

A Tribute to John Rose 21 October 2009

John Rose MBE
Hon Vice President, N Z
Federation for Deaf Children
Vice Patron, National
Foundation for the Deaf



A tireless and dedicated voluntary worker for deaf children and their families and deaf and hearing impaired adults. A very special person who gave so much, admired and respected by many - a very sincere, honest and modest person and a devoted family man.

I had the privilege of knowing John for 33 years as another parent of a deaf child and very soon as a friend.

I first met John in Jan 1977 at a day for parents of deaf children as part of an Australasian Conference for Teachers of the Deaf. John was a speaker that day and I was impressed by his passion and obvious discontent related to the education and well being of deaf and hearing impaired children and their families. My son was only 5. John was much further along the journey and I learnt much from him. John, then, was very active in Auckland School for Deaf Society, now Auckland Parents of Deaf Children and Vice President of the newly formed N Z Federation for Deaf Children. Soon he inveigled or convinced me to get involved at the local and national levels – hence the beginning of our association.

In May 1977 John was elected President of NZFDC a position he held for 8 years. In those years his leadership took NZFDC from its infancy to a strong and respected organisation. On his retirement he was made Hon Vice President. In 1978 John was involved with the establishment of the Combined NZ Societies for the Deaf, now the National Foundation for the Deaf. He was a Board member for 8 years as a representative of NZFDC and later was made Vice Patron. His commitment to these organisations never waned. The huge contribution he made to them and deaf and hearing impaired people was acknowledged. They respected his views, his wisdom and knowledge and his determination to see greater recognition and services for Deaf and Hearing impaired people. He continued to be called on frequently for his expertise particularly when problems arose. In 30 years John and Betty rarely missed an AGM no matter where it was held. Betty was John's staunchest supporter and he always said he could not have done what he did without Betty's constant patience, love and understanding.

I was privileged to work closely with John on both these organisations. I know deaf children and their families were always of paramount concern. Very few people outside the family have any idea of John's commitment and the sacrifices he made both time wise and financially both of which impinged on his family and business. The

small dusty and noisy office at Rose Engineering became the de facto hub of NZFDC. I spent many hours there, much was planned there, hundreds of toll calls made from there, secretarial assistance given and John even bought a photocopier for Federations use.

No one knew the countless hours that John and often Betty spent with parents of deaf children at a personal level offering support and guidance. Their door was always open – they rescued many parents in times of crisis such was their care and understanding.

In his first report as President of NZFDC John stated “the one thing that is very clear is that we will have many meetings to attend and letters to write to Government before we achieve our objectives.” Very true words but little did he know. This was the beginning for him of endless meetings ,letter and submission writing, repeated knocking on doors of MP’s and Government Departments, leading public awareness and funding raising campaigns parent education and many other facets – he spent days, weeks and months on planning and numerous trips to Wellington, up to 20 some years’ all this while running his own business. The establishment of Federation was met with enthusiasm by parents but not by the Dept of Education or many professionals in the field. There were some allies though among MP’s. For nearly 100years the Department of Education had run deaf education with no input from parents and now with John at the helm here was a group that would not go away. Federation Executive quickly established themselves as an aggressive but responsible group who had a great deal of knowledge between them. The first submission on Education met with a poor response but persistence was the word and those in authority were forced to listen to their demands. Many of you may remember John as a thoughtful, quiet person – you should have seen him when dealing with Government officials or MP’s – he reminded me of a terrier dog who was not going to let go. Parents especially John soon found themselves as “unpaid consultants” in the Education, Health and Welfare policy sectors and John for his perseverance received the dubious reward of being appointed a member of two important policy working groups, “Deafness – the Invisible Handicap” and later The Board of Health Hearing Committee. These were a big call on his time and as the only lay person he was greatly respected by the professionals involved. So great was the respect that he was later elected Chair. John not only lead the way for parents of deaf children having input into the education and other aspects of their child’s development but also parents of other special needs children. Professionals also realised John was working for them.

Many were John’s achievements for deaf children and adults– far too many to acknowledge here. *(These included involvement in :the introduction of a sign system and later NZ Sign language into the education of deaf children, better support services including AODC’s and Audiologists more speech therapy, more support for parents, after being the hearing person in a 3 person group to Gallaudet University Washington DC to study Interpreter and leadership training the setting up of the first Interpreter training course in NZ and recruiting a trainer from America – a 6 month course followed by the publication of the first NZ Sign Language Dictionary, some years later the establishment of a permanent Sign Language Interpreter Training Course at AIT)* I could speak and reminisce at length.

In 1990 thanks to the generosity of John and Betty the first “John and Betty Rose” scholarships for young deaf adults were awarded. Lack of support for deaf students in the tertiary area was one of John’s concerns and when nothing was done he decided to personally lend support and this continues. The scholarship is administered by NZFDC awarded annually

In his last report as President of NZFDC John said “over the years I have enjoyed working with the many exceptional people we have been fortunate to have on our various committees. My only regret on resigning is the projects I have to leave incomplete.”

John, you were an exceptional person and we enjoyed working with you, there are still many unfinished projects but you initiated many achievements – your legacy will live on. You will never be forgotten for your leadership, sincerity and commitment – the lives of many deaf children and their families and deaf adults have been enhanced through your determination – we all owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Thank you Betty and family for sharing John with us.

Rest in peace John - we are deeply saddened to say farewell to such a caring and special person.

Margaret Cooper QSM