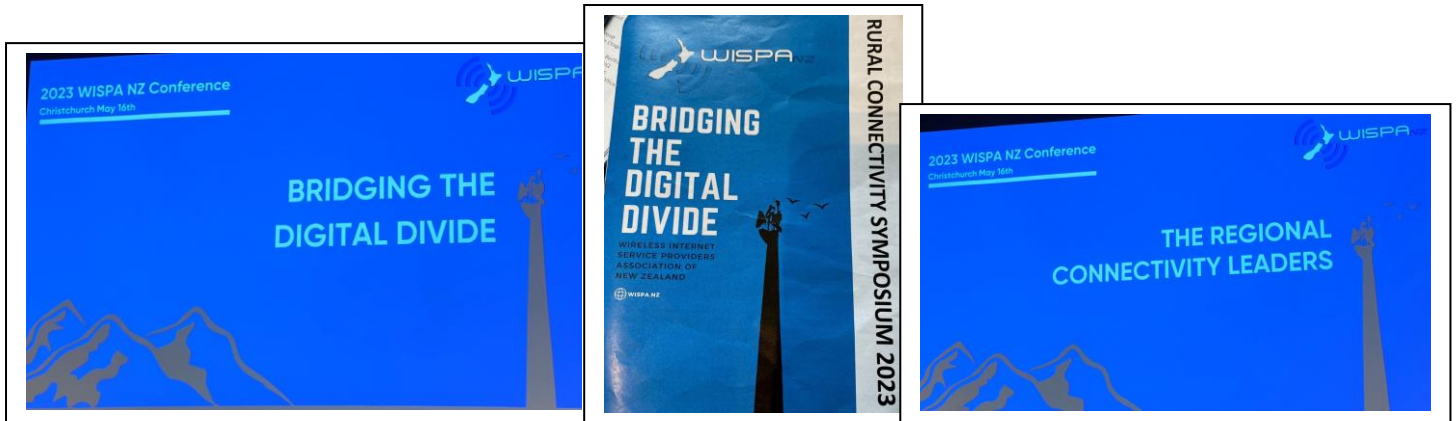


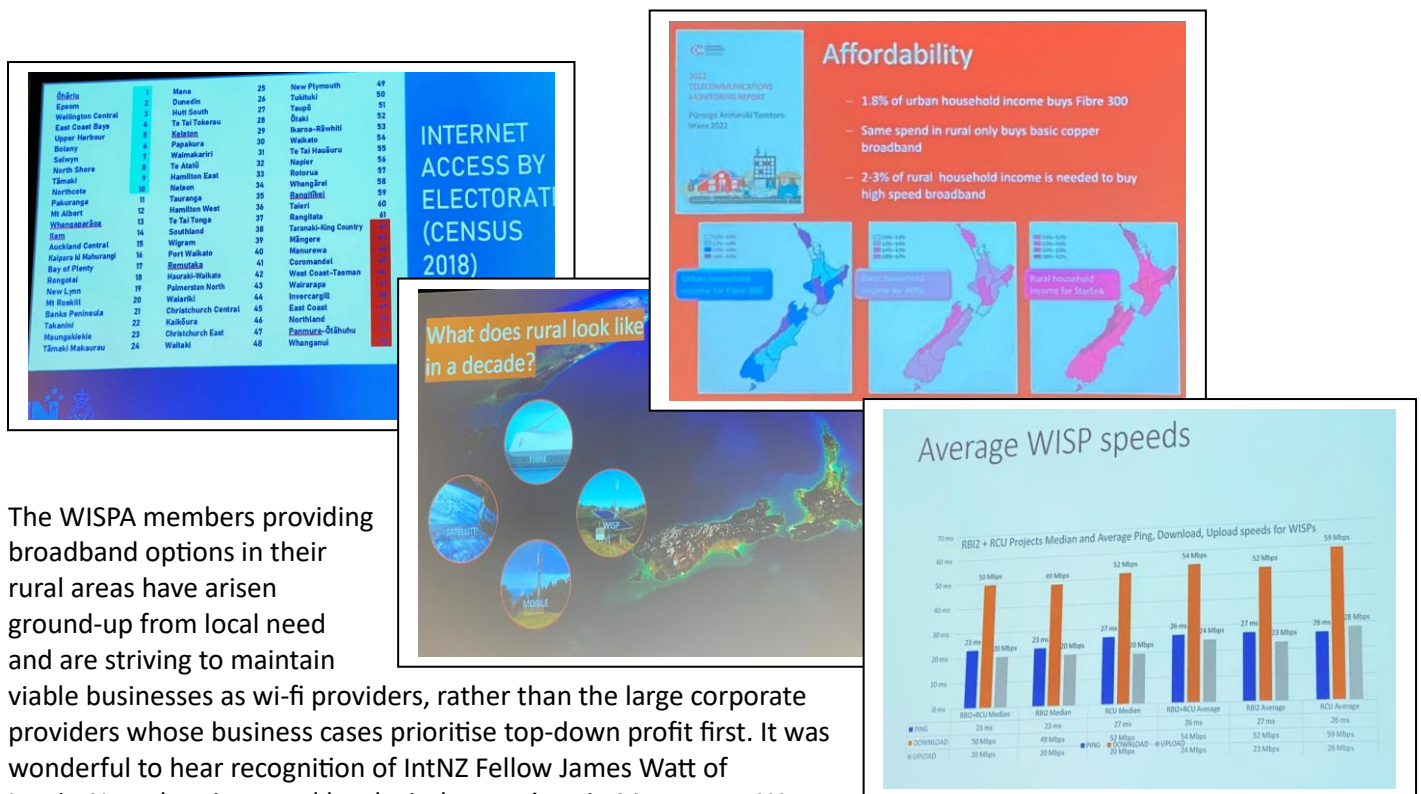
Di Daniels Conference Grant Report to InternetNZ TUANZ Symposium 16-17 May 2023



Thanks to InternetNZ for sponsoring my attendance at the TUANZ Rural Connectivity Symposium 2023 in Christchurch in May. The overall impression was there are so many people still in the conversation and reality of striving for Digital Equity and Inclusion in their own communities and nationwide, 20 years down the track. Seeking new solutions and adapting to challenges, yet unwavering in their commitment to improving access to the internet and technology.

Day 1 was dedicated to the WISPA providers, working on wireless solutions for their local rural communities and further afield as well. These are the innovative wi-fi geniuses and entrepreneurs who have picked up the challenge that the larger telcos have dismissed as not being a business case for their services. They are the ones going that extra mile (or 100's of kilometres) in depth, breadth and height to reach communities without access.

The statistics and data of the challenges people and communities face and the costs of not connecting our population were exposed, including Access, Connectivity, Coverage and Affordability. The area where I live in Taitokerau Northland is in the bottom three for access in the 2018 census. MSD funders had previously told me that all the Far North Marae now have 5G, but the locals roll their eyes because we know there is barely 3G coverage in most places.



The WISPA members providing broadband options in their rural areas have arisen ground-up from local need and are striving to maintain viable businesses as wi-fi providers, rather than the large corporate providers whose business cases prioritise top-down profit first. It was wonderful to hear recognition of IntNZ Fellow James Watt of InspireNet who pioneered local wireless options in Manawatu. Way back in 2010 James provided affordable prepay services for low-decile Computers in Homes families. Others like Rae Sciascia from SwiftNet and Ronald Brice at Gisborne.Net were also early pioneers.

Balancing the risks of the internet being unaffordable to communities, against the cost to the country's productivity if people are not working, interacting, trading and conducting business online with the benefits and efficiencies connectivity provides shows a staggering \$16.5 billion deficit. So it makes it hard to understand why successive governments appear to be dragging the chain on connecting rural areas and driving costs down.



Apart from soaking up the symposium information and making the obvious comparisons reflecting over time, I made the most of the opportunity to meet the expo hall exhibitors of tech suppliers offering equipment and services to the WISPS. This was a way of informing businesses about Digital Wings and making contacts for potential partnerships.

Joining the Dots; Making Historical to Current Connections

Day 2 TUANZ was an amazing chance to reconnect with people I have worked with for decades. It was sobering to find that after my being involved in this kaupapa for over 20 years, we are still addressing “The Digital Divide”. From the Computers in Homes (CIH) programme with low-decile schools in 2000 and Tuhoe Education Authority’s 13 Kura in 2003; around the Motu until 2016, to now the Digital Wings programme 2017-2023, we still face inequity.

Chris Eketone and Josie Gage from Minginui and Te Whaiti were involved with CIH way-back-then in 2003 with Haromi Williams, (the late) Riaka Rex Hiakita, Nesi Bryce, and Teina Boasa-Dean from Rūātoki. Together we connected whānau and kura with technology and varying success/failure dialup internet access. Those early days paved the way for deeper involvement with Tuhoe communities in 2011-2016 with Ivan Lomax as regional Coordinator for Bay of Plenty and Tairāwhiti, and Leon Symes & Leona Karauria coordinating CIH in Hawkes Bay.

Nesi Bryce & Di Tuhoe CIH 2003; Di & CIH team with Tame Iti, Rewarewa Marae Rūātoki 2011; Ivan Lomax, Leon Symes, Leona Karauria of Wi-Fi Connect with Di Daniels & Laurence Zwimpfer, seeking wi-fi solutions for Kāingaroa Forest CIH 2013.



From the Computers in Homes initiatives and paucity of coverage in Kāingaroa Forest, Te Uruwera and Tairāwhiti / Wairoa regions, arose the amazing

connectivity work done by Wi-Fi Connect with Ivan Lomax and Leon Symes.

The speakers Community panel in the afternoon emphasised the origins of and connections between the people and programmes that pioneered addressing the Digital Divide 20 years ago and how many of these players are still working for progress. Wi-Fi Connect’s business ranges from TokoNet, WairoaNet and TuhoeNet in the North Island to some of the most inaccessible regions of the West Coast South Island including Bob’s Bay, Fox, Franz Josef and Haast. The overheads are considerably higher for these remote WISPs as they need to deploy helicopters to reach, build and maintain their sites on difficult terrain. Chris Eketone acknowledged Minginui could not have progressed their economic recovery if not for the work of Ivan and Wi-Fi Connect and bringing the community together to fund the

first tower. He told how Minginui originally had 3 mills, retail shops, medical centre and 100% employment until privatisation shut the town and facilities down in the 1980's and created 99% unemployment. The only thing that had survived was the school. Now, since its fixed wireless internet solution, it is a thriving community again with a native plant nursery and 99% employment.



Te Aka Toitū Trust from Eastern Bay of Plenty use Wi-Fi Connect towers and backhaul from 9 Kawerau-Opotiki schools to run affordable wi-fi service to families for their Connected Learning Online at Home Programme. This is a partnership between the Trust, Ministry of Education, Wi-Fi Connect and the schools.

Ivan's daughter Naiki Pohe-Lomax was my PA while she was studying computer science, and I first met Robyn Kamira of Paua Interface in 2002 while I was a researcher for CIH. There have been various ongoing connections with Antony Royal and Robyn through Whitireia, Waitai and Nga Pu Waea, so it was wonderful to be in the same room with them all again. **Below, Di with Naiki, Chris, Robbie and Antony.**



So, thanks to Craig at TUANZ for a great gathering and to InternetNZ for supporting Digital Wings to attend. However, I thought the Govt rhetoric was heavy on platitudes, light on detail and the opposition very lightweight. And I remain sceptical of One NZ's SpaceX claim to 100% coverage as their map does not look at all promising for the Far North. All conversations I heard had Northland terminating at Whangārei, as does terrestrial TV by the way. **Ngā mihi nui, Di Daniels MNZM Programme Director Digital Wings**

