

# 149. Teaching O&M in New Zealand with Carina Duke

## PREVIEW:

### Kassy:

Standing on the cutting edge of everything that's coming down the pipe in orientation and mobility, the most innovative strategies and being the best version of yourself takes a lot of grit, it takes a lot of stamina, and it takes a lot of support from your community and also the commitment is step outside of the box.

In today's episode, we are talking with Carina Duke, an orientation and mobility specialist in New Zealand and she is really sharing how she does it, the challenges that she faces, as well as how she continuously steps outside of her own box gets uncomfortable and makes sure that she is staying on top of what is happening in orientation and mobility and staying connected with other people. You definitely don't want to miss this episode because her tools and the tips that she gives a little bit of wisdom are gold.

## INTRO:

Welcome to A Step Forward, a podcast for ambitious VI specialists who are challenging the status quo. I am Kassy Maloney, your new work bestie. With over 15 years of experience as an O&M specialist, author, professional development junkie, mom, and owner of Allied Independence, I have been through the wringer. And now I'm here to bring you a boost of inspiration, information, and our favorite, innovation, as we treat feeling overwhelmed for overjoyed while we create a significant impact in the lives of our learners and still lead more balanced, fulfilling lives. So grab your favorite beverage because we're about to take a step forward.

## SPEAKER'S BIO:

### Kassy:

Welcome back to the podcast, my friend. I'm absolutely loving, loving loving doing these every week. It has been such a beautiful and refreshing challenge for me specifically to reach out to people that I don't know and ask them to be on our podcast. It's not in my

nature to reach out to people and ask them for anything. But it has been so fun to get to know you guys. I want to extend the invitation to you as well. If you want to be on our podcast, you are welcome to go to [allied independence online.com forward slash podcasts](http://alliedindependenceonline.com/forward/slash/podcasts). And there's a little button there. And if you want to be a guest, you are welcome to submit that form. And we will reach out to you because we want to hear from everybody really everybody. Because I think hearing from other people and getting a sense of like I'm not alone, even if that's all we're doing today as you're driving as you're doing your dishes or as you're walking your dog or maybe you're just out in nature exploring or maybe you're just relaxing and listening to this podcast, feeling more connected to our communities are really what brings us closer together and help support us in the most beautiful ways.

So I reached out to Carina who has attended the symposium before and asked her to be on our podcast and she graciously agreed. Now Carina Duke is a rehabilitation instructor working for blind low vision New Zealand in Otautahi Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. I'm sure I messed up how to say those words. She initially joined what was then the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind in 1989 as a recreation specialist and has had various roles over the years, with the main being as an orientation and mobility instructor. Her current role includes providing programs for adults in orientation and mobility activities for daily living and functional low vision assessments. She was one of the first three orientation and mobility instructors trained in New Zealand when the postgraduate course was set up at Massey University in 1990 with Professor Steve LaGrow. She has a strong interest in environmental design and accessibility and has contributed to national guidelines for best practice.

She's just a phenomenal, sweet, sweet person, and I can't wait for you to get to know her and hopefully take away some really good practical pieces of information for how she continues to really step up for herself and her clients.

#### **PODCAST BODY:**

##### **Kassy:**

Welcome, Carina, to our podcast, I would love for you to share a little bit about yourself with our audience.

##### **Carina:**

Thank you, Kassy. I'm a rehab instructor here in Christchurch, New Zealand. So I work for blind low vision in Zed. And I've worked for the same organization for a long time. But it's been under different names, of course over all the years. So for me, a rehab instructor, I'm an orientation and mobility instructor. I'm an activities of daily living

instructor and functional, I do functional low vision assessments. So we cover everything in our training so that we can provide all of those services to the clients we work with. So for me, I work with adults, so from school leavers and but I have in the past worked with children as well.

**Kassy:**

How did you get into our fields? Because orientation and mobility is pretty new. And it's even newer in other parts of the world. And I always love to know how people get into it.

**Carina:**

Yeah, I actually trained as a rehab specialist. So I started with what was then the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind. I worked for a while in that role, but I did observe the role of the orientation mobility instructors. At that stage, most of our instructors were coming in from overseas. So we had a new German lady starting who had trained in the UK, I say new, but she'd been in the field for a long time. And we had an American instructor, and another New Zealander who was coming back in who trained in the UK. So I was interested. And then Massey University offered a program and Steve LaGrow, had come across from the states and set the program up. So I was fortunate, sat through an interview with him, and I was one of the first four that were accepted onto the program in New Zealand.

So yeah, it was really exciting and was different. It was fun. So we had some time up at Massey on the course, before we went off to do our practicums. And again, I was very lucky to have a lovely American lady, as my practicum supervisor who'd been in New Zealand, I think, almost one of the first star names who came across to New Zealand, wealth of experience, and still a very good friend to this day. And yeah, so that's how I got into the field. And it just sort of went from there.

**Kassy:**

Wow, this makes me think of two questions. But I will start with one. You are like a pioneer in New Zealand in orientation and mobility. How have you seen O&M grow since you started off and you went to school and to where we are now?

**Carina:**

Yeah, that's a really good question. For me, there's still two of us in New Zealand who, who did the course back in 1990, who are working in the field, one with another agencies. So yeah, we're sort of keep tight. We're a small country. So we've got a population of just over 5 million. So we're not a large country. One agency is a major employer working with adults, the other agency works with school aged children. Yeah, I

guess it's more that for a small country that we are we do support professional development. We do support attendance at conferences. And so I've been very lucky to have been to a few AI conferences and IMC conferences. So you know, the opportunities there to keep up with what's happening in the world. But I guess from us, it's just the numbers of instructors. So messy, put a few through each year, we had after Steve, we've also had Laura Bozeman over running the course as well. When I started, the main focus was as our names but over time, we've evolved to, you know, including the other two disciplines in our roles, that yeah, I guess that's just, you know, whatever happens internationally, we keep up with and we do our best to be providing a really good service for our clients. But I think the focus internally with our organization, when I first started, it was a sort of for the blind, and then it went to of the blind. So I think the approaches have changed with the way that we work with our clients and the way we respect to them within our programs. I think that has been a good change for me.

**Kassy:**

What are some of the changes that you are talking about when you mentioned for the blind and of the blind?

**Carina:**

I think when you say for, you know, we're more of an ownership than working with or working for and putting the client at the center. I know that as an O&M we always put the client at the center of our program. But I think when the organization also makes that shift, I think it makes it a lot lot easier. You know, just a nice atmosphere to work in.

**Kassy:**

Yeah, like the change in philosophy and values trickles down.

**Carina:**

Definitely. Yeah. Yeah. Very client centered organization. Yeah.

**Kassy:**

And you're also a rehabilitation therapist. So what does your day look like? Do you switch between roles? Do people come to you? How does that work for you?

**Carina:**

So most of my service is provided in the client's home or community. So for me, yeah, I plan my day, I manage my own caseload. So for some clients, the focus might be on

just orientation mobility, but for others, it will cover the full range of program. We do a lot more center based with our functional low vision assessments for magnification because cutting it all around us not the easiest. So I do Dhamma salary service for clients who live further away or can't get into an office for health reasons. But yeah, I just plan my day and it's overlaps nicely, generally for daily living skills. So if you get a really bad day, it's nice to focus on the inside activities and then refocus back to the O&M when the weather's good again. So it did start Yeah, I just plan my day. But I've also driven by the clients and what they want to achieve what they've prioritized in the program as well.

**Kassy:**

Are you the orientation and mobility specialist and rehab therapist for all of your clients? Or do you find that you have to split your case loads?

**Carina:**

For some clients, they have another person providing the daily living skills, so someone may have provided whether it be fundamental levels. So needs assessors might be providing that as part of their assessment as well, it may just be some follow up that I do. But particularly if someone's got some high level need for daily living skills that either functionally weren't able to be achieved on a shorter term, then they would be referred in for a longer program. So yes, some of my clients have seen other instructors, but in our office, we have one instructor who is an activities of daily living and functional vision, and she tends to be more center based. But you know, there could be times when she goes out to do the program, and I might be doing the O&M program that yeah, there's a lot of case management, you know, I work in a big team. So we cover a lot of disciplines. So you know, we we manage our cases and prioritize where we can, because we all have weightless. And so we want the best outcome for the clients.

**Kassy:**

So it kind of sounds like you're itinerant, and you go out to your clients homes, and like you said, you're managing your caseload. And sometimes you share caseload with other people, what are some of the challenges that you've faced in this role as a rehabilitation therapist and orientation and mobility specialist at the same time?

**Carina:**

I guess, as a rehab instructor, you know, you're busy. And so time for professional development has always been something of a challenge, I've been very lucky with the organization that they've allowed that and build in that, you know, the time is available

for professional development. So the symposiums and conferences have sought permission for that time to attend, it's always going to be a bit of a trade off about fitting that in and when you can fit it in. So it's good when things are recorded. And you can go back on those times when you're not so busy and review or, or sit in. I guess, for me, also, some clients who just don't want a white cane, and you know, it's the best tool for them, you know, they could achieve a lot more be a lot more independent. So it's, it's listening to your client, it's being patient with your client, we call them clients here with our database. So listening to them, and going at the pace and encouraging and sometimes, you know, just going to an environment that's uncluttered, that there aren't distractions, and that they feel safer than I do most of my programs away from the client's home. So for many, they just don't want other people suddenly to see them with a cane. And when we have worked in neighborhoods, it's just constant being stopped having conversations I didn't know you had to know you were blind or had a vision loss. And so it's quite distracting for them. And also, it's disruptive for the program. But yes, so for many clients, we'll we'll go to a nice indoor environment or a nice quiet outdoor environment, depending on weather, and we'll start our program there and work through at their pace. And you know, for some, it's that knowledge that I'm not forcing you to have a cane, but we'll trial it, see how you feel. And then you might make those ultimate decisions. So it's always going to be a bit of a challenge for some people to accept that it's a tool that's going to be a benefit. Yeah.

**Kassy:**

Yeah, there's so much stigma around. Needing a cane and having a visual impairment and not being seen as fully independent or being seen as disabled along with whatever grief they're going through at that same time. Sounds like you've a really client centered approach when you do that. Do you take them in your own car? Or does your center provide a car to get to the other places? Or do they get dropped off or have some sort of ride to wherever they're going? What does that look like?

**Carina:**

So we have pocas so sometimes my work can cover the whole region so it could be quite a lot of travel involved in the day. I used to do a lot of overnights but I don't do as many now as I used to with more instructors available around the country, which is good but yeah, so we have pocas that we booked that can be a challenge in itself just to make sure that you can go from client to client because I do like to go out in the morning and just go from one to the other. So yeah, we are able to transport clients in our cars so generally I'm going to pick them up and and we'll go to the the most suitable environment.

**Kassy:**

That makes life such a breeze with contract teaching. It can be hit or miss but you know, working for an agency a lot of times since you're directly under them, you're covered under their liability. I kinda want to go back to what you said about your challenges or making time for professional development, because I think everybody can relate. Even I can relate, and I'm running the show, I have to cancel all my students, I have to like, move things around. And I'm the only one who doesn't have the option to watch them later. But typically, when I'm going back, and I'm actually watching the presentations, I love to do it on today's a very rainy Sunday. We're getting into our winter time here in the northern hemisphere, and I love to just do laundry and watch professional development. It's kind of like my Netflix and chill. But how do you make time for professional development? Because it can be like challenging to do so. But also a big return of investment in your time. But it doesn't mean that it just like falls in your lap.

**Carina:**

Yeah, I think because I set my comms. So that's a big incentive for me to actually be organized and make the time. So I've got to ensure that I maintain competency. So my organization has a commitment to that as well, because they support it getting the comms. So yeah, for me, it's it's just putting the time in the diary. Unless something really urgent comes up, then it can wait. But if we get rainy days, so we're here, we're in spring, almost heading into summer here. So very different weather. But I have to say our winter this year, climate change has made such a huge difference. We've had unfortunate weather further up north and on our West Coast. But where I am on the South Island, midway down on the East Coast, we've been pretty lucky with the weather this year. So for me, if the weather's really bad, and the client, there's just nothing we can do and the client wants to cancel, then that's another time I can just pull out some of the information that's been sitting there. But during lockdown, it was great just to jump on some of the webinars that were being offered at timing difference. Sometimes getting up at 2am is not the best to bet in that you know the flexibility. I'm lucky with my organization around flexibility with getting managers permission just to flex the time and be realistic about how you spend your time. But yeah, there's, there's a commitment there. And it's you know, there's just so many wonderful opportunities for training, and they're so relevant to what we're doing. So again, I'm lucky even though I don't work with children, I work with them when they're adults. So particularly clients with CVI when they're coming through, and it's really good to be able to talk with their instructors from childhood, and then to continue. But yeah, I've picked up a few hints and tips through attending symposiums and conferences, just to make me a better instructor as well. And I think that's the outcome is if I'm better for my client, then it's good for the organization.

**Kassy:**

Oh, I love that. And you also seem really committed to your organization. But I want to go back to something that you said really a few things, you said you have to make the time. And that is such a different distinction from having the time because we're not always going to get to you know, those days, like in January, we're not going to wake up January 24. And just like our calendar, or our diary is clear for the day in order to attend the symposium live if we want to do that, but actually making the time. So setting aside that time and then for you guys waking up super early, or I know some of our friends in Australia, what they'll do is they'll miss the first half of the day, but then they'll catch it later as a group. So then they'll get together with friends either on Zoom and one person will play it or they'll get together like in a group. And they'll watch Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday's first two presentations all in one day. But you know at a different day that works for them. And I just so grateful that even though it's really hard to schedule the symposium at a time that works for everybody, although this year, we're really working to have people around the world showcase the symposium at different times. So that way, even if it's not live, it's at a time when you guys aren't having to wake up at 5am to attend all of the sessions in a row and really having that dedication. And you also mentioned being committed to it being committed to your own personal growth, because it's not just going to make you a better teacher. But it's going to really impact the lives of your learners. And it's going to look good for your organization as well.

**Carina:**

Yeah, we're lucky Australia's behind us in time. So it is a lot more earlier. So you're eliminating has been fitting in with the 6am start. So again, it's it's just that commitment and of course, our weekend. So Saturdays taken out as well. So I think you weigh up, I've never worked the number of hours per week that I'm paid to work, and I think I love my job. I'm passionate about what I do. So anything that makes me a better person, you know, I put that extra time and you know, sometimes it's just not practical to try and get the time back but we do work on flexi time in my organization, as long as a manager, you know, it's given approval, then we can work that in. But I think you balance that I'm gaining out of this professionally. So and also personally, I think some of the connections that you make through attendance and also getting to meet with people again, you know, people like Dona who I first met, I think, at a conference, but she did come to New Zealand on a holiday and got dragged into giving a presentation on our name for deaf blinds last minute through a friend of hers, so and that was just lovely. And her son was there doing the filming. So I still have a copy of that, which is brilliant. So you know, she's someone who reached out when we were having fun here with the earthquakes in Christchurch, and things weren't so great. So you know, those sort of friendships and connections that you established with people. And I have to say Janet



Barlow was just such an inspiration and a support and came along to some of my presentations when I was brave enough to put my hand up for conferences just to be a support, and there's just such a wonderful community.

**Kassy:**

Yes, man, you just touched on everything that I love about our community all around the world. And I'm so grateful that we have the internet. We're able to connect to like, for you and I to sit down and have a conversation would cost 1000s of dollars. In an unedited part of our conversation I mentioned to you, my dog is currently passively aggressive asking for attention. And she has, she's aging, she has health issues, I have young kids. So like me, leaving the house, me trying to get anywhere is really difficult, even if it's like three hours away at a local or state conference and those connections that you can have with people all around the world who have a different perspective from you, and whose lives look so different. But we have this thread that keeps us together is just so so special. And I love the fact that you guys wrote Dona Saurburger into a presentation. I commended that so much because she is phenomenal.

**Carina:**

She is she's just just an amazing human being and and so willing to share, you know, an email when I first started this profession back in 1990, we didn't have the internet. So we were still working with a screen that had green dots on it. So for our database. So I've seen a lot of changes and had to do a lot of learning over the years. But I think more so during lockdown, you learned to be a zoom specialist. You know, it was something we didn't do a lot of. And I think we've learned even as an organization now the importance of being able to have that connection internally. But you know, just be able to email someone in the world that you've worked with and say, look, I've got this issue, I've got this concern, have you got time and you know, can we commit, it's just amazing.

**Kassy:**

I love that you're doing that. I think so many of us stay on our little lonely islands, and we don't reach out. And within the symposium every year, we have a spreadsheet, really, it's a Google form. And then it turns into a spreadsheet where you can put your contact information so that way people can reach out to one another outside of social media. And we also have the Facebook group. So you can connect on social media on Facebook, but you have to take that initiative. And it sounds like you are really pushing yourself to move forward and take that initiative, what drives you to keep going forward and step outside of your comfort zone?

**Carina:**

I think well we ask our clients to do it most of our sessions. So I think it's something that we all have to do. And we've all got to embrace things. We've also got to keep learning, I think no for me, I can never say I know everything. Because I'm constantly learning from clients. And I'm constantly learning from my peers in the field. I guess I like a challenge. I like to solve problems. But I also like to help other people solve problems. So I guess, yeah, just the personality, but I love my job. I'm passionate about what I do. And I've been in the career a long time, things have changed. But you know, I still feel every day I'm gonna learn something new, or I'm going to come up with something that's a bit of a problem. And I'm going to be with a client. And we're going to say, Well, what do we do now? And we'll work it out together. Yeah.

**Kassy:**

That's so true. And a lot of us in the field are really great problem solvers. That's probably why we get into the field because nobody's gonna tell you exactly what to do. Once you leave university you're kind of on your own is not too much overhead, because even our bosses typically have not had our jobs before. So we can't even like ask them and we're not sitting at a desk job for them to see our mistakes. So we may not even know the mistakes that we're making and for you to keep going and keep really pushing yourself out of your comfort zone because we do we ask our clients to step out of their comfort zone. We're asking them a lot of times to change their identity of who they are. And someone in the Facebook group actually asked a question about the symposium and I I can't remember exactly how the conversation went. But I was like, Yeah, but we're not like other conferences, you're going to leave the symposium as a different person, in essence, and not fully completely changed as a person. But just taking one step forward and with a new skill or a new strategy, has there been a strategy or something that you learned from a presentation from the O&M symposium that you implemented, and what happened after that?

**Carina:**

I guess it was just perfect timing, in 2021, we had the presentation on the wheelchair guiding so from Scotts so I had a client with CVI using an electric wheelchair, not a manual. And but sometimes manual user, and I had sat through a presentation at an AI conference with him, I think it was probably the one way back in Chicago but if you're not practicing it, you don't retain it. So it was just the perfect timing for those strategies to come through. And just looking at how he approaches and quite relaxed, it was just I guess, paced at the right level for me to pick up and then go and get the resources that were available through, I think it was APH and then to apply those with my clients. So yeah, it just seemed to be calmer it was it was just perfect to make me better and a

better instructor for my client, and to be able to pace my lessons in a way that the client was able to pick up on them. And that was fantastic.

Of course, all the technology, because having access to technology is very difficult. So it's nice to keep up with what's happening. But there are a lot of apps that are not currently available in New Zealand, which is also a shame. And then I don't have an iPhone for work. So it's working with colleagues, communications instructors, adaptive technology instructors to sometimes sit in. And then we can look at the app, how it works, and then apply it when we go out on the field with our clients. So for the plants, we've got iPhones, I'm not a great iPhone person. So it's yeah, just working with others to make sure that it's an appropriate tool for the client, and they get the best out of it.

But yeah, I'd have to say from the symposium, sometimes it's things that you already have a good knowledge background, but it's just reinforcing that. And also looking at other internationally, how other countries are working. There's different roles, there's different regulations, particularly building standards, road codes, etc. So it's interesting to see how others are coping and what recommendations and you know, sometimes good old New Zealand, we've been a little bit ahead of the game with some of the research that we've done and strategies that we've come up with. So this is where working with Janet and others, it's been nice to actually send information that way not always be asking for it. I guess it's a tool that have not been the symposiums have been a tool for me each year, just that refreshing starting the new year for us. It's summer, we're just coming back off Christmas break. And it's just the right time of year to have that mindset for learning. Yeah.

**Kassy:**

Oh, there's something magical about the time of year, that just happened. I think organically, and you kind of touched on some of the sessions are really pertinent to right now. And some of the sessions you already know a good amount about but just refreshing or getting the other perspective of somebody else around the world and how they do things. I think you should present more, Carina, I think, I would love to learn more about how you guys are doing things in New Zealand and street crossings and the regulations because US does not, we don't have it all together. You know what I mean?

**Carina:**

We have our challenges. But the huge difference being a small country is you have one agency that's responsible for the highways, then we have local authorities that look after local roads and work together. I guess, again, it's a small community. And I've been lucky to be working in the environmental field and the previous role, I provided a lot of advice around design. And so working with those agencies, you sort of know which

people to tap on the shoulder and go and say, Look, this is an issue, you know, how do we address it. So assisting clients and their advocacy for environmental change. And now I've just had one that I've gone to our local authority here in Christchurch, who had to go to Walker Katoki, who is our Transport Agency to change the timing on a set of lights for a crossing and just got an email back. It's taken a week. But yes, they agree that it needs to be done. So if you know just those things known who to go to, and I think that's a big thing for me, as your community is not just your rehab field. It's also those local authorities and other people who can make changes that you can either get the client to go directly to or support them on that journey. So they learned to be an advocate of themselves.

**Kassy:**

Yeah, that's more information that I definitely could use. Okay, well, I want to make sure that we honor everybody's time and so we're going I'm going to wrap up. This has been such a fantastic conversation. Before we go, I want to ask you our very last question, which is if you could help our community become better teachers by encouraging them to take a step forward, what would you give them as a piece of advice?

**Carina:**

I guess passion already covered. And let's build a community of support. So you're not alone. You know, don't feel that you can't ask someone a question. And no question is silly. Each question's a learning. So just build that support network around you of colleagues, either locally or internationally. And I think in our field, people love to support one another. And nobody's precious about their knowledge. So get to know people, build that community around you. And I guess also impatient and listen, listen to your client, your clients going to direct the program. And I guess working with adults is a bit different than working with children. But it's, it's also taking that time, whatever the age of your client or student is, just take time to get to know them and listen and be patient.

**Kassy:**

That is beautiful. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast, Carina. It has been such a pleasure to get to know you, and to be able to hear from you and your perspectives all the way from New Zealand and to hear how Orientation and Mobility has grown there and how you've been at the forefront, all of all of it and how you really just keep moving forward and pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone. It has been such a pleasure.

**Carina:**

Thank you. It's been nice getting to know you a bit more, too.

**OUTRO:**

**Kassy:**

Impactful VI specialists are changing the way that we do things. The old way is no longer acceptable. And we get to decide how we're going to make more impact without burning ourselves out. I'm so grateful that you've taken the time to listen to this podcast. I would love it if you would leave a review on Apple podcasts or if you even just came and hung out with us on social media. I'm at Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, you can find me at Allied independence. I'd love to hear from you in my DMs. Let me know how you liked this episode and anything that you took away from it until next week. Just remember that all you have to do is take a step forward.