



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICES

Briefing for the Incoming Minister – Summary:

OFFICE FOR DISABILITY ISSUES

The following is a summary prepared by the NZCCSS Secretariat of the Briefing for the Incoming Minister of Disability Issues. The document itself is available at www.odi.govt.nz/publications/minister-briefing/2005/index.html

NZCCSS has provided this as a summary of the document. This summary is not intended to critique or comment upon the policies or initiatives contained in the agency's Briefing to the Incoming Minister, but simply to give an overview of some of the major issues covered in the agency's briefing.

Facts from the Office for Disability Issues

- According to the 1996 and 2001 Census and Post-Census Disability Surveys one in five New Zealanders live with a disability.
- In 2001, 626,500 adults (over 15 years), 90,000 children living in households and 27,300 people living in residential facilities reported some level of disability.¹
- In 2001 an estimated 743,800 New Zealanders needed some form of disability support.²
- In 2001 percentages of people who experienced disability were broken up into age groups, this data showed; 11 percent of children,³ 13 percent of people aged between 15-44 years, 25 percent of people aged between 45-64 years, 54 percent of people aged 65 and over and 87 percent of people aged 85 and over experienced disability.⁴
- Loss of mobility and agility are the most common forms of disability.⁵

The New Zealand Disability Strategy

- The New Zealand Disability Strategy (hereafter the Disability Strategy) was launched in 2001.
- It gives a clear explanation about what constitutes an inclusive society and what government and society need to do to achieve this. It also sets out steps that require the government and communities to better understand disability.⁶
- **The Office for Disability Issues** (hereafter the Office) is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Strategy.
- **A Disability Advisory Council** was established in May 2005 and is made up of disabled people and their families who play an advisory role to the Office.⁷

Barriers that disabled people face

- **Lower incomes-** 44 percent of disabled people have an income of over \$15,000 per annum compared to 60 percent of non-disabled people.⁸
- **Lower rates of employment-** an estimated 29 percent of disabled working-age adults work full-time in paid employment, compared to 65 percent of non-disabled working age adults.⁹
- **Less educated-** 61 percent of disabled people have formal education compared to 76 percent of non-disabled people.¹⁰
- **Poorer general health-** research shows that disabled people experience poorer health than others.¹¹

¹ *Making a World of Difference*, Office for Disability issues, Briefing to the incoming Minister, September 2005, p.7.

² Ibid.

³ Children aged 0-14 years

⁴ *Making a World of Difference*, Office for Disability issues, Briefing to the incoming Minister, September 2005, p.8.

⁵ Ibid, p.9

⁶ Ibid, p.15

⁷ Ibid, p.16

⁸ Ibid, p.11 see figure 1.3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Making a World of Difference*, Office for Disability issues, Briefing to the incoming Minister, September 2005, p.11

¹¹ Ibid.

- **Discrimination-** nearly a quarter of complaints made to the human rights commission are disability-related.¹²

The New Zealand Disability Strategy is focused around addressing five following areas;

i) Inclusion and acceptance of disabled people as citizens

Actions and Initiatives:

- The Office has developed the New Zealand Sign Language Bill.¹³
- Budget 2005 allocated funds towards a service within the Office that will appoint disabled people onto Crown boards and committees.¹⁴
- In May 2003 New Zealand agreed to take part in negotiations around the proposed United Nations international convention for the rights of disabled people which is due to be ratified around the end of 2008.¹⁵

ii) Improving government capacity

Actions and Initiatives:

- The Office has developed and published a ‘disability perspective tool’ that helps government agencies to consider the impacts of actions, decisions, legislation, policy or programme on disabled people.¹⁶
- A number of disability research programmes within government agencies are underway.
- The Office and Statistics New Zealand are undertaking a stock-take of data related to disability so that disability-related policy can be better informed.¹⁷

iii) Improving services for disabled people

- In July 2004 the Office did a review of disability issues due to inconsistencies related to funding and delivery of services. They would then advise government on how to move forward in a way that was consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy.¹⁸
- The Office has been talking to the government and disability sectors to gauge what issues there are with support services.¹⁹

iv) Enabling disabled people to participate in all areas of life.²⁰

Actions and Initiatives:

- The Office “focuses on promoting participation by disabled people in all areas of life.”²¹
- Due to the considerable difficulties with public transport local authorities and the Ministry of Transport have jointly funded a Total Mobility Scheme. The scheme provides subsidies for disabled people; this can be up to 50 percent of a person’s travel costs.²²
- The Department of Labour is working to improve the employment environment for disabled people by promoting the value of diversity in the workforce.²³
- The Pathways to Inclusion Strategy aims to move disabled people from sheltered work into mainstream work in the community. As part of this Strategy the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act 1960 has been repealed and also laws that enable disabled people to be paid less than the minimum wage have been tightened.²⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p.30

¹⁴ Ibid, p.31

¹⁵ Ibid, p.32

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.33

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.36

²⁰ Ibid, p.36

²¹ Ibid, p.37

²² *Making a World of Difference*, Office for Disability issues, Briefing to the incoming Minister, September 2005, p.39

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, p.39-40

- The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) is developing a new service delivery model for the Sickness and Invalids Benefits to reduce barriers to working.
- MSD are also developing services to help disabled people with transitions such as the transition from school into work.²⁵
- The State Services Commission runs the Mainstream Supported Employment Programme to help disabled people gain work in the state sector.²⁶
- The Ministry of Education is going to put an action plan in place to gauge what practices are most effective in special education.²⁷
- The Building Act 2004 has new requirements for public areas to provide disabled people with better access and mobility in public areas.²⁸

v) Accepting that there a diverse range of needs

Actions and Initiatives:

- The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa 2002 states that it is important to enable “disabled children and youth to lead full and active lives.”²⁹
- In March 2004 the Ministry of Women’s affairs launched an Action Plan for New Zealand Women. It included the need to promote the inclusion of issues for disabled women in the New Zealand disability strategy.³⁰

Other issues for consideration;

- **Changing attitudes** is identified as an important part of improving the lives of people living with disabilities. While the Disability Strategy was being developed, public ‘attitudes’ were identified as a significant barrier for their participation in society. The ‘Like Minds, Like Mine’ programme is an example of an initiative to address negative attitudes towards people suffering from mental illness.³¹
- **Integration of a ‘disability perspective’ into policy** is also identified as an important area for the Office. As part of the Disability Strategy some policy areas that concern disabled people have come under review. These include the Building Act 2004, the Residential Tenancies Act 1986 and the Fire Services Act 1975.³²
- **Disabled people’s basic human rights** need to be recognised by society and policy makers. The Office believes it to be an important factor in combating the “relative invisibility of persons with disabilities.”³³ The Office believes that “promoting understanding” and “an improved legislative rights framework that better acknowledges disability issues” is needed.³⁴ The United Nations is developing a convention to address issues around disabled people’s rights.
- **Disabled people are in a difficult position when it comes to the law**, treating them equally does not mean treating them the same.³⁵ It is necessary to have clear guidelines within law about what is reasonable in relation to discrimination. The United Nations convention will address these grey areas; they will then need to be used by government to change what society views as acceptable practice.³⁶

²⁵ Ibid, p.40

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p.41

²⁹ Ibid, p.42

³⁰ Ibid, p.44

³¹ Ibid, p.19

³² Ibid, p.20

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Making a World of Difference*, Office for Disability issues, Briefing to the incoming Minister, September 2005, p.21

³⁵ Ibid, p.22

³⁶ Ibid.

- **Disabled people rely on not-for-profit disability organisations** which need assistance with capacity issues. The Office is helping community organisations representing disabled people to address capacity issues.³⁷
- **Workforce issues threaten the implementation of the Disability Strategy.** The Office believes that the “workforce needs to be skilled and empowered” rather than simply increasing funding for more workers.³⁸
- **There is a need for more advocacy services for disabled people.** There is a complaints system available but there is a lack of immediate support for issues concerning disabled people.³⁹
- **Disabled people are concerned with bio-ethical issues** that threaten disabled people’s uniqueness and diversity. There is no consensus of values and concepts of these issues.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid, p.24

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.25