of the Christchurch RSA from 1918 and, when the Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League was established in 1931, he was the first District Officer of the Canterbury branch.



TO HELP EX-SOLDIERS

RE-ESTABLISHMENT LEAGUE SET UP.

WELLINGTON, Jan. 13.

A conference convened by the New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association opened in Wellington yesterday to discuss schemes of the N.Z.R.S.A. for employing disabled soldiers and for utilising the proceeds of the art union. "Another Black Cat," in accordance with the stated objects in the application for that art union. They are to further the recommendations of the Ex-Soldiers' Rehabilitation Commission, 1930, and to endeavour to assist the operation of the Disabled Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment Act toward the creation and control of suitable schemes of employment for disabled soldiers.

Mr J. S. Barton, S.M., who was chairman of the Ex-Soldiers' Rehabilitation Commission, presided and those present included: Mr J. H. Boyes, Commissioner of Pensions; Sir G. S. Richardson, representing the Auckland Advisory Committee under the D.S.C.R. Act; Colonel G. Mitchell, representing the Wellington Advisory Committee under the Act; Mr W. E. Leadley, representing the Christchurch Advisory Committee under the Act; Mr E. J. Anderson, representing the Dunedin Advisory Committee under the Act;/ and Mr S. J. Harrison, representing the New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association.

The conference was marked by a splendid spirit of co-operation and real endeavour.

It was decided that there be set up an incorporated body to be called "The Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League," to consist of a Dominion headquarters and branches. The Dominion headquarters will consist of no fewer than five and not more than seven members, one of whom shall be chairman, representative of the Government, the canteen fund, the various war and patriotic funds, Dominion industries and commerce, organised labour, and N.Z.R.S.A. This headquarters of the league will control and administer all money allotted to it for the purpose of creating suitable employment for disabled soldiers, who have served in the Great War or the Boer War, and who, through war disabilities, have found it difficult to obtain employment.

The branches of the league are to be the agents or representatives of the Dominion headquarters, and are to consist of the personnel of the disabled soldiers' civil re-establishment local advisory committees as established under the Act.

The organisation avails itself, for administration, of the existing committees under the Disabled Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment Act, calling them branches of the Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League, and in so doing gives power to create and control schemes of employment suitable for disabled men which previously could not be done under the Disabled Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment Act.

The New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association will call for nominations from all the bodies to be represented on the Dominion headquarters and make the necessary appointments. Arrangements were made for the league to be set up immediately. In the meantoime the New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association has been requested to make money available to the four committees to finance existing schemes for providing machinery, plant, raw materials, and other means of livelihood pending the incorporation of the league.

Newspaper report from the *Manawatu Standard* on the RSA meeting which established the Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League, article dated 13 January 1933.

Profile: Bill Leadley

Walter Leadley (known as Bill) was a Yorkshireman who came out to New Zealand in his early 20s, on the brink of war, and was keen to enlist. Because of his short stature, he had to persuade the powers-that-be to take him on, which he did by telling them he was a qualified telegraphist, skilled in Morse code, heliograph, and semaphore.

He quickly became a sergeant in the Canterbury Regiment and served as a signaller at Gallipoli and the Somme, suffering severe wounds in both battles.

A portrait photograph of Walter (Bill) Leadley in soldier's uniform.(9)

You can hear narrated extracts of his writing about his experiences on the WW100 Programme website, in a section called Nga Tapuwae Trails – Corporal Walter (Bill) Leadley.(10)

The diary he kept during his time serving has been published by his granddaughter.(11)

His experience at Gallipoli was so profound that while there he made a vow that if he survived, he would do all he could for his fellow servicemen for the rest of his life.

Back in New Zealand Leadley was appointed secretary of the Christchurch RSA in November 1918 when its membership numbered 890. By February 1920 it had grown to over 5,000. When he became

secretary, repatriation boards had not yet been established, and the RSA acted like an employment agency, with Bill Leadley placing 93 men in work. Once the boards were established, he joined the Canterbury board as a government nominee.(12)

In 1928 he resigned from the secretaryship and stood as a Reform Party candidate in the Avon electorate. By this time Leadley had been elected a member of the Christchurch City Council and the North Canterbury Hospital Board.

As well as serving as District Officer for the League's Canterbury branch, became general secretary of the League and wrote three books describing its work, two of which have been used extensively in compiling this history.(13)

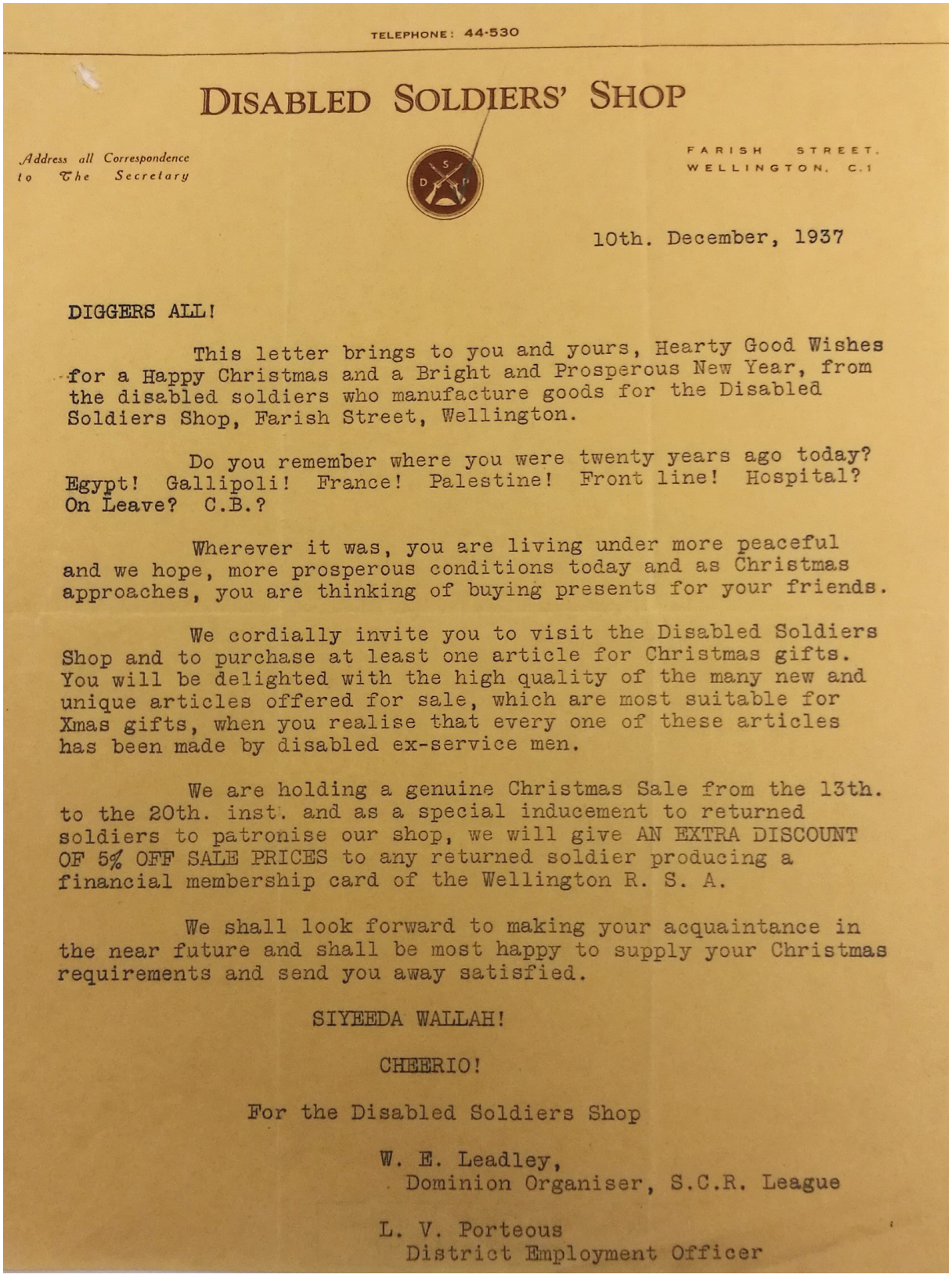
Bill Leadley was awarded an OBE in 1946 and retired in 1956 after 38 years of service to his fellow ex-servicemen.

Leadley was one of several returned servicemen who served for many years on regional and national committees of the League. Although the disabled service recipients had no decision-making powers, there was an element of self-determination in that they were represented on the management boards by people who had served alongside them who took a strong advocacy role on their behalf.

Another committee member was Dr Fletcher Telford, Medical Officer for Health for Canterbury and Westland for 25 years until his retirement in early 1944.(**14**)

Throughout the 1930s, the League provided

> …sheltered workshops for those who, because of disabilities received on active service, were unable to continue their pre-war employment ... Factories were established, and retail shops were opened for sale of goods manufactured by disabled soldiers in the factories. Large numbers ... were also assisted to take up primary production on small farms, or to commence businesses of their own.(**15**)



TELEPHONE: 44-530

DISABLED SOLDIERS' SHOP

Address all Correspondence to The Secretary

FARISH STREET.
WELLINGTON, C.1

10th. December, 1937

DIGGERS ALL!

This letter brings to you and yours, Hearty Good Wishes for a Happy Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year, from the disabled soldiers who manufacture goods for the Disabled Soldiers Shop, Farish Street, Wellington.

Do you remember where you were twenty years ago today? Egypt! Gallipoli! France! Palestine! Front line! Hospital? On Leave? C.B.?

Wherever it was, you are living under more peaceful and we hope, more prosperous conditions today and as Christmas approaches, you are thinking of buying presents for your friends.

We cordially invite you to visit the Disabled Soldiers Shop and to purchase at least one article for Christmas gifts. You will be delighted with the high quality of the many new and unique articles offered for sale, which are most suitable for Xmas gifts, when you realise that every one of these articles has been made by disabled ex-service men.

We are holding a genuine Christmas Sale from the 13th. to the 20th. inst. and as a special inducement to returned soldiers to patronise our shop, we will give AN EXTRA DISCOUNT OF 5% OFF SALE PRICES to any returned soldier producing a financial membership card of the Wellington R. S. A.

We shall look forward to making your acquaintance in the near future and shall be most happy to supply your Christmas requirements and send you away satisfied.

SIYEEDA WALLAH!

CHEERIO!

For the Disabled Soldiers Shop

W. E. Leadley,
Dominion Organiser, S.C.R. League

L. V. Porteous
District Employment Officer

Letter of Christmas greetings from the Disabled Soldiers' Shop in Farish [now Victoria] Street, Wellington, inviting the reader to the shop to purchase gifts during a sale held from 13-20 December 1937.(16)

The 1940s: salvaging the human wreckage

In 1939, war broke out again in Europe, and the early 1940s brought new waves of returnees from the front, many of whom needed rehabilitation services.

A mere four years after the end of the Great War, the government department set up to assist returning soldiers had closed, leaving the men feeling neglected and outcast, and resulting in the establishment of the League more than a decade after the end of the Great War to assist with the continuing need for rehabilitative assistance.

Perhaps due to the recency of that experience, a different approach was taken in the early 1940s.

In October 1941, the Rehabilitation Act established the Rehabilitation Board, part of a concerted effort by the Labour Government to rehabilitate all veterans.(**17**)

The Government appointed the League to be an agent of the Rehabilitation Board and charged it with "the special duty of training disabled servicemen".(**18**) The name of the League was changed to the Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League in 1942.

The *Auckland Star* reported in 1943:

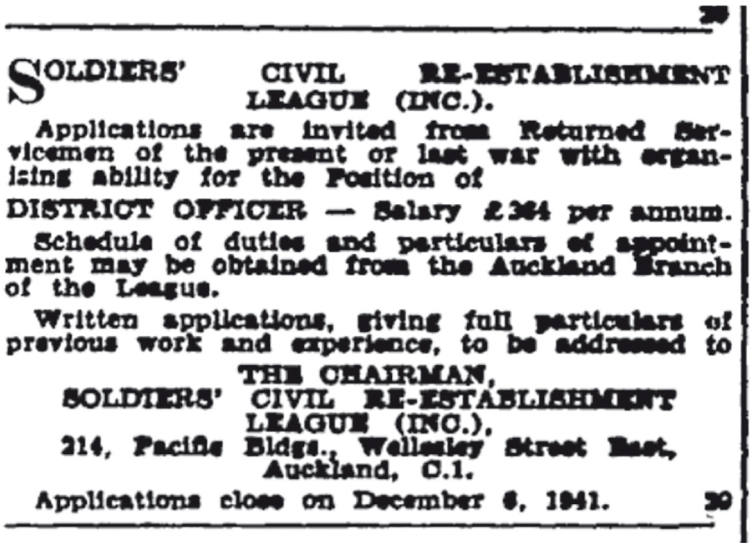
> The task is to salvage the human wreckage of the war, to restore men broken on the wheel of conflict so that they may overcome their disabilities and play their part in the economic structure of the community in the contentment of usefulness, instead of being left despondent in idleness and monotony. Since the last war, in other countries probably more so than in New Zealand, almost miraculous results have been achieved in the rehabilitation of cripples suffering from all types of injuries, and it is planned to extend and develop on a much more extensive basis the comparatively insignificant schemes that have been carried on for 25 years in this country.(**19**)

This time around, returned soldiers like Leadley held prominent positions in the League, and, with their reasonably fresh memories of the post-war experience, could advocate for the newly returning soldiers.

The practice of recruiting returned servicemen to assist with the activities of the League continued at least into the 1940s, as the 1941 advertisement from the Auckland Star below shows.(**20**) The League provided employment for returned servicemen and ensured that employees shared the experience of the returnees.

Advertisement for staff

Applications are invited from Returned Servicemen of the present or last war with organising ability for the Position of DISTRICT OFFICER — Salary £384 per annum. Schedule of duties and particulars of appointment may be obtained from the Auckland Branch of the League. Written applications, giving full particulars of previous work and experience, to be addressed to THE CHAIRMAN, SOLDIERS' CIVIL RE-ESTABLISHMENT LEAGUE (INC.), 214, Pacific Bldgs., Wellesley Street East, Auckland, C.1. Applications close on December 6, 1941.



SOLDIERS' CIVIL RE-ESTABLISHMENT LEAGUE (INC.).

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DISTRICT OFFICER — Salary £384 per annum.

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THE CHAIRMAN,
SOLDIERS' CIVIL RE-ESTABLISHMENT LEAGUE (INC.),
214, Pacific Bldgs., Wellesley Street East, Auckland, C.1.

Applications close on December 6, 1941.

Advertisement from the situations vacant column of the *Auckland Star*, 29 November 1941, inviting returned servicemen of the "present or last war" to apply for the position of district officer.

The general labour shortage also affected the extent of the service provision, as the Government concluded that "the nation cannot afford to neglect to utilise the productive capacity of any workers".(**21**) As the servicemen began to return, there was a fresh awareness that returning them to productive work would enable them to sustain their own living and have the added advantage of not needing to provide the servicemen with continued state assistance, as noted in the words of J. I. Goldsmith (Dominion president of the League) at a conference of Justices of the Peace in Tauranga:

> Disablement represents a double loss to the community. It means a reduction of the total national production, and also an increase in the cost of maintenance and Social Security Services ... It is essential therefore, in the interests of the nation and the disabled, that every modern facility be provided to train the disabled, so that they may become economic units in the community once more.
>
> Rehabilitation of the disabled is not only a national responsibility, it is an economic necessity. To the disabled, it is the door of hope, leading to independence, security and happiness.

Consequently,

> ... there was born a new resolve to see that those who were disabled in the service of the nation received sympathetic attention and an opportunity to take their place again as citizens.
>
> ... Pensions on a more liberal scale than ever before were granted for war disabilities, and a Rehabilitation Act, the provisions of which far exceeded any similar proposals in any part of the world, was put into operation to assist the re-absorption of New Zealand's fighting men into the civil life of the community.(**22**)

Prime Minister Peter Fraser promised that the Government would provide whatever finance was necessary for the training of disabled men in new trades and occupations, carrying out this "great work" in partnership with the League.(**23**)

It was quite a different approach to that taken for other disabled people at the time, who were forced to rely on charity for vocational assistance. The inaugural meeting of the Crippled Children's Society was held in Wellington in July 1935, but although the Society pledged to work in "the closest cooperation with the Government Health and Educational authorities" in (among other things) "educational and vocational training, in finding suitable avenues of employment, in removing any existing bars to employment of cripples …", the organisation was largely funded by donations and through Rotary Clubs, in response to the "lack of thought" given to the training and employment of young adults disabled by polio.(**24**)

Training centres in all major centres

In contrast, as part of its contribution to the rehabilitation of soldiers, the Government set up training centres in Auckland, Napier, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill, and a training farm in Milson, near Palmerston North. It also gave grants to the League for new plant and machinery, and interest-free loans for working capital. Trainees at any of these establishments were paid on a sliding subsidy scale and were able to "earn while you learn".(**25**)

Modernist style in Wellington

Wellington's training centre was designed by architect Edmund Anscombe, its foundation stone laid on 16 November 1942. It is an "important early example of the Modernist style of architecture in New Zealand and has high architectural value ... The austere exterior reflects both a Modernist obsession with unadorned form and an austere wartime economy where materials, labour and money were in short supply."(**26**)

The centre had room for 150 people, and included an orthopaedic and limb-fitting section, vocational re-education section, and recreational facilities, including a bowling green which no doubt relieved the austerity a little. Other activities included paua shell jewellery-making and printing.

Picture caption from the newspaper article: Yesterday Mr. W. J. Jordan, New Zealand High Commissioner in London, visited the Disabled Servicemen's Training Centre in Lloyd [now Hania] Street, accompanied by Mrs. Jordan. They are seen inspecting the work being done in the watch and clock repair department (top), and in the printing office attached to the centre (bottom).(27)

The photographs show what appears to be a number of dignitaries, watching men at work at benches, looking at items in cabinets and display cases and printed material on a display board. There are nine men wearing aprons or overalls.

Jordan himself had been wounded in the war in March 1918 in France, severely enough to prevent his return to action. As a veteran and former army educator he had a keen interest in the welfare of returning servicemen, He was appointed to the army's education service, rising to the rank of warrant officer second-class and third-class instructor. Appointed High Commissioner in 1935, he refused

to “believe that the world was so mad as to go to war” for a second time in the lead-up to the Second World War. However, both during and after the war Jordan received deserved accolades for his concern for the welfare of New Zealand servicemen and women stationed in Britain.

The building in Hania Street has been through several iterations since then, and since 1996 has been home to Te Whare Tipu, a maternal, child, and adolescent mental health service. It is currently owned by The Street City Church with offices and seminar rooms available for hire, accommodating up to 90 in the biggest room, and 25 in a smaller one. The bowling green that was opened with great pomp and ceremony in 1944 is now a carpark at the front of the building.

Natural light in Dunedin

Meanwhile a new occupation centre in Anzac Avenue in Dunedin was being built. The Dunedin committee already operated a factory at 182 Rattray Street and a retail shop at 2-11 George Street, both of which were staffed by “disabled men of the last war and men from the present war who are receiving training”. The new centre, much larger in scale, was erected “to enable the League to accommodate the increasing number of men who will receive training to equip them to re-enter civil life”.(**28**)

The *Evening Star* reported on the laying of the foundation stone on 11 September 1943:

> Foundation stone laid – ceremony on Anzac Avenue
>
> The laying of the foundation stone of the Occupation Training Centre in Anzac Avenue was performed this morning by the Prime Minister (the Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser) before a representative gathering of citizens. Associated with the Prime Minister on the platform were the Mayor and Mayoress (Mr and Mrs A. H. Allen), the heads of the three fighting services, and a number of officials.

The project was a huge undertaking, with:

> … a central block containing offices, show room, storeroom, despatch room, and cafeteria. The other buildings will comprise seven workshops and boiler house for the heating and dust

extraction plants. The ground, which is of a total area of 2 acres 3 roods 22 poles [sic], will be laid out in ornamental lawns, flower beds, and decorative shrubs. There will also be a bowling green, the cost of which is being provided by the Dunedin Bowling Centre. ... [For] maximum sunshine, as much window space as possible will be provided, and the whole lay-out will be such as to provide bright and cheerful surroundings to help in the restoration of health to the ex-servicemen.

The picture of afternoon tea-time at the Christchurch Training Centre gives an idea of the numbers of men in training in the 1940s. There are at least 45 men visible in the picture, crammed quite closely around three long tables, sitting on fold-up chairs. Some are in overalls, some in shirts and ties, waistcoats, and suit jackets. They all have mugs in front of them, and one has a tin lunchbox. One man, near the front, has a cigarette in his mouth.

Afternoon tea break at the Christchurch Training Centre, 1940s.(29)

Farm training at Milson

A farm of 58 acres was acquired at Milson, Palmerston North, and grants were made for the milking sheds, piggeries, fowl houses, and the purchase of stock. Extensive market gardens and flower beds were planted. There was a homestead, and huts were provided for the accommodation of single men, all with the intention of providing for those who desired training in light outdoor occupations.

Community support

There was a wealth of support for the returning servicemen, and community groups like the Bowling Club in Dunedin were keen to contribute to the work of the League.

A wide variety of training and work was available to the trainees. The League's office bearers often spoke at meetings of various professional bodies, which led to the introduction of a range of training into the centres. An example is the watchmakers of the Wellington Province, reported by the *Evening Post* in April 1944.

At a meeting involving 98 percent of the trade from the area, two matters were discussed:

> ... the decision to form a Wellington watchmakers' association with the object of obtaining registration and protection of the industry on a national basis, and
>
> ... the best method of assisting the rehabilitation of disabled servicemen in regard to training them as watchmakers.(**30**)

The meeting was addressed by Bill Leadley, and an advisory committee was appointed to place the proposals before the Rehabilitation Board.

Watchmaking became one of the occupations taught at the Wellington training centre.

In 1949, the League Dominion president, was quoted as saying that "the old idea that persons who have suffered disablement through war wounds, accidents, sickness or any other cause are only capable of performing work of minor skill and importance has become outdated by the remarkable achievements resulting from the scientific training of the disabled in every progressive country which has undertaken such training". This kind of thinking about the capability of disabled people

to learn and achieve despite their impairments may not have come about without the wars of the early 20th century, and the subsequent need to rehabilitate the returning wounded soldiers. However, it was still quite a few years before the same opportunities were afforded to those disabled people who were not returning from the front.

Administration in 1949

In 1949, the Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League had a Dominion headquarters and branch committees in Christchurch, Hawke's Bay, Dunedin, Invercargill, Auckland, and Wellington, as well as a committee for the training farm at Milson. Each branch committee was delegated the power to conduct its own operations and had a chief executive officer employed by the League headquarters.

Work by members of the headquarters, branch committees, and farm advisory committee was entirely voluntary. In 1949, there was a president and vice-president and 23 other committee members in the national body. Three members, including the president, Colonel J Murphy OBE JP, were former military men, and 14 held awards or titles, or were members of professional organisations. The service awards, for chivalry and/or meritorious or long service, included OBE (Order of the British Empire), VD (Volunteers Officers' Decoration), DSO (Distinguished Service Order), and MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire). A number were Justices of the Peace, and some were doctors.

The number of members on the branch committees ranged from 13 to 17, and many were similarly decorated.

The role of the chief executive officer in the local branches was crucial. Leadley wrote that as well as managing the workings, supervising the field officers and instructors, and all manner of other tasks to make the system work, "the chief executive officer is the guide, philosopher and friend of the trainees and employees".

Each branch had a field officer, who visited every serviceman in the area who had returned 40 percent or more disabled, to talk to them about their pre-war work experience and their interests and aspirations and try to work out the best course of training and action for them.

Instructors, mostly ex-servicemen with long experience of their

trade, were employed to pass on their skills to the trainees. Leadley wrote that not only were they supremely competent in their fields of expertise, but they were men who were "imbued with the 'spirit of the League' in their desire to be of service to the disabled".

Trainees received a minimum pay rate of 6 pounds 5 shillings per week during the training period, which generally lasted from one to three years, depending on the course. Trainees' wages were subsidised by the Government on a sliding scale during the training period and the pay received did not affect their pension. At the end of the course, they received a certificate and assistance to find work or set up in business. Contact was maintained for at least 12 months afterwards.

Those who were unable to be absorbed into private industry were given permanent employment by the League under sheltered conditions at award rates of pay. The League aimed to keep them fully employed, including men who were "75 to 100 percent disabled". If the men were unable to accept work at the training centres, they could work at home making products in their own time, and the League would purchase the goods and sell them through the shops. (**31**)

Each case was "dealt with on its merits with the object of giving efficient training to each individual within the limits of his physical ability and his capacity to absorb knowledge and skill".

The Dominion headquarters had a number of sub-committees, including a headquarters management committee, an Artificial Limb board of management, a trade training committee, and a headquarters farm management committee.

The League was the national maker of artificial limbs and appliances until 1969, when it created the New Zealand Artificial Limb Board as a delegated board under their authority. This was the forerunner of the current New Zealand Artificial Limb Service, Peke Waihanga, which today operates as a Crown Entity, with a team of over 100 professionals providing technical, clinical, and rehabilitation services. (**32**)

Other instances of the League providing a service to New Zealanders included a specially designed weaving loom, created by a returned soldier (and inventor) in the Christchurch Training Centre for the Dunedin branch of the then Crippled Children's Society, to enable

clients of the Society to learn how to weave and produce woven products.

Training in a wide range of occupations was offered in the League workshops, including furniture restoration, French polishing, upholstery, motor car upholstery, and shop salesmen. Some were less common, such as mop manufacture in Auckland, and umbrella manufacture in Dunedin. Surgical boots were made in Auckland and Napier.

In 1949, four years after the League's training programme began, 383 soldiers had finished training and been placed in private employment or set up in their own businesses, and 376 were being trained or employed by the League.

Leadley was keen to point out that the success of the venture was due in the largest part to the willingness and attitude of the trainees, saying that "success could not have been achieved without the cooperation and the desire to learn on the part of the trainees themselves".(**33**)

The 1950s and 1960s

While the years from 1940 to 1949 were a very positive time of growth and development for the League, the following two decades were to be a time of change and some turmoil. The League had had a meteoric rise with an abundance of support and resourcing from the Government and the community alike, but in 1949, when Leadley wrote the document outlining the huge strides the League had made in rehabilitating returned soldiers, it was at its zenith.

By July 1950, there were rumours circulating that the Government had withdrawn assistance from the League, although Tom Macdonald, Minister of Rehabilitation, refuted the rumours, stating that "the League continues to receive free premises and free grants for plant and machinery in addition to the annual administration grant and training subsidies".(**34**)

Rehabilitation services for returned servicemen continued to make the headlines in local papers throughout 1950. For example, local branches of the RSA (by then the Returned Servicemen's Association) were being canvassed for their opinions on the establishment of a war veterans' home and whether it should be national or local, while the

Ashburton branch of the League was proposing to set up a shop to sell goods made by disabled servicemen. It was also reported that the prospects of returned servicemen securing farms at an early date was "not very bright".(**35**)

By 1950, most of the returnees who were able to both undergo training and benefit from it sufficiently to become independent had already moved on. In October 1950, a proposal to reduce the work of the Government's Rehabilitation Department was discussed in Parliament, and it was pointed out that the number of trainees had significantly reduced in most centres around the country.

One solution discussed was to extend the opportunities offered by the training centres to disabled civilians. It was not supported by the rehabilitation minister, who expressed concern that "... if the training of disabled civilians were undertaken difficulties would be created for ex-servicemen. ... Macdonald said that the interests of ex-servicemen had been preserved to the full and could best be met by the League concentrating on their training".(**36**) Macdonald was an ex-army man himself, having served in 1918 in the Middle East with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. He enlisted again as a private in 1940, not long after he had won a seat in Parliament in the New Zealand National Party in Mataura in 1938.

MacDonald was not alone in his reluctance to preserve the country's rehabilitation services by opening them up to the general disability population. Although in late 1950 there were 1,000 returned soldiers still undergoing treatment in hospitals who hadn't yet had training, an editorial in the *Gisborne Herald* postulated that the main issues that remained were housing assistance and the need for farms (for which 4,000 men were waiting). The writer proposed that the need for a separate department for rehabilitation of returned servicemen was over, and strongly believed that civilian casualties should be "the function of industry, not the general taxpayer".(**37**)

By then the assisted immigration scheme, started in 1947, was beginning to provide a faster, more cost-effective solution to the need for a labour force. Between 1950 and 1968, over 72,000 healthy, fit, often skilled, migrants from Britain alone were brought out to New Zealand. In return for their passage, they agreed to work for two years in a job allocated to them by the Labour Department. A further 6,000 came from the Netherlands, and another 1,300 from other (mostly European) countries.(**38**)

The need to train and assist the remaining returned soldiers, or any disabled person, became less of a priority as more immigrants arrived, and memories of the war began to fade in the collective consciousness.

Navigating change

The League had quickly become an institution in New Zealand, providing employment and training opportunities in local communities and gaining huge support from both central government and local groups.

Large numbers of returnees had at least some contact with the League services; their families and communities knew of the good works done during and after the war and were keen to support the organisation.

Well-respected professionals and members of the business community, themselves often returned servicemen from one of the wars, took leading roles at both national and local levels, making decisions, networking among their colleagues and communities, and building the profile and success of the organisation.

It is likely this contributed to local activities continuing to develop for some years to come, regardless of what was being discussed in parliament or at the League's Dominion headquarters.

Snapshots from the meetings of the Invercargill branch committee demonstrate the concerns of the local committees around the country as they navigated (and at times ignored) the changes and challenges of the 1960s.(**39**)

Numbers of returned soldiers who required the services were falling, as were the numbers of skilled workers to carry out the contracts the branch relied upon for financial security. The buildings and services needed to be maintained to provide for those that remained, but there was less and less support for repairing the buildings and obtaining stock, and it was harder to recruit staff. Government financial support reduced as it became more difficult to justify maintaining state funding. The branch grappled with the need to find other ventures to keep the business afloat with the skills (or lack of skills) of the remaining trainees.

The profile and visibility of the League in the community also declined, but some feared these would decline even further if disabled citizens

were included. The fact that its clients were returned servicemen was considered to be the cornerstone of community support for the League.

In addition, some found it difficult to accept that a venture that had provided so much hope and optimism for so many (committee members, staff, trainees, and community alike) was no longer a priority for the Government or wider community.

By 1959, 14 years after the end of the Second World War, rehabilitation of returning soldiers was a matter of concern only for those most immediately affected. The goodwill and support that made the League the best place to purchase new furniture or basketry was also fading. Still, the committee members diligently sought other ways to keep the business afloat.

Snapshots from the Invercargill branch committee minutes

1956: The seven members of the Invercargill branch committee continued to meet monthly, as did their finance and works committee.

In September, a total of £1,652 was spent by the branch to make purchases from 59 businesses, a typical monthly spend.

In November, a new government representative from Christchurch attended the meeting, and promised that a representative based in Dunedin would attend meetings as often as possible going forward.

1957: The president was re-elected, and funds were allocated for members to attend a conference.

In May, the first sense of what was to come occurred in a discussion about a letter from headquarters about disposing of the lathe and drilling machine (presumably due to downsizing of some of the branch activities); however, the committee elected to retain the lathe as it would be useful for cabinetmaking and in the basket-making department. (It was later also earmarked for use in the blacksmith shop.)

In July, the proposed upgrading of the building and workshops was the subject of the meeting.

There seemed to be no real sense of reducing need or imperative to change until November that year, when one of the delegates to the

national council "particularly stressed the recommendations dealing with disabled citizens and it was hoped that a better arrangement for selection of the persons concerned would eventuate".

1958: In May, two disabled civilians were placed on trial in the basket-making department, youths who were to be referred to the district panel for a decision after a fair trial.

In August, a Special General Meeting was held about improving the finances of the branch.

Over these months a substantial drop in shop revenue was a repeated concern, and there were problems getting the renovation of the showroom completed. It appears that headquarters helped with that, and the branch promised to make every effort to increase turnover and make sure that best use was made of its facilities.

1959: In February, there were problems finding someone to manage the showroom, but later that month a person was appointed.

1960: In April, three civilian trainees had been assessed, and two youths were considered to be unsuitable for training and therefore "not to be persevered with".

The third, a girl, was to be referred to the Social Security Department to be trained in sewing outside the League until she was "sufficiently proficient to enable her to accept sheltered employment with the League".

Although one of the youths was subsequently retained, and the other two trainees left of their own accord, this discussion illustrates the struggles of having to keep producing quality goods in order to maintain what business remained.

While there had been scores of returned soldiers coming through the training workshops it had been possible to keep production levels up, despite three years barely being enough time to fully train some of them.

Disabled civilians might need longer still in training because "... they have been well catered for in the past with no need to make any physical effort for their own comfort". Hence, although "they are happy people ... they do not recognise responsibility".

1962: By November, possible closure of the Invercargill branch was on the agenda, following ongoing issues with building, stock, and finances throughout the previous months, with no great progress on solving

these issues. The committee thought it could overcome these problems by bringing in new ventures such as dancing shoes (eventually rejected) and printing. In December, the decision was taken to close the cabinet-making department.

1963: In August, dissatisfaction was expressed following a visit to the national headquarters. It seems that little if any help or support was forthcoming, and the delegate said, "if anything was required to further the successful prosecution [meaning continuation] of this branch, it would have to come from within the branch itself."

1964: There was a brief improvement early in the year, when finances seem to be on a more even keel, some endeavours had been dropped, and items in the shop were now more saleable.

The League's dominion president attended a meeting of the Invercargill branch committee and acknowledged the "steady change in the class of personnel employed in the League centres, and in the nature of work undertaken". Complimentary remarks were made about the general improvement in the Invercargill branch; however, another representative of the dominion council spoke about the need to justify the annual government grant of £13,000, signalling that it was not certain that it would continue.

In mid-1964, funds were centralised, and branches were asked to submit any surplus cash at the end of each month to headquarters. As Invercargill seldom had any surplus funds, it was not able to contribute.

1965: News came that the administration grant from the Government had decreased, and branches around the country were experiencing a lack of finance.

1967: The Invercargill branch was poised to take over Auckland's mop-making venture as Auckland was finding space an issue, but a proposed reorganisation of the League put that endeavour on hold. Invercargill opposed the reorganisation and commented that the only acceptable name change was the "Disabled Servicemen's and Civilians Re-establishment League", indicating a strong preference for maintaining 'servicemen' in the name and the image.

Throughout 1967 and 1968, the committee continued to explore options for employment and income-generating activities. One of these was paua shell jewellery which had been very successful in Wellington, but by then Wellington was having difficulty getting experienced workmen, so the Invercargill committee decided not to attempt it.

A member of the committee visited Hong Kong and discovered that the Hong Kong Association for Blind Citizens had some success with chalk making, which inspired the committee to follow suit. For several months the committee was preoccupied with the arrival of the chalk machine from Hong Kong, problems getting it into the country, paying the duty, and, when it finally arrived, getting the machine to work.

1969: In February 1969, the chalk machine was at last working, a new shop lease had been obtained after some months of wrangling – and plans for the reorganisation were received from headquarters.

In March 1969, a Special General Meeting was held to elect a member of the current committee to the new branch committee being established as result of the reorganisation of the League. The current chairman was duly elected.

In May that same year, an invitation was received from the Australian Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled for members to attend a conference, and it was thought that "as the League would be entering a broader field of rehabilitation in the future" it would be of benefit for the manager to attend.

A new mission on the horizon

When the soldiers who served in the Great War returned home, the government of the day introduced several measures to help them resettle into the country and into productive lives, including war pensions, parcels of land, and a certain amount of retraining for those who had acquired disabilities that affected their ability to work. It was the first time a vocational training service had been offered for disabled people in New Zealand.

It wasn't quite enough, and it was over too soon, with the result that a new body was established, funded for the most part by government but run by volunteers, many of whom were also returnees from the front – another first for New Zealand, in that it was run by returned soldiers for returned soldiers, an early example of self-determination in service delivery.

By the time the soldiers returned from the Second World War, the Government understood a great deal more about what was required to rehabilitate disabled soldiers, although the term rehabilitation wasn't commonly used until a few years later. A full vocational package was

put in place, again run by volunteer committees in the League.

These experiences brought about a sea change in the country's mindset. For the first time there was an acceptance of the right of disabled people to aspire to working and providing for themselves and their families, and importantly, a new understanding of what could be achieved with the right support.

It took time for that changed understanding to be extended to those whose disabilities were not acquired through service in the war. It was hampered by shifting economic priorities, and, in part, by the fact that the people who had been so dedicated and effective in advocating for the services were driven by a determination to help the men who had served alongside them in battle.

Although the original intention was to help a limited group, by the end of this period, the lessons learnt about treatment and rehabilitation were beginning to be applied to those with congenital disabilities, or disabilities acquired through accident and other injury.

It would be up to a new organisation, and to some extent a new generation, to carry it forward and make it a reality.

Section two: Rehabilitating disabled New Zealanders

Although the need to change the Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League's training centres was largely due to a decreasing need for soldier re-establishment, there was also a shift in attitude taking place in New Zealand and around the world.

The soldiers returning from both wars, and their ability to be rehabilitated, went a long way to dispel "assumptions that disability indicated inferiority and likely moral degeneracy" because they "exemplified the eugenic ideal of fighting for the empire, and their impairment couldn't therefore be linked with immorality or blamed on faulty genes".(40)

Prior to the First World War, there was little in the way of services to help disabled people get jobs. Returning soldiers showed that disabled people could overcome their impairments and live productive lives, and once the need for soldier re-establishment reduced, the focus turned to other disabled people.

It gave rise to the new concept of rehabilitation – to be made fit again – which became strongly linked with employment, as in the development of the League, particularly after the Second World War.

The first Labour Government (1935–1949) had introduced free hospital treatment, and in 1936 an invalids' pension was introduced. In 1938 the Social Security Act provided disability support and pensions, but only a small proportion of the eligible population received them because of the strict criteria.

In 1939, the "rights to education for every child" were asserted by the Director General of Education, Dr Beeby, and the Minister of Education, Peter Fraser, but this did not make schooling compulsory for disabled children who, depending on their disability, tended to be sent away to residential schools such as Otekaike (Campbell Park School) near Oamaru, or Salisbury near Richmond. Many were placed in psychopaedic institutions like Templeton Farm Mental Deficiency Colony, Braemar (Nelson), Kimberley (Levin), and Mangere (Auckland), which came into being after the 1928 Mental Defectives Amendment Act was passed.(**41**)

Although they came under the auspices of health, these institutions aimed to provide vocational training for and limited social rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities "to make them socially and economically productive citizens".

In 1949, the Intellectually Handicapped Children's Parents Association was founded by Hal and Margaret Anyon, Wellington parents of a son with Down Syndrome, who wanted their son to have an education, employment, and a home in the community. At that time children with intellectual impairment were among those least likely to access education, and were often sent to institutional care.(**42**)

In the 1950s, "parents of children with intellectual disability in Wellington had a long battle to win the right to use a couple of rooms in the old Basin Reserve stand as a temporary educational facility – at that time education for children with intellectual disability wasn't seen as necessary".(**43**)

In 1954, the National Civilian Rehabilitation Committee was established, and the inclusion of disabled civilians was recommended as a solution to the reducing numbers of returned soldiers who needed the service.(**44**) It was still a new concept, and it was another 14 years before the change was fully implemented.

In the meantime, the former soldiers and other committee members of the Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League grappled with a new concept – that civilians born with disabilities were equally deserving of, and able to benefit from, the training and wrap-around support offered to soldiers in the workshops. It was not only a new thought for them, it was new to society in general.

There was little in the way of financial support for disabled people in 1954, and even less in terms of any special training opportunities, because there was no expectation that they could, or would want to, train or be gainfully employed.

By the 1960s, New Zealand, along with the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia had begun to adopt the philosophy of normalisation, which was soon seen as a solution to scandals related to patient over-crowding, patient abuse and neglect, and the development of abnormal behavioural patterns among intellectually disabled people in state institutions.(**45**)

Demand from parents for training and education for their disabled children, the concept of normalisation being subscribed to by the western world, and the proof that returning soldiers with disabilities could be rehabilitated, all contributed to a strong impetus to change the function of the League to be more inclusive.

Like any institution, change takes time, and in this case did not happen officially until April 1969, with a change of name and organisational arrangements.

Disabled Re-establishment League 1969

The change of the League's name to the Disabled Re-establishment League in 1969 acknowledged the inclusion of disabled civilians by dropping the word 'soldiers', but keeping the word 're-establishment' was a definite nod to where the League had come from, and its original purpose. It was a compromise, reflecting a reluctance on the part of the League's leaders to drop the association with the returning soldiers which they feared would lead to a loss of community support and make the League less effective.

In 1942, the League had been charged with undertaking "the training

and re-establishment of the disabled servicemen of the 1939–1945 war"; in 1969, it was again appointed an agent of government, this time to "carry out the policy of Government in relation to the assessment, rehabilitation, training, sheltered employment and placement of disabled persons, both ex-servicemen and civilians".(**46**)

The organisation was to "establish centres and to maintain such assessment units, workshops and other facilities as may be necessary to carry out its functions".

The League was also expected to "report at such time as it shall deem expedient to the Minister on any matters relating to the rehabilitation and employment of the disabled" ('the Minister' being the Minister of Social Security or any other Minister "charged with responsibility for the rehabilitation and employment of the disabled").

Employment was very much part of the rhetoric, and the League was to act as an expert adviser and advocate to government in this area.

The RSA would continue to have a presence (two members) on the League's board of management, along with four representatives nominated by employer bodies – the NZ Federation of Labour, the NZ Employers' Federation, and the NZ Manufacturers' Federation. Three government departments (Health, Labour, and Social Security) were represented, and one member was nominated by the district committees.

Of note, for the first time two members were appointed by the Minister of Social Security as representatives of disabled persons. It's not clear whether they were disabled persons themselves, but the move reflects an intention to give disabled persons a voice on the board of management.

The League was expected to set up a district committee when a new centre was set up in any area.

District committees had a similar make-up to the national body, with one important difference. They had only one member from each of the RSA and the federations of labour, employers, and manufacturers, three members from the Departments of Health, Labour, and Social Security, and no fewer than four members nominated by the Minister as representatives of disabled persons.

District committees were to control the general servicing of the centre in accordance with the policy of the board "and to act in an advisory capacity to the Board on matters relating to the disabled

within that district".

The board could appoint a general secretary and other officers as it saw fit, and particularly a chief rehabilitation officer and a chief medical officer.

The district rehabilitation centres that had been set up to rehabilitate returned servicemen would now be reorganised to provide assessment units and training services as needed in the region. Training might include short courses principally to cover work habits, experience, and endurance, and longer courses of vocational training in specific trades or occupations. Districts could also provide sheltered employment and occupational workshops, and placement and follow-up services.

Each district was to have a district manager and, "as a first step", the personnel would include a psychologist and a consultant psychiatrist, both on a salary or sessional basis, an occupational therapist, a social worker. and other specialist services as required.

There would be a district rehabilitation officer to implement the training programme and assessment units and a district medical officer as an advisor on all medical aspects of rehabilitation and assessment.

In terms of rehabilitative services for disabled people, this was a move from very little being available to something much bigger. There was now the potential to provide a comprehensive programme, covering all aspects of assessment, training, and vocational assistance, along with work brokerage in the form of the placement and follow-up service. The involvement of a range of medical specialist services and a social worker shows the lessons learnt by government and the League from the experiences of the First and Second World Wars. In the case of the First World War, returnees hadn't been offered a full range of services, and it was assumed that they would simply get better and get on with life with minimal assistance, resulting in a need for some sort of intervention that lingered on for over a decade. Returnees from the Second World War were able to access more comprehensive assistance and training, and as a result most were more successfully rehabilitated and re-established in a shorter time.

Setting up the new service shows an understanding of what might be needed for successful outcomes for the wider disabled population which, along with returned soldiers who were 40 percent or more

disabled, now included civilians who were considered to be 50 percent or more disabled.(**47**)

Societal change in the early 1970s

In the early 1970s, the Government's approach to services for disabled people was becoming more community- and rights-based, part of a growing worldwide recognition that disabled people had rights, particularly to education, employment and a 'normal' life.(**48**) Following the 1972 Royal Commission into Psychopaedic Hospitals, government funds were increasingly channelled into building small residential facilities rather than large institutions.

A principle of entitlement was established through the new Accident Compensation Act 1972, that is, people whose impairment was caused by injury through accident were now able to receive assistance on an individual entitlement basis. Although the Act attracted international praise as an extremely advanced piece of social legislation, people with congenital disabilities and illnesses were excluded from the provision of income maintenance and rehabilitation services.

There was increasing recognition of the need for disabled people to have access to a wide range of community-based support, and in 1975 the Disabled Persons Community Welfare Act gave disabled people who were not claimants through the Accident Compensation Commission (ACC) access to services to help them stay in the community.

There was also increasing recognition of the need for disabled people to have opportunities for mainstream employment. The Industrial Relations Act 1973 established the under-rate workers' permit. This enabled a person with an impairment to work in the open labour market and receive a wage that matched their productivity.

Rehabilitation League NZ – the first five years

A mere five years after its reincarnation as the Disabled Re-establishment League, the League changed its name again, signalling the reducing focus on re-establishment of soldiers in favour of its new role of providing assessment, training, and preparation of disabled New Zealanders for employment.

The Rehabilitation League NZ (Incorporated), so named in 1974, was poised to play a key role in putting into practice the changing attitudes towards, and aspirations for, disabled people expressed in the raft of legislation in the early 1970s.

Development of new facilities and relationships

Although the beleaguered Invercargill centre closed in 1974 with the remaining people being transferred to the new multi-agency Southland Enterprises, in 1975 a new centre was being planned for Napier. In Wellington, extensive building alterations were carried out "to accommodate the assessment unit and administration staff", as well as external work to upgrade "the bowling area to establish outdoor training facilities, additional parking, and eventually, it is hoped, a gymnastic and swimming pool complex for the better assessment and therapy for clients". Development of buildings and stock continued through to 1980, and both Napier and Wellington building projects were completed by then.(**49**)

In 1975, the Rehabilitation League worked in close co-operation with the recently formed ACC, and was engaged in appointing rehabilitation officers to hospitals. The League was also working closely with the "special employment officers of the Department of Labour" – in fact, accommodation was being made for them to be housed at the League's branch in Auckland.

New clients

The number of clients 'handled' since 1970 reached the 2,000 mark in 1974, with an increase of 10 percent on the previous year to 555 in the year ended March 1975.

The placement of 245 persons in employment was seen as not much of an increase on the previous year, but it was "a difficult employment market".

A breakdown of clients shows that nearly 200 of the 555 were men aged 24 or under. Around 64 percent of the total 183 women were categorised as having a 'mental' handicap as opposed to physical/ medical or other. Only 44 percent of the men fell into this category.

In 1966 women made up only 27 percent of the New Zealand workforce, and 41 percent of employed women were married. Although legislation required the introduction of equal pay for equal work in the public service (1960) and the private sector (1972), women's earnings and careers were often still treated as secondary to those of men, and to domestic responsibilities.(**50**) It's possible that disabled women were less likely than disabled men to seek and gain employment assistance.

It appears that the Department of Labour acted as a referral agency at the time, and it was noted that "preliminary assessment included 20 hard core unemployed and disabled referred by the Labour department".

By 1980, the numbers had increased astronomically, and a total of 4,651 persons were successfully placed into permanent full-time work in the 12-month period "in spite of the difficult employment situation and relatively high unemployment", a massive increase from the 245 in 1975. A total of 11,822 persons were provided with assistance.

Profile: Barry de Geest

Workbridge board member Barry de Geest attended the Rehabilitation League in the 1970s.(51)

De Geest was born in Oamaru in the early 1960s, a thalidomide baby, with no arms and very short legs. His mother took no heed of advice (common at the time) to go away and forget about him and have another baby. Instead, she took the new baby home and set about raising him as she did her other children, with chores to do, attending the same school as his siblings, and enjoying the usual summer holiday activities.

De Geest counts himself lucky to have pre-dated special schools and special classes and to have been educated in normal classrooms with his peers. It gave him a solid grounding in living a 'normal' life and prepared him for realising his aspirations of getting a good job to support himself and live a good life.

Nevertheless, by the time he was a teenager, he says he hated school and got into trouble a lot because he was bored. His father said he had to stay and get qualifications, but a social worker from the Crippled Children's Society (CCS) told him about a place in Dunedin called the Rehabilitation (Rehab) League which could help him train to get a job.

He applied, was accepted, and left school (and home) when he was 17 to 18 years old. The League found a place for him to live with someone who could help him. The first thing they did was work out what his best employment fit would be. He found the staff fabulous; they really cared and wanted people to achieve something. His first job was making belts, but while he was there they started up a basic bookkeeping course in a small room at the end of the corridor. Writing by holding his pen in his mouth, De Geest learned about cashflows and ledgers, and all the basics of how to run an accounting system.

After six months the League staff felt he had learned everything they could teach him.

It was a worrying time as he wasn't sure what he was going to do and how he would cope, but the staff at the League were fantastic, he says. "It was uplifting to do something that was practical. And to have people who had expectations of you. I was sad when [the League] closed down."

After that he “drifted around a bit and tried some different options” until he got a job doing the books for an aluminium company in Oamaru, where he set up a system of receipt books and order forms. It was the first time the books had balanced.

His next job was in Palmerston North, where he worked for the Rehab Centre. That started a series of jobs in disability organisations, including Ready Willing and Able, the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), and the Wellington Disability Resource Centre. Again, that organisation was in financial strife and De Geest was able to put the finances in order.

After working for CCS in Palmerston North and Auckland, he teamed up with a business partner to set up the Renaissance Group in 2001, supporting disabled people to become independent – to learn to budget, cook, and find places to live, and work towards reaching their career aspirations.

De Geest feels that in the years since the Rehab League closed, disability services have gone backwards. He feels that a lot of the disability funding goes to residential care organisations and there is still a charity and conscience-absolving element to funding distribution, and expectations still need to be re-tuned. Disabled people need to be seen as, and expected to be, productive members of society.

People ask him what has driven him and he says he’s driven by money so that he can live a good life. Years ago, De Geest decided he wanted to one day own his own home and his own car, be married, and have a family. He’s achieved all of that and attributes much of it to what he learnt at the Rehab League. It would have taken a lot longer without it, he says, to become the person he is today, with the skills he has, and to have the life he has been able to live.

As the chief executive and director of Renaissance Group, De Geest leads an organisation that provides opportunities for disabled people with high needs and their families to have choice and control about where they live, who they live with, and how they are supported. As well as being a proud single Dad, a professional business consultant and public speaker and an advocate for the rights of disabled people, he a member on and advisor to numerous boards and councils, including the Workbridge board.

Operations

In 1975, there were centres in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Napier. At most branches there was still “an insufficient variety of suitable activities for work experience”.

Christchurch and Wellington had introduced light metalwork and engineering; Wellington had phased out its occupational department and was establishing an assembly department.

Each branch employed remedial teachers and physical therapists.

Four vehicles were purchased and fitted out to transport disabled clients, and some branches provided housing for clients from out of town.

A survey of clients had shown that some were spending nearly all of their rehabilitation allowance on transport to and from the centre, so submissions were made to the Social Welfare Department, and accepted (presumably for extra assistance for transport costs).

The president noted in the 1975 annual report that developing an effective assessment method was an ongoing endeavour, and coming to grips with the severe, permanent limitations encountered was not an easy task. “The ability of the rehabilitation staff to constantly renew their own feelings of confidence, and transmit those feelings to their clients and colleagues will be largely responsible for future successful rehabilitation services.”

From about 1969, the League shops that had initially been the public face of the organisation and the disabled makers of the goods, were no longer an outlet for goods manufactured by disabled workers, but solely souvenir retail outlets, with goods bought in from wholesalers as required. The shop accounts were being separated off from the general accounts, as recommended by the Government. The accumulated estimated shop profits were $226,473.

Over the next few years, the shops would gradually be closed, for example the Dunedin shop closed in 1980, and the assets of the shop account were used to form the Rehabilitation Welfare Trust.

That year, 1980, Wellington’s Willis street shop had sales of $166,087, an increase of $11,000, “quite good considering the lack of passenger vessels visiting Wellington and the future prospect is not encouraging”. This is probably a reference to the demise of international travel by large passenger liners, rather than cruise ships,

because by the early seventies it was becoming cheaper to travel internationally by air than by sea.

Public support lacking

As feared by the League's leadership five years previously, before the change of name and focus, lack of public awareness of the League and its activities had become an issue, and there was a plan to contract an advertising agency to try to engage the support of the public at large.

Whether this was due to the change away from returned soldiers is not certain, but it is likely that it would have happened anyway, given that the wars and their legacy were already diminishing in the public consciousness. Anzac Day parades, once the scene of an outpouring of support for returned soldiers and the defence force, became caught up in the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, especially around issues of peace and women's rights, and became "either the scene of protests or largely ignored by the public".(**52**)

Committee matters

In 1980, the make-up of the committee still included decorated men, such as the chairman Mr K Mills MBE, and deputy Sir Hamilton Mitchell KBE, but by that time, the 'old guard' was retiring. James Read, who had steered the Invercargill Committee through the trials and tribulations of the 1950s and 1960s, retired from the Committee in 1974. In 1979, Mr S G Common retired from the Christchurch Committee, "after 33 years faithful service, having started in 1946".

A(nother) new organisational structure was put in place, with changes of role titles.

The president noted that in the 1980 annual report that board members, committee members and League staff participated and contributed to community organisations and committees, and had been involved in establishing a secretariat to service the International Year of Disabled Persons coming up in 1981.

A climate of change

Throughout the period from 1970 to 1990, there was "a growing push by disabled people to dump old custodial philosophies of segregation and institutionalisation, toward building a new view of integration, participation and self-determination by disabled people themselves". (**53**)

In the early 1970s, grassroots organisations of disabled people were gathering strength and making themselves known by putting forward submissions to the likes of the 1972 Royal Commission on Social Security; as previously noted, the introduction of the Accident Compensation scheme and the subsequent Disabled Persons Community Welfare Act were tangible signs of the change in societal attitudes and of the expectations of disabled people.

Rehabilitation International Conference, 1980, Winnipeg

An overseas event which had an impact in New Zealand was a walkout of disabled people at the 1980 Winnipeg conference of Rehabilitation International in protest against "a display of paternalistic control by able-bodied bureaucrats over the affairs of disabled people". The protest led to voting and representation of disabled people on the Rehabilitation International governing body.

Bill Madren, who was head of the Rehabilitation League NZ at the time, was at that Winnipeg conference and witnessed the walkout. He took on board the message that disabled people viewed themselves as equal partners in their own rehabilitation.

International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) 1981

In 1976, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). It called for a plan of action at national, regional, and international levels, emphasising equalisation of opportunities, rehabilitation, and prevention of disabilities.(**54**)

The theme of IYDP was "full participation and equality", defined as the right of persons with disabilities to take part fully in the life and

development of their societies, enjoy living conditions equal to those of other citizens, and have an equal share in improved conditions resulting from socio-economic development.

Other objectives of IYDP included increasing public awareness, understanding and acceptance of persons with disabilities and encouraging persons with disabilities to form organisations through which they could express their views and promote action to improve their situation.

In New Zealand, it was headlined by the first-ever telethon for disabled people, which raised nearly $6 million. It gave rise to projects like Total Mobility and Dial a Ride, as well as other initiatives aimed at integrating disabled people into society with a view to participation in the design of services for disabled people and partnership in their delivery.

Both the Winnipeg event and IYDP served to strengthen and give impetus to the concept of normalisation for people with learning disabilities (intellectual impairment) which had started and spread throughout the 1970s and 1980s – a model that emphasises the right to be integrated into the community, and to have services that enable participation in 'normal' age-appropriate activities in society.

Disabled Persons' Assembly NZ

A decade or more before the Winnipeg incident, a small group of people in New Zealand had begun to plan for a pan-disability representative body. The group included J B Munro, then head of IHC, and Quentin Angus, a lawyer with cerebral palsy. Their work and advocacy ultimately led to the formation of the Disabled Persons' Assembly NZ in 1983. Its philosophy was one of enabling disabled people to take charge of their own affairs alongside government and service agency representatives.(**55**)

Meanwhile, members of the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind were going through their own emancipation journey, documented by Peter Beatson in his book *The cost of blindness*, published in 1987.(**56**) This growing sense of self-determination was reflected in a seemingly minor change of name that occurred in 2003, when the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind became the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, recognising its "status as a body that is controlled primarily by, and operates for the benefit of, people who are blind and vision impaired".(**57**)

At the same time, parents were fighting for mainstreaming in schools, and by 1986 the expectation was growing that disabled pre-schoolers should be able to attend early childhood centres along with their peers.

State of the League from 1985

The Rehabilitation League meanwhile was undergoing further changes as it adapted to the differing needs of its clients.

In the year ended March 1985, there was an increase in funds, including a grant for the hostels provided in the Hawkes Bay for people who needed to stay overnight to complete their assessment and training.

A total of 17,893 people received assistance from one of more of the services, and 4,893 successfully moved into permanent full-time employment during the year.

The Wellington and Christchurch shops closed, although the Auckland and Napier shops were going strong.

A range of special courses had been designed to help increasing numbers presenting with personal development problems, and in line with the increasing use of computing in the labour market, microcomputers had been purchased for each centre.

The president advised of a trend towards clients requiring far more specialised social skills and remedial educational programmes before they could be exposed to vocational activities, which often meant they needed to remain in the centres for a longer period of time.

Some saw the trend towards clients needing more specialised help as being due to new government schemes introduced to tackle rising unemployment in the late 1970s, including Steps and the Young Persons Training Programme. Until 1978, the League was the only place where job training and confidence-building skills could be obtained. After that, it came into competition with the Department of Labour schemes which offered award wages. As a result, the League sought referrals more aggressively, then found itself accepting more seriously disabled clients. Schizophrenia, drug addiction, brain damage, and spina bifida were some of the disabilities recorded.(**58**)

There was an assumption that disabled people, previously unable

to get into work without the help of the League, were able to gain employment on the new government schemes. If that were true, it was surely a good thing for the people concerned, and perhaps said more about the services provided by the League.

At the time, although the centre in Mt Albert in Auckland was described as an impressive building, with state-of-the-art equipment ("even a computer for the use of clients and staff"), and impressive professional teams for the assessment of clients, of the 130 clients enrolled there would often be as many as 20 absent. The assessment teams were busy, "but lathes and cutting-machines lie idle".(**59**)

The former Minister of Social Welfare, Venn Young (National Party), had started a review of the League in January 1984, but the outcomes weren't made public prior to the election later that year, at which time there was a change of government.

The assistant director of the Mt Albert centre, Mr D R Page, suggested a move towards concentration on assessment and evaluation was desirable, and also increasing the payments to clients. Mark Williams, writing for *New Outlook* in 1984, concluded that it was "now up to the League to find and define the real needs of the community if it is to survive".(**60**)

Three new ventures had started and were moving forward, including a horticultural block in Hawkes Bay, now well into its second growing season, and new centres in Manukau and Lower Hutt – but a halt had been called on any further plans pending the outcome of a rehabilitation review underway at the time.

1985 Review – the disabled person as partner

In the face of changing societal attitudes to the rights of disabled people, and the challenges the League was facing in providing for a changing cohort of clients, it was perhaps no surprise that the report presented to the League by the new Labour Government in 1985 proposed the restructuring of the League.

The restructure did not intend to change the basic functions of the League, which would continue to provide assessment, work experience, training, and work adjustment, but rather to "recognise its importance to the rehabilitation of the disabled and to give a more dynamic approach to its operations".

The proposed reorganisation aimed to:

- develop and implement effective policies
- recognise the special place of the League as a government agency providing assessment and work experience training relative to other welfare agencies
- make the League more able to influence as an agent of the government in the rehabilitation field, and
- ensure efficient and effective administration of resources.

Importantly, the fifth aim was to recognise that rehabilitation is a process that involves the disabled people themselves as part of that process.

Key changes to the make-up of the board of management were proposed, effectively reducing the input of employment-related bodies, such as the Department of Labour and the Employers' Federation, and limiting government representation to one department, Social Welfare. However, the RSA was viewed as a special case and "in view of its long and direct association with the League and the continued need for rehabilitation by servicemen from Malayan and Vietnam services", it was suggested that its representation may still be warranted.

Officials at the time recommended closer links to the other sheltered workshops and related training services for disabled people at the time, listing them as: "NZ Crippled Children's Society with its 12 workshops, the 26 independent workshop organisations and the New Zealand Society for the Intellectually Handicapped and its 88 adult centres."

The report stated that "in particular [the League's] technical expertise in assessment and individual programme planning could be more widely available to be of benefit in the provision of rehabilitation services generally" and that "the League should also have close links with hospitals and their medical and industrial units where they exist".

Significantly, the report noted that, "It is now generally recognised that the disabled person himself or herself is an important partner in the rehabilitation process. The inclusion of appropriate disabled people on the board of management would give greater sensitivity to the policy-making functions of the board." The recommended make-up of the board therefore included "two disabled persons appointed by the Minister of Social Welfare from at least four nominees made by the Disabled Persons Assembly Incorporated".

Although the League board membership had included "two members appointed by the Minister of Social Security as representatives of disabled persons" since 1969, it was never specified that they be disabled persons, nor was there a body named as the source of nominations.

During the years between 1970 and 1985, the demand had been growing stronger. The Winnipeg conference walk-out, IYDP, and the formation of the Disabled Persons' Assembly in 1983 were all part of a growing demand for representation and self-determination by disabled people.

The Government proposal of 1985 recognised both the need for disabled people to have a place on the governing board, and the newly-formed Disabled Persons' Assembly itself, as a voice of disabled people.

Difficult years – 1987 and 1988

During 1987 and 1988 there were considerable pressures on the League. As well as the uncertainty created by the ongoing reviews and restructure proposals, it was subject to pressures caused by the Government's shift in policy from job creation schemes to training to offset unemployment in the general population.

In 1985, the Training Assistance Programme was implemented, broadening the focus of training schemes from school leavers to unemployed adults and creating a much larger framework for training. It was further extended in 1987, with the institution of the ACCESS training scheme, under the control of 22 regional committees called Regional Employment and ACCESS councils (REACs).(**61**) The number of people on ACCESS training programmes increased from 212 in April 1987 to more than 10,000 in November 1987. This caused a drop-off in referrals from schools to the League in some branches, while other branches were working with REACs to provide resources and training expertise.

In some branches (Auckland in particular) there was a long delay between being referred to the service and starting. The length of the delay was seen as unacceptable by referral sources. It was possibly due to taking on more seriously disabled clients who stayed longer. The delay was thought to be another reason for the drop in referrals.

Nevertheless, 24.9 percent of those who started with the League

were placed in work, compared with 31 percent of Auckland ACCESS graduates who found employment after one month of training, and only 13 percent of ACCESS trainees in Horowhenua.(**62**) ACCESS trainees were from the general unemployed population, and not necessarily disabled.

The total number of cases handled in that year was 21,214, with most of them (18,639) on the caseload of hospital rehabilitation officers. This seems to indicate that most had acquired rather than congenital disabilities.

The remaining shops, in Auckland and Napier, were closed, and a new trust called the Rehabilitation Welfare Trust was established by the board in October 1987 to administer grants from the shop funds. It still exists as a registered charity today. Organisations in the disability sector can apply on behalf of individuals or groups for funding to help with various activities to support disabled people.(**63**)

Rehabilitation League annual report 1989 – client self-determination and involvement

In the 1989 annual report, the chairperson of the board (Mr Cording) reported that a total of 21,476 persons received services and 7,364 (34 percent) were successfully placed in or returned to work.

He pointed out that "although no policy directives have been received from Government during the lengthy period of review and uncertainty" the board had continued to follow the 1969 objectives and also attempted to work on the proposals or issues raised in the recent review, of which there were six main points, mostly around increasing structure and accountability, and being more 'realistic' about staff/client ratios relative to resources.

In response to the point that "clients needed to be more involved in making choices and developing their own programmes etc", Cording reported that there had been "development of client goal setting (with the goal of making staff more accountable to clients) with emphasis on self-determination and involvement". Client committees were also developed, and he believed that "the League as a whole is becoming more client oriented and less process oriented".

Client committees were meeting on a regular basis with the district

director, but because most clients were there for a short time, there was a lack of continuity. (Around 33 percent of people left within two months, with 80 percent gone within eight months.)

Long servers on the branch committees were acknowledged, including Norman Stewart from Dunedin, and George Faulknor from Napier; also Cording was sad to report that Hamilton Mitchell, the deputy chair and a lawyer, had passed away shortly after the final meeting of the board of management, and commented that he had been a "tower of strength with his clear thinking and extremely capable legal approach".

The League centres had received referrals from ACC, NZ Employment, DSW, hospitals, schools, and voluntary agencies, as well as an increasing number of self-referrals.

According to the statistics reported, the highest proportions of conditions continued to be orthopaedic and social/educational, together making up around 66 percent of referrals, with psychiatric conditions around 10 percent.

The referrals were made up of 67 percent men and 33 percent women, similar to the previous year.

Cording expressed concern about job certainty for the hospital rehabilitation officers (for example, the eight in Wellington) with the upcoming changes to the League's structure.

Analysis of the branch committee make-up shows more women serving on the committees as time has gone by, with almost all (except the chairperson) on the Dunedin committee being women.

In the early days of the previous iterations of the League, women were conspicuous by their absence in both the decision-making bodies and as clients. While this was perhaps to be expected in the 1940s and 1950s, quite a number of the original 1930s committee members stayed on the boards for many years, and it was really only as they retired or otherwise left that women took up roles on the committees.

Even more conspicuous in their lack of visibility were Māori, again both on the committees and as clients. Today ethnicity would have a high profile in the reporting, as organisations would be expected to demonstrate how they are catering for Māori clients, and kaupapa Māori and consultation with iwi would also have a high priority in the recommendations from the Government for the setting up of any new organisation. In the reports and reviews up to 1990 there are no

expectations expressed or statistics reported on Māori participation. In fact, there is very little visibility of Māori in the government assistance reporting, and, in spite of increasing Māori urbanisation since the Second World War, the extent to which Māori were able to access the services provided by the League is unclear.

Changes ahead for the Rehabilitation League

The most notable thing about the 1989 report is that it was to be the last of the Rehabilitation League's annual reports. In the Chairman's report, Cording reported that a meeting of the board of management had taken place on 12 May 1989, "at very short notice and at the Government's request". This was to be the final meeting of the board of the Rehabilitation League.

In her address to the board, Annette King, then parliamentary under-secretary to the Minister of Employment and of Social Welfare, commented "it is an end of an era because the links to ex-service organisations are increasingly tenuous and are now being severed. It is now recognised that rehabilitation has a much more civilian focus as more people with congenital as well as accidental disabilities make use of the League's services."

Nearly 60 years after its beginnings as a response to the need for rehabilitation of ex-servicemen, the League was about to embark on a new part of its journey, leaving behind the trappings of its association with soldier re-establishment, and taking up arms alongside and on behalf of all disabled persons, with a new focus, a new way of working, a new name, and a new commitment to self-determination.

Section three: Building a bridge over barriers

A fresh beginning and a new name

After months, if not years, of reviews of organisational structure and service provision, a sea change in both began in 1990.

The Rehabilitation League's sheltered workshop model was no longer in sync with attitudes, particularly with attitudes of disabled people themselves, nor did it enable the dynamic, holistic approach envisaged by Annette King, under-secretary to the Minister of Social Welfare, when she welcomed the new Workbridge board in 1990.

Instead, there would be a new service, that of facilitator or coordinator, helping individuals to identify and pursue training and employment with a wide range of providers and employers.

In time the new approach would include coordinating rehabilitation policy and advising government on the directions of future policy, and it would take an innovative approach to the concept of work, according to King.

During the year following the final meeting of the Rehabilitation League board, there were further discussions and negotiations about the proposed changes to the structure of the organisation. One thing that stuck was the need to be guided by the aspirations of disabled people.

Shirley Jones was appointed chair of the new board of management in 1990, and at the AGM that year, a new name and constitution were adopted "to meet the aspirations of people with disabilities for full participation and equal opportunity in the labour market".

Workbridge Incorporated was officially launched on Thursday 20 September 1990, and was poised to open a network of 25 centres around the country.(**64**) The centres were not to be workshops or training centres, but instead would be offices for the new work brokers, who would not provide direct services to clients, but would facilitate a match between clients and employers, using existing community resources for assessment and training if needed along the way.

The new Executive Director, John Meeuwsen, said disabled people were not "gaining adequate training and employment opportunities in fully paid jobs commensurate with their skills", and the restructured organisation aimed to "get people with disabilities placed into fully paid jobs".

The new way of working appears to have started in April 1989, because Meeuwsen pointed out in his report that client self-referrals had increased, which he saw as a reflection of the credibility and quality of the training being offered. In fact, self-referrals for the three months from April to June 1989 alone were 199, compared with 119 to the Rehabilitation League for the whole of 1988.

Special programmes had been consolidated with a strong bias towards empowerment and self-determination, as promised in the previous year's report. This increasing reference to self-determination reflects the change of focus both of societal/governmental attitude and values, and of the organisation itself.

The key responsibilities of Workbridge were to:

- assist people with disabilities to determine realistic vocational goals
- arrange the services necessary to enhance the prospects of achieving them

- engage in continuous job search
- arrange post-placement support or job coaching as required
- help people who have had accidents or become seriously ill to retain their employment by interceding on their behalf with employers.

By June 1991, Workbridge had recruited 109 staff in 27 teams throughout New Zealand, including nearly 70 staff from the former Rehabilitation League. Enrolments reached 1,000 with about half achieving successful placement into jobs.

The first decade – 1990 to 2000

Disability scene

At the time the organisation changed from a training and employment provider to a specialist job placement service, the disability sector was still reaping the benefits brought about by the International Year of the Disabled in 1981 and subsequent improvements. Awareness of disability issues had been heightened and, through the likes of the pan-disability organisation, the Disabled Persons' Assembly (DPA), disabled people en masse had a voice.

Through the 1990s more concerns were expressed about the limitations of government provision for reducing social barriers experienced by disabled people. Government funding for support services for disabled people moved from the welfare agency (Department of Social Welfare) to health agencies (Regional Health Authorities), providing more of an emphasis on rehabilitation for all disabled people (not only those disabled through injury or accident).

By 2000, when Workbridge was celebrating its first ten years, Parliament had rejected an amendment to exempt government permanently from the Human Rights Act in 1999, but it was not yet subject to the requirements of the legislation. The Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act (DPEP Act) 1960 still exempted sheltered workshops from the Minimum Wage Act, the Holidays Act, and other legislative provisions that protect other workers.

In 1999, in response to public pressure, the Government appointed Ruth Dyson as New Zealand's first Minister for Disability Issues.

Workbridge key activities

Meanwhile, Workbridge got on with the job of helping disabled people realise their aspirations. More than 44,000 job placements were made in the decade, starting with 1,000 in 1991, quickly rising to 10,000 by 1992, then adding about 5,000 per year thereafter.

Building relationships and capacity

A special 10th anniversary edition of the Workbridge newsletter outlined key events and influences, alongside personal stories of jobseekers who had been assisted by the organisation.(**65**)

From the outset, Workbridge recognised that its relationships with employers would be a crucial success factor. Workbridge knew win-win situations had to be the goal, and there had to be more to the employment relationship than the simple 'feel-good' factor. Making the right match between jobseekers and employers was critical, and staying involved to provide support to all parties was, and still is, part of the service.

In 1991, the Disability Pride Good Business Awards were introduced to recognise employers throughout the country who were making special efforts to employ people with disabilities, particularly those with high labour market support needs. The award scheme, run in partnership with the DPA and the New Zealand Employment Service (now Work and Income, part of the Ministry of Social Development), was maintained until 1995.

There were two winners of the award in Upper Hutt in 1994, McDonald's Upper Hutt and the Upper Hutt Inland Revenue Processing Centre. The award was reported in the Upper Hutt Leader, which noted that the award recognised "employers who show excellent business practice in employing people with disabilities".(**66**) The Upper Hutt Inland Revenue Processing Centre had employed a number of participants on the Mainstream Supported Employment Programme (Mainstream) due to a successful working partnership between Pam MacNeill in her role of Manager of Mainstream and the late Tom Morris from Workbridge. Mainstream assists people with significant disabilities to get employment in roles tailored to their abilities.

In 1995, Workbridge entered a key customer relationship with McDonald's.

One of the first tasks for Workbridge involved building the profile of the organisation. A marketing campaign began with the catchphrase, 'Workbridge – preparing for a new millennium'. It launched Workbridge as a non-government, market-aware, progressive employment service agency. Its mission statement from the outset was to meet the aspirations of people with disabilities for full participation and equal opportunity in the labour market.

Workbridge's promotional magazine, a critical part of the campaign, won the TVNZ Marketing Magazine Award not-for-profit section in 1993.

Customising services to target groups

Regardless of disability, ethnicity, or gender, people were increasingly expecting the right to mainstream employment by the early 1990s.

As it became apparent that disabled people were always at the back of the employment queues, Workbridge recognised that many faced additional barriers to employment because of cultural differences.

In 1992, the agency developed a series of culturally based programmes to customise its services for target groups. After consultation with various Pacific Island communities, church leaders, and the Pacific Island resource centre, "Workbridge Pacifica" was launched to focus on the specific needs of Pacific Island disabled jobseekers, facilitated by Workbridge's Pacific Island staff. Based on the success of these programmes, Workbridge later developed a similar programme for Māori.

Pauline Winter, chief executive at the time, recognised the multiple barriers faced by certain cohorts in society.

Disabled women also faced additional barriers to employment, and a series of workshops called "Workbridge Women" was developed and delivered through the centres, aimed at raising levels of confidence and self-motivation amongst participants.

Encouragement for this group continued through Workbridge's Women's Study Awards in 1993. Targeted at those who were already achieving, the awards provided much-needed assistance to recipients who used their grants to pursue teaching, art and design, marketing, social sciences, and other degrees.

Soon after, it became apparent that 62 percent of jobseekers registered with Workbridge had a further barrier to gaining employment – they had no educational qualification at all.

Workbridge realised that an initial step in addressing this issue would be to encourage those still at school to continue with their education. In 1993, the Workbridge Prep programme was introduced. It aimed to both prepare students for employment and change attitudes of schools, so their disabled students were encouraged to "reach for the stars" in employment and training.

New support funds

In 1995, Workbridge was appointed by the Department of Labour to manage and administer three new support funds for disabled people, Individualised Training Support, Job Support, and Self Start. The funds were designed to assist disabled people into training, jobs, and self-employment.

More than 11,800 people were assisted by the funds over the next five years. Many received ongoing financial help in the form of wage subsidies, job coaches, or travel assistance. Others benefited from one-off purchases or special equipment.

Also in 1995, Workbridge initiated a pilot scheme at Lincoln University with the aim of making the campus more disability friendly. Within five years, disability coordinators were on many campuses around the country and participation levels were up.

The Next Step

The 1993 Human Rights Act was a milestone for New Zealand. By making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, the law was a huge step towards providing legal protection and demonstrating that disabled people count, although government was initially exempt from being subject to the Act.

Further recognition followed when the 1996 Health and Disability Services Consumer Rights Act was passed, and in 1996 the New Zealand Census included disability questions for the first time. Workbridge provided disability training for Statistics New Zealand census staff.

In the same year, the Government decided to move the purchasing of

Workbridge's services to the Department of Labour, another welcome move as it placed employment of disabled people squarely in the labour arena, rather than that of health or social services.

In September 1996 more than 600 international representatives descended on Auckland for the 18th Rehabilitation International World Congress. While international perspectives were of great interest, many local disability groups were keen to find out more about a document called The Next Step that Workbridge presented to the Government earlier that year. Interest was so strong, and views on the content so diverse, that Workbridge decided to take the initiative and staged a sector summit in conjunction with the DPA in November 1996.

At the summit, participants voiced their opinions, shared their philosophies, and demonstrated their passion for disability issues, but also recognised that significant progress could only be made with a united voice. Setting aside their differences, summit participants agreed to develop a proposal for the Government that would reflect the views of the majority of the disability sector.

The Disability Sector Vocational Coalition was established in December 1996 and the Vocational Support for People with Disabilities position paper was presented to the Government in July 1997. The document recommended a single policy agency and funder, and called on policymakers to develop a range of flexible, individualised, employment and day services options.(**67**)

Changing demands

1997 saw rising demand for Workbridge's services as more and more disabled people registered their intention to enter the workforce. Younger jobseekers coming from mainstream education had higher employment aspirations, and others coming from institutions were needing a high level of support in the labour market to sustain their opportunities and choices. Workbridge implemented several 'working smarter not harder' practices, including a major upgrade of its information systems.

In 1998, Workbridge introduced Workbridge Omega, a new range of services for people with injury-related disability. The new services were promoted to Accident Compensation Commission offices around the country and from 1998 to 2000 more than 2,000 ACC claimants, many of whom had been out of work for several years, were placed into work by Workbridge.

International interest

International interest in Workbridge reached new heights in 1999. Keen to both talk to Workbridge staff and customers, and find out more about disability service provision in New Zealand, visitors included:

- the United States secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala
- American disability activist Patrisha Wright, and
- Mike Buckley and Arthur Blacklock from Britain's New Deal for Disabled People project team, and the UK's Minister of Employment and chief executive officer Margaret Hodge.

Workbridge personnel had also spoken at key disability events in Australia, Japan, Britain, and the USA.

End of the first decade

The ten years from 1990 to 2000 covered a period where the new agency was finding its feet, and developing a strong niche for itself in an era of increasing commitment to the rights to employment of disabled people, as well as increasing the understanding of what that meant in practice.

By the year 2000, Workbridge had a team of 120 people in 22 centres around New Zealand.

Along with development of its own services and new ways of working to achieve the employment goal, Workbridge quickly became a strong advocate and willing partner in disability rights advocacy, working alongside other agencies and government to affect changes in the law and respond to increasing disability rights.

Over the period, it had gained an international reputation as a leading service provider with a winning approach, and had become part of a global movement to improve employment opportunities for disabled jobseekers.

A new decade, a new structure – 2000 to 2010

By the end of the first decade, Workbridge had taken Annette King's words to heart, and had become a dynamic organisation with a holistic approach to employment for disabled people, working both to improve skills and opportunities at an individual level, and to provide leadership and advocacy to challenge systems and close-held beliefs that created barriers to employment for disabled people.

Introducing a new council and board of management

The newly-elected Labour Government's first budget, announced in June 2000, sought to "…develop an economy which adapts to change and increases the employment opportunities and incomes of all New Zealanders."(**68**). Along with $25 million over four years to help unemployed people gain work experience, $21 million in additional funding over four years was announced to buy vocational services for people with disabilities.

While she was Minister of Social Services and Employment, Jenny Shipley had commissioned a review which found Workbridge's structure to be too corporate in its approach. In response to the review, and to meet the needs of the changing labour market, the Workbridge board reviewed the governance arrangements. It decided to retain the Incorporated Society status but to:

- modernise Workbridge's governance by instituting a council and a board of management
- strengthen the representation of key constituency groups, especially organisations representing people with disability and Māori and Pacific Island peoples
- confirm Workbridge's independence by having the council fulfil roles previously performed by the Minister of Social Services and Employment.

Workbridge's existing vision, mission and values were reconfirmed during the process.

Workbridge council

The new council would be a supreme authority and representative forum and the board would cover day-to-day activities.

Council members included ordinary members and representatives of corporate bodies, Business New Zealand, New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, and the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand. The Disabled Persons' Assembly was also represented and their representative took the role of president.

It was an important step in making sure the organisation remained true to its original intent, "to meet the aspirations of people with disabilities for full participation and equal opportunity in the labour market".

Foundation members of the Workbridge council

President

Robyn Hunt (DPA representative)

Ordinary members

Wendy Nelson

Dr Ross Tapsell (Honorary life member)

Stuart Ransom

Corporate members

Ann Knowles (Business New Zealand representative)

Thomas Brian (New Zealand Council of Trade Unions representative)

Peter Marshall (Human Resources Institute of New Zealand representative)

Robyn Hunt (DPA representative)

Bob Va'ai (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs representative).

The first council president was Robyn Hunt ONZM, a disability and accessibility activist, writer, former journalist, and Human Rights Commissioner, with lived experience of low vision since birth. Hunt was appointed an officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2001 for services to people with disabilities.

At its inaugural meeting in July 2001 the council invited representatives from the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and the Association of Blind Citizens to join the council.

Workbridge was proud to be the only organisation where leadership was in the hands of disabled people, and successive chief executives would expend considerable effort over the next decade in building up disabled persons' representation, and ensuring that the council had a strong voice and meaningful input into the direction of the organisation.

Representatives of People First New Zealand, Richmond Trust New Zealand, Deaf Aotearoa, and Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa (representing blind and vision-impaired Māori) were invited to join. The position of president continued to be held by a representative of a disabled persons' organisation, usually the Disabled Persons' Assembly New Zealand in the first years. By 2012, numbers of representatives of disabled people or organisations had overtaken those representing employment or employers.

In the words of Dot Wilson, Workbridge council president in 2009, the council is made up of delegates from a range of stakeholder organisations. "They provide grassroots feedback from people with disabilities and ensure that Workbridge is responsive to their needs … their roles include setting policies and making sure Workbridge stays true to its values. These roles are very important so it's fitting they should be overseen by those in the disability sector."(**69**)

Board of management

The first task of the new council was to elect members of the new Workbridge board of management. They were Paul Bayliss (chair), Linda Beck, Phil Falloon, Glenn Harris, Alan Nixon, and Ross Brereton. Some members of the board had disabilities.

Once in place, the board set about strengthening Workbridge's organisational capability, establishing a strategic presence in Wellington, and amalgamating corporate support functions.

A new chief executive, Ruth Harrison, was appointed and started in September 2001, having had a brief stint on the board herself.

Getting to grips with management

The need for these changes came about in part because Workbridge had got into financial difficulties. Being caught between the need to build a professional profile to appeal to employers and bring in good jobs for their clients, a single-funder contract that relied on self-referrals and learning and embedding a new way of working had taken its toll, and Workbridge seemed to be on the wrong side of just about everyone.

Of greatest immediate concern, the organisation had a $500,000 deficit, and needed a loan to pay the staff.

Conscious that it would need a professional appearance to attract employers, Workbridge was determined not to be in the same boat as many not-for-profit organisations and end up in an old house on a side street. As part of the branding programme during the 1990s, Workbridge had retained a marketing company at a cost of $500,000 a year and acquired a shopfront on the main street.

To help meet the extra costs, and to diversify, Workbridge had developed contracts with the Accident Compensation Commission, but that raised concerns with the main funder, the Ministry of Social Development. The first task of the new chief executive was to try to repair the relationship with the funding agency, and to get the finances in order.

To other supported employment providers, it looked as if Workbridge was getting preferential treatment, and it took time to overcome that impression.

Perhaps worst of all, disabled people themselves were less than impressed. Workbridge developed a view that they were establishing a friendship with their clients, and staff were truly passionate about what they were doing, but their clients really just wanted to get a job, and the sooner the better.

Repairing connections

Having the president of the DPA as chair of the council was very helpful in strengthening relations with other agencies and with disabled people. DPA was very aware of being inclusive of groups like Pacifica and other disability groups, and Workbridge worked together with the DPA to reach out to those groups.

Another very helpful initiative was the formation of a group of chief executives of not-for-profit organisations. It included around 10-15 small agencies, and provided peer support. Ruth Dyson would attend the meetings, so the group had a direct line to the minister. Dyson had been appointed New Zealand's first Minister for Disability Issues in 1999 and held several ministerial roles over the decade from 2000–2010, including that of Minister for Social Development and Employment.

When it came to issues like the need for travel allowances for disabled people, the group was able to present a stronger front together.

At the time there was a lot of rivalry between the disability groups. People with vision impairments were seen as getting preferential treatment, and there was competition for funding for the different support and advocacy groups, which made it difficult for those groups to work together and have an effective voice. People with mental health issues (or mental distress) were separate again, and had even less in the way of self-advocacy.

The Ministry of Social Development had begun to get representatives of disabled people together to talk about service provision and what services they wanted. It included the CCS, IHC, Deaf Association, and Royal Foundation of the Blind.

The chief executives' group provided some cohesion, and was an important tool for Workbridge in rebuilding connections with other agencies.

Back on track

By 2005, when chief executive Ruth Harrison handed over to incoming chief executive Ruth Teasdale, Workbridge was back on track financially, and relationships with the key government stakeholders had been reinstated. Performance against contractual requirements had improved, and staff could be paid. Harrison says, "that meant we were able to do the job with more passion and get more jobs."(**70**)

"Nothing about us without us"

It was during this decade that the phrase "nothing about us without us" really came to the fore in New Zealand. Workbridge wasn't alone in having disabled people in leading roles in the organisation. The DPA was an ambassador for disabled people and advocated for

service providers to involve service users in decision-making.

Disability issues were becoming much more visible, with the appointment of the first Minister for Disability Issues in 1999 and following both the inclusion of disability questions in the census and the passing of the Health and Disability Consumer Rights Act in 1996.

The New Zealand Disability Strategy was published in 2001. The strategy was based on the social model of disability, which makes a distinction between impairments (which people have) and disability (which refers to barriers to participation experienced by disabled people). The Office for Disability Issues was established in 2002 to provide a focus on disability across government and to lead the implementation and monitoring of the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Psychopaedic institutions were being closed across the country, the last one being Kimberley in 2006. Meanwhile the *To have an ordinary life* report and associated reports by the Donald Beasley Institute, published in 2003, outlined many issues concerning the health and wellbeing of those with intellectual or learning disability in the post-institution era.(**71**)

The year 2006 was a big one in the disability calendar, as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was completed, and New Zealand Sign Language became the third official language of the country.

The Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act was repealed in 2007, signalling the closure of sheltered workshops. In that same year, New Zealand won the International FD Roosevelt Award for disability leadership.

In 2008, a select committee reported on the quality of disability care and service provision.

At a more grassroots level, advocacy and support organisations such as Parent to Parent (which supports parents of children with disabilities) were also working to raise the consciousness of issues faced by families and whanau of disabled people. Organisations set up to help with the move to the community from psychopaedic institutions were also very active at the time, developing new ways to support people who had been institutionalised for most of their lives adjust to making decisions and plans, and develop aspirations.

Coming of age

In the years leading up to its 21st birthday in 2010, Workbridge introduced several new measures aimed at making better use of resources and enhancing its service. A service delivery model was introduced in urban areas, which meant that some employment consultants focused on working with employers, while others focused on working with jobseekers. This model enabled Workbridge to better understand the specific needs of jobseekers and employers, and to bring the two together for mutual benefit.

Workbridge also developed an employer database for matching jobseekers to job vacancies, which allowed Workbridge consultants to identify suitable vacancies nationally rather than only in the region where they were based.

There was further investment in technology, including computer laptops so consultants could work out in the field more easily and be more accessible to jobseekers and employers. The investment aimed to create more employment opportunities for disabled people and ensure that Workbridge was well-placed to build on its achievements in the future.

Not only was Workbridge successful in placing people in jobs according to their aspirations over those years, it also served as a champion of the right to work, according to the board chairperson, Dot Wilson.

In 2007, New Zealand signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which included "the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities".(**72**)

Workbridge had taken that right to heart from its inception. This thinking in fact began in 1931, when the Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League first advocated for more support for returning soldiers, more training, and more employment opportunities to get them back on their feet and back in the labour market.

Throughout its first two decades, Workbridge championed the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce and enjoy the personal benefits of that. Workbridge worked with people with

disabilities to secure long-term jobs that made the most of jobseekers' strengths and skills.

Grant Cleland, who had taken over the role of chief executive in the previous year, commented at the time:

"Since its launch 21 years ago Workbridge has worked hard to improve the employment prospects of disabled people including those with disability, injury or illness and the deaf community. In the past decade alone, staff have secured about 40,000 jobs and, in the process, provided those jobseekers with the opportunity to participate in the workforce, earn an income, and use and develop their skills."

However, the chief executive was not suggesting it was time for Workbridge to rest on its laurels. He went on to point out that "the last census statistics (2006) show that disabled people are less likely to be employed than any other minority group. The statistics also show that disabled people with qualifications have about the same employment rate as nondisabled people without qualifications. So Workbridge's role today is just as important as it has ever been. At Workbridge we recognise that disabled people want the same kind of employment outcomes as anyone else; they want jobs which are satisfying, provide financial security and offer opportunities for personal development and social interaction."

The third decade – 2010 to 2021

Increasing direction by disabled people

Workbridge started the new decade in good heart. Representation of disabled people on the Workbridge council was building, and strengthening of the council's role was continuing.

Organisations representing a range of disabled New Zealanders were present on the council, including two representatives of People First New Zealand. People First New Zealand had formed in 2003 to be a voice of people with intellectual disability.

Other organisations represented included Business New Zealand, Council of Trade Unions, and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, a deliberate mix of disability representatives and employers and

businesses, along with cultural input.

The board of management was a smaller body, with six members.

The organisation had started a review of its activities over the previous three years and was looking to capitalise on the opportunities coming from the Government's welfare reforms.

Disability scene

Workbridge chief executive Grant Cleland chaired a disability employment forum (DEF) in 2010. The forum, involving a wide variety of sector organisations, arose out of continuing concern over the low participation rate of disabled people in the New Zealand labour market.

The forum attendees were unanimous that there was an urgent need for a long-term whole of government strategy and action plan to provide all disabled people with a pathway to employment and more jobs. The group developed a position paper, *Disabled people in employment – the way forward*. Nineteen agencies representing disabled people were involved in preparing the paper, including Blind Citizens New Zealand, the Association of Supported Employment New Zealand, CCS Disability Action, Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand, Disabled Persons' Assembly of New Zealand, and People First New Zealand.

It advocated for an employment summit and in June 2011, the Disability Employment Summit was held.

Getting people into work

Workbridge placed an average of around 3,200 people per year into work during the decade, with the highest number of placements (4,174) occurring in 2015, and the lowest (2,538) in 2018. An average of 400 placements each year could not be counted as part of the MSD contract – this seems to be because they were duplicate or short-term placements and didn't meet the terms of the contract.

Although the placement numbers fell between 2015 and 2018, the proportion of those enrolled who obtained jobs either increased or remained steady at a higher rate than the MSD contract required. In 2015, 55 percent of those enrolled obtained a job, in 2017, 57 percent, and in 2018, it was 52 percent.

This was a steady improvement from 42.8 percent in 2012–2013.

Contracting

Whereas previous decades had been dominated by ongoing reviews, the years from 2010–2021 were subject to major changes in contracts.

The economic climate in 2012 affected ACC referrals, which continued to decline. Workbridge decided to discontinue its Omega programme developed in 1998 for those who were out of work for the long term due to injury. This meant that the top priority was to meet the MSD national contract job target.

The MSD contract also went through major changes during the period. These changes were Workbridge's biggest challenges over the decade. In 2012, MSD proposed changing its single annual national contract to regional contracts, which would have placed Workbridge and other disability services in a very precarious financial position. That was avoided, but Work and Income referrals reduced by 36 percent in the year ended June 2013. By then, the cost per placement was exceeding the contracted price for each placement. This placed a limit on the number of employment consultants Workbridge could employ, and in turn affected the ability to reach the contract targets.

In 2017, the Government signalled that there would be a change to an outcome-based payment model. All employment services were to be tendered in early 2018. In a bid to increase the sustainability of jobs, major changes included moving the length of time a placement needed to continue (durability) from 91 days (3 months) to 6 to 12 months, and the introduction of milestone payments at enrolment, pre-enrolment, work placement and 6 to 12 months post-placement support.

The change to the new funding model, and the model itself, created a great deal of work and a great deal of uncertainty in 2018, but Workbridge was successful in securing a new three-year contract to continue administering MSD support funds. Workbridge had been administering the fund for the Government since 1995, and a three-year contract was helpful for forward planning. Even this was not smooth sailing, however, because only a year later the administration of support funds was changed and some were allocated to another organisation when the new Enabling Good Lives pilots were implemented. This decision created administrative complexity for Workbridge while making no difference at all to disabled people, according to the chief executive. After strenuous advocacy the decision was reversed and the contract returned in full to Workbridge.

Although not averse to the contract model changes, Workbridge found that because outcomes were very specific, that didn't leave room for responding to the changing needs of clients. The prescriptive nature of the contract meant that staff had to spend time administering a contract rather than being creative, and in fact some of the funding had to go towards employing people just to do the administration, which meant fewer staff to do the business, that is, to find jobs.(**73**)

Workbridge was also forced to consider cost-cutting measures such as reducing the number of members on the council (2017) and working more online.

From about 2017, the level of support needs was reported, and in the two years from 2016–2018, around 45 percent of jobseekers had low support needs, 45 percent had medium support needs and 10 percent had high support needs. The conversion rate (from enrolment to placement) for jobseekers with low support needs was 68 percent, for those with medium support needs it was 52 percent, and for those with high support needs it was 44 percent.

The goal of supporting disabled people to achieve their aspirations and meeting the contractual requirements do not always align. By nature, most contracts are based on getting a good outcome for the money spent, and in the case of getting people into jobs that outcome usually means permanent or long-term jobs of the highest number of hours per week possible to give the greatest likelihood of financial independence.

During this period Workbridge added the goal of improving the number of hours worked to at least 15, and preferably 30, the latter being regarded as a full-time job. It started reporting on durability (duration or length) of jobs from 2015 onwards, exceeding the 50 percent target in most years. In 2018, 58 percent had stayed in their jobs for 6 months or longer and in 2019, 52 percent of those placed into work were still employed 12 months after first starting work either in their first or a subsequent placement.

The new contracting model included targets for Māori and Pacific Island clients, and Workbridge achieved just over 90 percent of the Māori target, and 70 percent of the Pacific target.

Throughout the period, the chief executive was working closely with MSD on the Work and Income health and disability long-term work plan, started in 2011.

Customised services

Despite the restrictions caused by contract changes, Workbridge continued to be responsive to groups with particular barriers to employment.

Disabled people with post-school qualifications sought Workbridge's assistance with the fact that they were often employed at the same rate as non-qualified nondisabled people. Work continued in developing relationships with universities, in particular Workbridge's tertiary service in consultation with Otago, Victoria, and Canterbury Universities in 2016 and 2017, along with advocacy with government to increase investment in this area.

Workbridge was also working with schools to better prepare disabled school leavers for employment, and Wise Group was engaged to provide training for staff to help them improve their work for people with mental health issues.

Relationships were developed with a Pacifica organisation, and a Māori strategy was developed.

In 2014, Workbridge partnered with Work and Income on a trial targeting young people receiving the supported living payment, jobseekers with a disability or health condition aged 18–24 years.

Challenges

In 2011 the Christchurch earthquakes and the aftermath affected the labour market overall. Construction employment went up as the rebuild began, but overall employment fell, particularly in hospitality and retail. Across the country in 2012, the impact of the recession following the 2008–2009 global financial crisis was still affecting small to medium businesses and resulting in reduced job opportunities in some areas. There were fewer seasonal jobs, and a loss of state sector jobs.

Related to the contracting space was the concern at one point that self-referrals would no longer be possible, which would affect the partnership between disabled jobseekers, the employment consultants, and the employers.

Competition for jobs increased, with Work and Income and overseas for-profit organisations working more in the employment space. MSD (the funder) had become a competitor in the disability employment

space, which in turn caused a continuing downward trend of referrals from Work and Income.

With the change in contract model, Workbridge was deeply concerned about its ability to remain true to its purpose. Attempts to develop a sustainable business model and a workable strategic plan continued throughout the period, with a three-year plan in place from 2014–2017. For once there was no external review being undertaken, but Workbridge continued to review its own policies, practices, and organisational structure.

Even as Workbridge has become more self-determining, with disabled people increasingly having control at all levels of the organisation, the Government has become more prescriptive about what it will and won't purchase from Workbridge. Although the Workbridge structure is progressive, the contract is paternalistic, and effectively works against autonomy for disabled people. That, combined with reducing numbers of referrals, presents the biggest challenge for the current leadership team.

It continued to have the role of "conscience, guidance, community, advocacy, networking, and perspective", as council president Gaye Austin said in her 2019 report. "It also has the responsibility to ensure that Workbridge as an organisation has a culture that conforms with the NZ Disability Strategy, that is, New Zealand is a non-disabling society, and a place where disabled people can have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations."

Achievements

The Ministry of Social Development conducted a survey of employers' attitudes towards employing disabled people as part of the Think Differently campaign (2010–2015). The survey results showed that despite having generally positive attitudes towards disabled people, some employers saw a mismatch between the ideal employee and disabled people and considered employing disabled people a hassle and an economic risk.

Nevertheless, the number of large employers partnering with Workbridge increased. By 2016, 30 percent of placements came from large employers and 400 employers offered multiple jobs. Partnerships were developed with the likes of Z Energy retailers and suppliers, ACC, Victoria University, and Kiwibank. Repeat business also increased.

From 2017, Workbridge was supporting employers to become disability-confident workplaces and strengthening its support for employers, including recruitment assistance and post-placement support.

2018 saw the successful completion of a 12-week internship programme in partnership with Z Energy and ServiceIQ (the industry training organisation (ITO) for a large part of New Zealand's service industry). Students with a range of impairments from Riccarton and Papanui High Schools (Christchurch) special units were part of this programme. All four achieved level 2 retail service IQ unit standards and the only final-year student was employed full-time by retailer Hattrick Services NZ. Plans were made to expand this programme to other centres and schools.

To ensure its alignment with the NZ Disability Strategy, the organisation put in place a 100 percent accessibility policy. A full organisational accessibility audit was undertaken, to ensure development of the most accessible experience available.

Change the only constant?

It was a period of constant change and considerable concern as the organisation managed the change of the contracting model with its main funding agency. Throughout, it continued to work to improve outcomes for jobseekers, seek new opportunities for specific groups such as university students, and work with government, employers, and other agencies to build a labour market that is more inclusive of disabled people.

There was further change in 2019, as Jonathan Mosen took over as chief executive from Grant Cleland, president Gaye Austin stepped down from the council, and chair David Wright stepped down from the board.

The first thing the new chief executive, council president, and board chair had to navigate was the onset of a global pandemic.

Despite the huge challenge the changes presented to all concerned, Workbridge has continued its fine traditions and aspirations:

- It is still one of the few (perhaps the only) disability organisations with disabled people in all three of its governance positions (chief executive, council president, and board chair).

- Workbridge council has welcomed another disability organisation member and is currently made up of seven representatives from disability organisations and three from business organisations.
- It continues to seek innovative ways to improve the employment opportunities for disabled jobseekers – for example, a recent pilot project with the Department of Internal Affairs called "Grow Digital" to help disabled small business owners or those who wished to start a small business with a digital boost package.
- It continues to proactively advise government on disability employment matters, with its thought leadership document *Policy that works: a fair go for disability employment post COVID-19*, launched in August 2020.

In the year ended June 2021, Workbridge had 2,465 enrolments, and placed 1,114 jobseekers into work. Nearly 60 percent of those placed in work have stayed in work for 12 months or more.

The words of Pauline Winter when she summed up the first ten years of Workbridge apply equally in 2021:

> Today, Workbridge continues to develop new ways to deal with changed expectations and the new demands that present themselves, all the while, working towards achieving its mission: to enable people with disabilities to participate and experience equal opportunities in the labour market.

Vision of the future

New Zealand's attitude to disability changed profoundly when soldiers returned from fighting in the wars in Europe. The returned soldiers enabled the nation to see that disabled people could work and contribute to the labour market, and that disabled people were entitled to help to do so.

Government support of the Disabled Soldiers' Re-establishment League provided the opportunity to develop assessment, training, and employment services, to learn what was required and how best to help individuals.

Eventually this service was extended to disabled people who were not war veterans, but who had been born with, or otherwise acquired, disabilities, and the service was renamed the Rehabilitation League.

At the same time the voice of disabled people was getting louder, calling for recognition of the right to inclusion, access, participation, and employment.

In 1990, a new service model was set up under the name of Workbridge, that of facilitator or coordinator, helping individuals to identify and pursue training and employment with a wide range of providers and employers.

Workbridge took up this challenge and focused on delivering an individualised service to meet the specific needs of each job seeker, as well as offering strategies for further success.(74)

Throughout its history, the various incarnations of Workbridge have been under almost constant review by their funding agency and, when not being reviewed, were subject to prescriptive contract changes. If not being reviewed by an external party, they've reviewed themselves, always in the pursuit of more opportunities and better options for employment.

When chief executive Pauline Winter was looking ahead to the future of employment for disabled people in 2000, her vision looked like this:

- There will be equal opportunities for people with disabilities.
- People with disabilities will not face unusual difficulties gaining access to educational and training institutions.
- The needs of the people with disabilities will be taken into account in the planning of government and private institutions as a matter of course.
- Recruitment of people with disabilities will reflect their ability to do the job, rather than philanthropy or outright prejudice.

When her vision is realised, you could say there will be little or no need for organisations like Workbridge or, at the least, their role would be quite different – no longer advocacy, but perhaps advice and expertise.

It has been 20 years since Winter outlined her vision. Workbridge is still working with educational facilities, schools, and universities, still exhorting government to take a lead role in addressing the inequities and inaccessibility of those systems, still working with employers to give them the confidence to tap into the talent pool of disabled jobseekers, and still building bridges across the 'unusual difficulties' disabled jobseekers face every day in having their abilities recognised.

Workbridge today has the twin advantages of being a working example of disabled people working, leading, directing, managing, teaching, advocating, and advising, and being a pan-disability organisation. It has its roots in that very first organisation where soldiers advocated for a better service for their returned invalided comrades. Today it also has authenticity of lived experience of disability in its board of management, its council, and its chief executive. That alone is a huge achievement, for those individuals, for the organisation, and for the disability sector.

It should stand the organisation in good stead for the next 90 years;

however, if there's one thing to be learned from the history of disability and employment over the past century, it is that the greatest leaps forward were taken in partnership between government and disability representatives.

From the outset, following the Great War, government couldn't do it alone. Services were wound down far too soon, and representatives of the soldiers stepped in to establish and design more suitable services. During the Second World War, government swore to back the voluntary representative group with funding to set up the best possible services for returning soldiers, and a far superior service was established and provided at that time.

Throughout the intervening years, both government and disability agencies have responded in different ways, and at times in unison, to the changing attitudes and pressures of the time.

Former Minister of Social Welfare, Sir Michael Cullen, expressed his pride in his part in the establishment of Workbridge, and in what it has become, in his autobiography published in 2021:

> "Working with the [Rehabilitation] League I was able to change both its name and focus. The new organisation, Workbridge, began operation in 1990 as a 'dedicated employment service for people with disabilities seeking to gain or retain open employment'. It now operates in twenty locations and has been a great success story over the past thirty years."(**75**)

Today, the people with lived experience of disability who are at the helm are equally proud of 'their' organisation, especially the fact that it provides a working example of self-determination in the flesh.

And yet, 20 years on from Winter's vision, it's still the case that six out of ten disabled New Zealanders are out of work.

Despite its achievements in helping people realise their employment goals, despite all the advances by disabled people towards self-determination in the 90 years since the first employment and training organisation was established, it appears that Workbridge's work is not over yet. There is still advocacy to be done on the part of disabled jobseekers, and there are still barriers to overcome.

With difficult contracts to negotiate and expectations that the organisation will do more for less, can it make a difference in people's lives?

Pam MacNeill, businesswoman, disability rights advocate, totally blind "self-determinate", and chair of the Workbridge board, suspects it's still about attitude. She is constantly surprised and concerned about the lack of motivation of young disabled people to seek work and even to speak up for themselves.(**76**) Perhaps they are not the only young people to come out of our school systems in that state.

Recently the Government introduced the Youth Employment Action Plan, aimed at improving the employment outcomes for the 9,000 young people who will experience a stint of unemployment or non-participation in education or training for 6 months or longer while they are between the ages of 18–24. Disabled youth are over-represented in this group, and so are Māori and Pacific peoples – and women.(**77**)

Motivation is the first item on the list of employability skills they all need help with.

Part of that lack of motivation for young disabled people must surely be low expectation of getting a job. The statistics are everywhere. They have the right to get a job, but still more than half don't succeed. That lack of expectation does not only apply to the people themselves. It is systemic within the school system and in the benefit system.

People with a disability and/or health condition on a supported living payment do not have work obligations, unlike other MSD clients of working age. They are exempt from having to look for work or apply for jobs that will enable them to come off the benefit. This also means MSD is under no obligation to help them find work, to pay for services to support them into the workforce, or to report outcomes for this group, although it may do all of these things from time to time. For example, people on a Supported Living Payment can 'opt-in' to get help to prepare for and find a job. However, it stands to reason that the jobseekers with obligations are likely to be the first to get that help, especially in times of labour market tightening.

Rights are one thing. Realising them is quite another, and requires resourcing, skills, and a healthy, unwavering, all-encompassing expectation of achievement.

Workbridge may have that expectation, but it is only one small part of the machinery needed to make it happen.

Two decades after the appointment of New Zealand's first Minister for Disability Issues, a new ministry for disabled people is being

established to “transform the way government serves disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, families and whānau”.

Can it help to address the need for change in expectation of employment in individuals and the system? It has already fallen short of the expectations of some disabled people in appointing someone who does not identify as disabled or bring strong connections to the disability community to head the establishment of the new ministry. (**78**) Robyn Hunt, one of the founding members of the Workbridge council established in 2000 asks “Why is a non-disabled person leading the establishment of a disability ministry?”.

While it may be of small comfort to those grappling with their disappointment about this, it may be worth noting that the announcement of a new Minister for Disability Issues in 1999 seemed not to generate similar commentary when the position was filled by someone who did not identify as disabled. Perhaps at least expectations have progressed, if not action.

Self-determination advocates say, “a new Ministry genuinely led by us could radically change the perceptions New Zealanders have of disabled people, so not only could it result in service improvements, but a more disability-confident nation resulting in improved employment and accessibility.”(**79**)

The catch-cry of disabled self-advocates in past years has been “nothing about us without us”. More recently we have heard a new demand – “Nothing in our name without our direction”.

Time will tell whether their voice is heard, and whether heeding it will in fact make New Zealand a more disability-confident nation, capable of true inclusion of its citizens with impairments in the workforce, and in all aspects of life in our society.

Appendix

Names of the organisation – a summary of the names of the organisation and its services at different times throughout the history.

The Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League, 1931

Not-for-profit organisation, to provide rehabilitation and employment opportunities for disabled soldiers returning from the South African Wars and the First World War.

The Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League, 1942

Training and re-establishment of disabled servicemen from the Second World War

The Disabled Re-establishment League 1 April 1969

Government agent for both ex-servicemen and civilians

The Rehabilitation League NZ Incorporated 1974

Provided rehabilitation and vocational services for disabled New Zealanders

Workbridge Incorporated 1990

Provides dedicated employment services to disabled people, seeking to gain or retain open employment.

- 1931–1970 Emphasis was on the state rehabilitating injured war veterans: former servicemen who were 40% or more disabled were considered for training.
- 1970s–1980s Included civilians considered to be 50% or more disabled while continuing to rehabilitate injured war veterans.
- From 1990 Focus on ensuring disabled and injured New Zealanders have the opportunity to gain meaningful, sustainable employment, outside the sheltered workshop environment.

Workbridge chief executives

John Meeuwson 1990–1995

Pauline Winter 1995–2000

Ruth Harrison 2001–2005

Ruth Teasdale 2005–2008

Grant Cleland 2009–2019

Jonathan Mosen 2019 to present day.

Board chairs in the first decade included the first chair, Shirley Jones, William Smith, and Mary Schnackenberg, who is a life member.

Workbridge presidents and chairs since 2001

Year	Council President	Board Chairperson
2001	Robyn Hunt	Paul Bayliss
2002	Robyn Hunt	Paul Bayliss
2003	Huhana Hickey	Paul Bayliss
2004	Huhana Hickey	Paul Bayliss
2005	Wendy Neilson	Paul Bayliss
2006	Wendy Neilson	Paul Bayliss
2007	Wendy Neilson	Paul Bayliss
2008	Wendy Neilson	Simon Arnold
2009	Dot Wilson (Acting)	Simon Arnold
2010	Dot Wilson	Bonnie Robinson
2011	Dot Wilson	Ruth Jones
2012	Dot Wilson	Ruth Jones
2013	Dot Wilson	Ruth Jones
2014	Wendy Neilson	Gail Munro
2015	Wendy Neilson	Gail Munro
2016	Wendy Neilson	Gail Munro
2017	Gaye Austin	Gail Munro
2018	Gaye Austin	David Wright
2019	Gaye Austin	David Wright
2020	Debbie Ward	Pam MacNeill
2021	Debbie Ward	Pam MacNeill
2022	Chrissy Fern	Pam MacNeill

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- Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment League / Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League
- Rehabilitation League
- Workbridge.

I drew heavily on the writings of Walter (Bill) Leadley for the first section of the book and am very thankful to him and to his granddaughter who together made his story and that of the returned soldiers available in the public domain.

From the Papers Past digital records, I was able to access and read newspaper articles up to 1950 pertaining to the organisations from the comfort of my own home. It was a very useful resource to have during lockdown.

I am grateful to the past and present chief executives and board chairs who made time to speak to me about their challenges and achievements – Grant Cleland, Ruth Harrison, Jonathan Mosen, and Pam MacNeill, also to Don McKenzie who helped with leads for information and context, and to Barry de Geest for generously allowing me to interview him.

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Janette Munneke

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