



EMPLOYING DISABLED PEOPLE

“The only true disability
is a bad attitude.”





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Celebrating difference and acknowledging the impact of a disabling environment are features of the current way of looking at disability. This approach sees that barriers to disabled people are attitudinal, organisational and in the physical environment. It enables employers to assess if and how they “disable” workers and potential workers, limiting the workplace’s ability to tap into their talents.

While this EEO Trust resource for employers inevitably treats disabled people as a group linked by disability, the EEO Trust challenges the very word “disability” which emphasises what people can’t do rather than what they can do. As our research shows, they can do a great deal and are a largely untapped labour resource. Can we afford to continue to overlook them in a skills-short employment market?

Frequently asked questions

Can I ask job applicants if they have any health or disability issues when I interview them?

You can ask applicants if they have any condition that may affect how they do the job and what accommodation, if any, they need to enable them to perform the tasks involved in the job.

Some of the other people I employ mightn't want to work with a disabled person. What can I do about this?

Challenging stereotypes and people's fears is a key step towards creating an inclusive work environment where everyone can be productive.

Disability awareness training can make a difference to people's attitudes and enable employers to create an environment which encourages creativity and commitment.

Having disabled people conduct the training can help give managers and co-workers some experience of disability and break down negative perceptions based on fear and expectations of incapacity rather than ability.

Wouldn't a disabled person need special treatment like special equipment or lots of time off?

Research suggests that disabled people:

- Perform as well as or better than those without disabilities (Perry et al, 2000).

- Are often highly educated and bring a wide range of skills, talents and qualities to the workplace, such as flexibility, communication and a sense of humour (EEO Trust, 2005).
- Have a lower or equivalent level of absenteeism. In Australia, 86% of employees with disabilities had an above average attendance rate (Brake, 2001; Hall, 2002).
- Cost a similar amount to employ.
- Have lower or equivalent turnover and accident rates. In New Zealand, research shows the safety rate for disabled people in the workplace was 99.78% (Brake, 2001; ILO 2003; Perry et al, 2000).

Many disabled people believe they have developed skills and abilities as a result of their impairment. Results from the EEO Trust survey on employment and disability issues show that disability is often seen as an ability and it was suggested that disability was a contributing factor to developing leadership skills.

Will it cost me more to employ a disabled person?

There is funding available to cover any costs which are directly related to a person's impairment.

In fact, most disabled people do not need extra assistance or funding:

- Around one in five (19%) disabled people in the workforce need some form of personal assistance, technical

equipment or other workplace modifications to enable them to work in their current job. Modified or different duties, including flexible work hours, is the most common requirement and was indicated by 9% of these people.

- Alterations to the work area or building are required by 2% of people in the workforce. (Ministry of Health, October 2004)

I want to ensure I'm not inadvertently excluding anyone from my recruitment pool. Who can help me tap into the skills of disabled people?

If you're using a recruitment agency, make sure they're aware of your commitment to EEO/diversity to ensure that disabled people are having the same selection criteria applied to them when the agency is short-listing.

A number of recruitment agencies specialise in supporting disabled jobseekers including Workbridge, Accomplish, Platform and other local agencies. Many of the local agencies are part of the ASENZ supported employment providers network (Phone 04 471 0933, www.asenz.org.nz). Organisations such as CCS, Foundation of the Blind, and the Deaf Association also have a specific supported employment focus. Go to the disability resources section on page 24 to find out more about funding or local assistance.

Is there any funding to help me make changes to the workplace if I employ a disabled person?

Workbridge administers government training and support funds. These are available for all disabled people, not just those registered with Workbridge. Funds include:

- Training Support targeting people with high support needs, and can be used for approved training, transport costs or special equipment up to \$15,600.
- Job Support - this is available to people in the private sector and up to \$16,900 can be paid in any 12-month period. People already in employment can also access this support if their job is threatened because they become disabled or their health worsens. The funding can be used to pay for workplace modifications, job coaching, interpreter services, temporary or ongoing wage subsidies etc.

Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) can provide job assistance and advice for clients with disabilities. It administers a modification grant to help remove any physical barriers for disabled people seeking work or already working. The grant can cover special equipment or modifications to the workplace or access to the building.

ACC usually funds adaptive equipment needed for daily living or equipment to help people who have had an accident return to work.

Can I get any financial help with paying the wages of a disabled person?

The Skills Investment programme administered by Work and Income can be used to help a new employee reach the skill level required by the job by:

- Investing in training which may be provided on-the-job or through a course or programme.
- Making a temporary contribution to wages. Mainstream Supported Employment Programme, run by the State Services Commission, offers a two-year placement within the state sector for disabled people. This programme aims to enable severely disabled people to:
 - Enter state sector employment on full pay; this includes a 100% wage subsidy in the first year and 50% in the second year.
 - Train on the job (people need to work a minimum of five hours a week and can build up to working more hours).
 - Be ready to compete for employment at the end of the placement.





Why employ disabled people?

One in five New Zealanders has a disability. Like other New Zealanders, their skills, experience and educational qualifications are widely varied, but they tend to be an under-utilised talent pool. This points to a huge opportunity for workplaces, both in terms of tapping into disabled people's skills and talents in a skills-short employment market, and more effectively providing products and services to disabled people.

Disabled people bring many positive skills and qualities to the workplace. In EEO Trust research conducted in 2005, disabled people rated themselves highly on:

- People skills
- Reliability and trustworthiness
- Good work ethic.

They also said they were:

- Passionate
- Had a positive attitude
- Were willing to go the extra mile
- Had a can-do attitude.

Respondents to the EEO Trust survey had a higher than average educational level - 48% had a degree and almost half of these were at postgraduate level, and 22% had trade or other vocational qualifications. Respondents were mainly in professional or managerial roles, with clerical, service or sales roles next most common.

Australian research (Graffam, J., Smith, K., Shinkfield, A. and Polzin, U., 2002) has found that:

- Disabled employees averaged one-sixth the recorded occupational

health and safety incidents of employees without a disability

- Disabled people are absent from work 85% less than other people
- Disabled people are cheaper to maintain in employment (recruitment, safety and insurance costs)
- Workplace accommodations for disabled people are financially cost-neutral or cost-beneficial to the organisation as a whole.

In American research (J. Levy, D. Jessop, A. Rimmerman and P. Levy, 1992), employers who had hired disabled people in the past said they were predisposed to hiring them again, indicating that disabled people are good employees.

Despite their positive qualities and work records, disabled people are under-represented in the workforce. Statistics NZ data (2002) shows that 44% of disabled adults living in households (i.e. not in residential facilities) are in the labour force compared with 74% of other people, and disabled people aged between 25-44 years have the highest unemployment rate (64%) of any

group. Disabled people are also often working in poorly paid, low-status jobs.

Good business sense

Employing disabled people makes good business sense. Benefits to workplaces include:

- Attracting and retaining the best of the talent pool
- Improving customer service
- Strengthening workplace morale and productivity
- Being a good corporate citizen
- Complying with legislative requirements and meeting international standards.

Attracting and retaining the best of the talent pool

To be competitive and effective, workplaces need to ensure they recruit the best person for the job and then retain and develop them. If people are excluded from the job market for reasons that do not relate to their ability to do the job, workplaces will inevitably miss out on skills, talent and energy.

Learning to respond creatively to life's challenges means many disabled people develop good problem-

solving skills, flexible and innovative ways of approaching an issue, as well as determination and focus.

Improving customer service and increasing market share

Employing disabled people can open up new opportunities and improve market share. Good customer service requires people to think creatively about the needs of all their customers. Those with direct experience of living with a disability provide an invaluable perspective. This could be in the front line as customer service staff, signalling to clients that disabled people are welcome and that their needs will be met.

In the UK, DIY store B&Q proactively recruited older and disabled people. "We want disabled people to be able to shop with confidence in our stores, secure in the knowledge that they will be able to access our goods and services easily, find solutions to meet their needs and be treated with respect by our store staff," said Kay Allen, Equal Opportunities and Diversity Manager, B&Q.

The result:

- Increased sales to disabled people
- Brand enhancement
- Overall improvement in customer care
- Increased overall employee satisfaction.

In Australia, Westpac is making a major commitment to attracting disabled staff and providing better service to disabled customers. The initiatives for employees include:

- Investigating how to attract disabled applicants for jobs
- Incorporating disability issues into its induction programme
- Raising awareness of disability issues within the organisation - for example, including regular updates and articles in its monthly staff magazine.

In 2005, Westpac said these initiatives were enhancing its employment brand and its organisational image.

Increasing workplace morale and productivity

All workers benefit from diversity in the workplace and the stimulation and interest a range of experiences and approaches brings. This, in addition to the sense of fairness that comes from seeing good employment practice in action, improves workplace morale and productivity.

Meeting the triple bottom-line

Good employment practice in relation to disabled people is part of ethical business practice. It signals to the one in five New Zealanders who have an impairment and their friends and family that your organisation is committed to equity. Addressing the issues around disability and work gives organisations the opportunity to brand themselves as good corporate citizens.

Complying with legal requirements

Under the Employment Relations Act and the Human Rights Act it is unlawful to discriminate in employment (including during recruitment) on a number of grounds including disability. Generally speaking, employers cannot treat a person differently because of their impairment or health condition if they can reasonably make accommodations to enable the person to do the job effectively and safely.

Disabled staff enhance work atmosphere

"Two absolutely wonderful people," is how King's Plant Barn branch manager Alexis Middleton described his two employees, James and Michael.

James has Williams syndrome, a rare genetic condition. People with Williams syndrome often perform well in areas such as speech, long-term memory and social skills, while other areas such as fine motor and spatial relations can be weaker.

"He has tremendous rapport with customers," says Alexis, "and an amazing memory for specific things. James is very skilled at remembering the names and faces of customers and past conversations, although he has a short attention span. He's very affectionate and this contributes towards a warm, friendly atmosphere for staff.

"James is funded by Workbridge because he still requires considerable supervision. He's totally accepted by other staff and everybody takes this on."

Michael worked with the garden centre for more than three years before moving to a job nearer his home. He has a physical disability as a result of a car accident and joined the centre through a community agency-funded job scheme.

"He has a brace on one of his legs, which means he couldn't do as much as other staff," says Alexis. "However, this was more than compensated for by the fact that he was one of the best communicators with customers. He'd talk to anybody, of any age, and any background.

"As with James, Michael greatly contributed to the warm and friendly atmosphere at our centre."

How to tap the potential of disabled people

Making the most of the talents and energy of New Zealand's diverse population requires creativity. Tapping into the qualities that disabled people can bring to the workplace is no exception.

Specific issues for disabled people relate to:

- recruitment and selection
- induction and training
- career development and promotion
- workplace culture
- technology

Recruitment

To identify and recruit the best of the talent pool, it is important to:

- determine exactly what is needed through job analysis and description, and
- ensure an equitable process of advertising, selection, interviewing and induction.

Job analysis

- To identify what the job entails, decide what is essential and what is only desirable. Being clear about these categories allows for the flexibility to later adjust the job description to the talents and needs people bring to a role.
- Remember that although it may be clear what a job entails, especially if it is a vacancy for an existing

position, it is worth re-analysing the job to avoid assumptions which indirectly exclude anyone.

Job description

- Focus on outcomes rather than tasks. Because of the challenges they face in everyday life, disabled people are often good at finding new ways of doing things. Narrowly defining how a task is carried out may exclude someone from finding an innovative, and perhaps better, way to reach the desired outcome.
- Write a clear and complete job description so applicants can assess whether they could fulfil the job requirements.

Person specification

- Specify which skills, qualifications and attributes are essential, preferred or an additional bonus.
- Remember, formal qualifications and previous work experience are not the only indicators of ability, so do not over-emphasise these at the expense of other types of experience or personal qualities.

Disabled people, like many other applicants, may not have vast work experience but their life experience may have provided them with the required attributes and qualities.

- Beware of the subtle stereotyping which may occur as a mental image of the "ideal employee" is formed. Learning to think outside preconceived ideas of who can do what is the key to effectively tapping into the skills and energies of the diverse population.
- In identifying the skills needed for the job, beware of sources of indirect discrimination such as the need to lift or for a driver's licence if these are not strictly necessary or are a minimal part of the position.
- Medical requirements directly related to the job could form a legitimate part of the person specification. For example, minimum visual ability and the absence of heart conditions may be requirements of bus or truck drivers.

Advertising

To broaden your base of applicants in a skills-short market consider:

- Using the EEO Employers Group logo or a statement of support of EEO/diversity in job advertisements to show applicants that you will make your selection on the basis of merit. EEO Trust research (2005) found that disabled people find this visible evidence of commitment to EEO helpful.
- Advertising in the disability media.
- Providing a copy of the job advertisement to organisations that cater for disabled people.
- Making job descriptions available by email or in large print.
- Registering jobs with Workbridge.
- Including your fax number and/or email address with the advertisement to enable enquiries from those with hearing impairments.

Using a recruitment consultancy

Ensure that your recruitment consultancy understands the benefits of having a diverse workforce and is committed to recruitment on the basis of EEO/diversity. A good starting point in selecting a suitable consultancy is to choose a member of the EEO Employers Group. If the consultancy is a corporate member of the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association, their business has been endorsed as complying with all legislative requirements.

Selection

Gathering information

- Consider asking a disabled person to be involved with short-listing, interviewing and selecting candidates. Be sure to brief them on the recruitment procedure and have them participate in the whole process, not just the interviews of disabled candidates.
- Ensure the application form is available in large type or electronically for people with visual impairments.
- Only ask for information that is directly relevant to the job and the candidate's ability to do it. Don't ask general questions seeking a

list of all disabilities, limitations or health problems, whether the applicant has received psychiatric care or been hospitalised, or for a complete ACC history.

- Where recruitment requires a selection test, it may be necessary to offer an alternative test format or make particular arrangements, for example, to trial the work involved to see if the person can do it.

Interviews

- Before the interview, ask short-listed applicants if they have any particular needs for the interview. For a disabled person this could include an accessible car park, sighted guide, or rearranging furniture to accommodate a wheelchair.
- Applicants should only be asked about their ability to perform the tasks relating to the job they are applying for.
- Ask if the applicant has any condition that may affect how they do the job and what accommodation, if any, they need to enable them to perform the tasks.
- Interviewers can ask (for accident insurance purposes) whether the applicant has or has had an injury or medical condition caused by gradual process, disease or infection, such as hearing loss, sensitivity to chemicals, or repetitive strain injuries which the tasks of the job may aggravate or further contribute to.
- Medical examinations should be conducted only in regard to conditions related to job duties.
- Avoid assumptions about what disabled people can and can't do. Even if someone on the interview panel knows a person with a similar condition, avoid jumping to conclusions about the candidate you are considering for a job.

Decision-making

- Take into consideration the personal skills and qualities disabled people acquire to manage the practical difficulties of living in a world that seldom takes their needs into account.

IT expert brings specialist skills

Enable New Zealand provides services to disabled people, their families, health professionals and disability support organisations. Leon, who has cerebral palsy, was referred to the company by Workbridge and has been employed by Enable through the Mainstream Programme. He is an IT expert and his work involves developing on Visual Basic, Microsoft Access and SQL platforms.

"We were looking for the person whose IT systems development skills, competency, and academic or industry qualifications fitted with our criteria; Leon has definitely been a match in all of these areas," his manager says.

At work, Leon mainly communicates with one-fingered typing via email, computer/digital diary. Enable New Zealand purchased a specialist keyboard and is looking to upgrade the digital diary Leon uses in his day to day work.

"We are continually growing and learning as we make every effort to create an inclusive workplace for all staff," says Guy. "Both the team and Leon have to be adaptable. It is a matter of reconfirming that everyone needs to step up to the mark and people are responding well. Leon has a great attitude, turns up for all the social events 'boots and all' and is definitely one of the team."

Accommodating a disabled person

You won't necessarily need to make special accommodations if you employ a disabled person but, as well as being legally obliged to make reasonable accommodations, employers will get the best from all workers, including disabled people, if they provide a safe, effective working environment which encourages productivity and creativity.

Special accommodations may be organisational (such as redistributing tasks and workload), structural (such as lowering the height of a workbench or putting in a wheelchair ramp), or technological (such as installing new computer software). The supported employment agencies can work with employers and employees to identify useful workplace accommodations.

- Discuss any workplace accommodations required with the new employee well before they start work.
- Plan ahead - time may be needed to source equipment and expertise.
- Consult with the Department of Labour Health and Safety (www.osh.govt.nz, 0800 209 020) if there are concerns about safety and health issues for the disabled person or other workers.
- It may help to arrange a pre-start visit for the new employee to smooth the process of adapting the workplace and give the person a chance to familiarise themselves with adaptations they may need to make to their working methods.
- Ensure access to toilet and catering facilities is adequate and allow time for any necessary modifications to be carried out. It is important that the new employee is able to participate equally in all aspects of the work environment - the social and personal as well as the directly work-related.

Funding may be available for some accommodations, for example, to assist with:

- Workplace modifications
- Special equipment required because of a disability
- Job coaches and/or mentors
- Interpreter services
- Productivity allowances
- Additional transport costs
- A support person/note-taker

Funding sources include:

- The Job Support fund to meet the costs of disability in open employment where a person is earning the minimum wage or more.
- A WINZ Modification Grant to pay for changes to the workplace, equipment, or access to buildings to enable employers to recruit disabled people.
- The Mainstream Supported Employment Programme to assist disabled people into long-term supported employment within New Zealand's public sector.
- The Training Support fund to meet disability costs for those participating in integrated training for work experience.

Induction

- As with any new employee, a proper welcome and introduction gets things off to a good start.
- Ensure everyone is clear about roles, responsibilities and expectations.
- All the usual induction and support processes of the organisation such as seminars, visits, and text material should also be available to a disabled person. Check that written material is accessible to those with a visual impairment.
- Make sure emergency procedures take account of your new employee and that everyone is familiar with the procedures. Discuss with the new employee what their needs are in this respect.
- As with all staff, implement a regular review process. This creates an opportunity for the new worker to raise any issues and enables the reviewer to make sure the person's

skills are being used effectively and also give feedback and support to him or her. The process should not just address the employee's performance, but also such things as whether the accommodations are working well.

- If there are several disabled people in the workplace, create an opportunity for them to set up a support network or forum.

Training and development

All employees, including disabled people, need to have their training and career development needs taken seriously. You can help ensure disabled people have the opportunity to reach their potential and contribute effectively at work by:

- Assigning a mentor when she or he joins the organisation. This may be another disabled person who is more senior or with considerable experience in the organisation, or it may be someone else who can support and encourage the new employee.
- Ensuring disabled employees have career goals and a plan to move towards those.
- Carrying out a training needs analysis on arrival and annually thereafter.
- Ensuring training offered to a disabled person is in a style and format to suit their needs. For example, don't expect a person with vision impairment to watch a training video.
- Recognising different ways of doing things in performance appraisals.

Technology

New technology has created new opportunities for many disabled people. Ways technology can assist disabled people include:

- Large-print options onscreen and a large screen for those with visual impairments.
- Screen readers for people with print-related difficulties.
- Video for some deaf people.
- Loop and other electronic assistance for hearing-impaired people.



What if an employee acquires an impairment?

Employees may develop an impairment through an accident or through a degenerative illness. This obviously creates many new challenges for them and also raises issues for their employer.

Questions include:

- How will the disabled employee continue to do their job?
- What changes will need to be made and what help will be needed to do this?
- What does the law say?

Job retention makes good business sense

Ensuring the employee can remain at work or return to work makes good business sense:

- The business retains an experienced, motivated and probably loyal employee.
- The business avoids recruitment, selection, induction and training costs.
- Staff morale may be enhanced as other workers are reassured that they will be looked after if they are injured or develop an impairment.
- Safety standards may increase as a result of improved awareness of disability and health-related work issues and methods.
- Improvements in building access for disabled staff also benefits disabled customers.
- Customer perception is enhanced.

Key points to remember

- The legislation promotes job retention and return to work for injured and disabled workers.
- The Human Rights Act 1993 requires employers to take reasonable steps to accommodate and, if necessary, provide special assistance for employees with an impairment.
- Assume that an employee who is injured or develops an impairment will retain their job or achieve a full return to work.
- Try not to have hard-and-fast rules about outcomes of cases of disability and injury in the workforce. Each individual case must be considered on the particular circumstances of the individual injury and/or impairment and of the employee, the job and the workplace environment.

Legal requirements

Where an employee is injured at work, an employer must consider their particular circumstances. This consideration is guided by a web of protective legislation that places a number of requirements on the employer. The general intention of the

legislation is to ensure injured or disabled employees can, wherever reasonably possible, either keep their jobs or return to work at the earliest opportunity.

Keeping actively involved in the workforce is widely recognised as essential to the financial wellbeing and personal self-esteem of injured or disabled employees. The legislation aims to promote this without imposing unreasonable disruptions on employers or risk of harm to the employee or others.

Key concepts in the law Accident compensation

An injury may result in an impairment that is short-term, long-term or permanent. The accident compensation legislation (Injury Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Compensation Act 2001) provides certain statutory entitlements to an injured employee. These include:

- Weekly compensation for loss of earnings
- Payment of cost of health treatment
- Rehabilitation measures, including social and vocational rehabilitation.

The Act places a strong emphasis on rehabilitation, particularly in the workplace of the injured or disabled employee. The Accident Compensation Corporation provides a case manager who will usually develop a rehabilitation plan with the employee and their employer. This may involve scheduling a gradual return to work, alteration or reallocation of tasks, and arranging any necessary alterations to the workplace.

Human Rights Act

Where an employee develops an impairment, an employer is required to take reasonable steps to accommodate them. This may involve the provision of special facilities or assistance for that worker.

Employees who are given less favourable terms of employment, conditions of work, opportunities for training, promotion or transfer, or are dismissed because of an impairment may have grounds for action against the employer under the Human Rights Act.

Where do I start?

The following process will meet the needs of both the disabled employee and the employer:

- Develop a standard procedure for handling and enquiring into cases. While there can be no standard outcome, a well thought-out procedure will enhance the confidence of the managers and workers involved.
- Be aware that procedures that seem similar to those developed for performance reviews, disciplinary meetings or dismissals may make an employee feel anxious that they are about to be “told off” or “sacked”. Procedures prepared in advance and advised to staff will help ease such anxiety.
- Explain the process and goals to the disabled employee. Be aware that if a plan for job retention or return to work does not succeed, the procedure will be open to the

same scrutiny as any dismissal or termination of employment.

- Involve the employee as much as possible. Make sure they have a good chance to put forward their ideas and concerns. A person who is dealing with their impairment in other parts of their life is likely to have good ideas about dealing with it at work.
- Remember that if they have a new injury or a newly developed impairment they may need extra time and help to sort through and present their ideas.
- Keep a thorough record of discussions and plans for dealing with the situation and make copies available to the employee.

A number of actions may be necessary to enable the disabled person to continue to contribute at work, including:

- Changing the work environment, such as access, lighting, additional or adapted equipment.
- Changing the job by providing light or modified duties or reallocating tasks between employees (accident compensation applies here).
- Providing additional training and support for new tasks or doing old tasks in a new way.

Information to check during the process

- Employment agreement. Look at provisions for sick leave, how it may be used, consultation provisions about changes to jobs, and notice periods.
- Accident compensation and rehabilitation legislation. If the injury or impairment occurred through work, there are particular requirements. If it is not work-related, the employee still has entitlements to social and vocational rehabilitation.
- Anti-discrimination legislation. The Human Rights Act prohibits termination, non-promotion, changes of job, or lesser conditions of work for disabled employees, unless there is a particular exception.

- Employment relations legislation. In addition to the minimum standards of employment, employers and employees are required to be responsive and communicative in all aspects of the employment relationship.
- Health and safety legislation. The employer is required to assess health and safety risks for workers, clients and other users of the workplace. This assessment should identify what information, training or procedures may be required.
- Privacy legislation. The needs and personal health status of a disabled employee may need to be discussed among a range of people - managers, supervisors, safety and union representatives, other employees, and medical or occupational advisors. Be aware of the need to balance this involvement with respect for the individual’s privacy. The nature and purpose of the information gathered and the use to which it will be put should be discussed with the employee. While some “evaluative material” from supervisors or managers is confidential to the business only, the employee will be entitled to see most other material, including medical reports.





Disabled people are people - practical tips

EEO Trust research has found that disabled people believe that other people's attitudes and behaviours are the main barrier they face at work. Disabled people need to be free to pursue their goals in the workplace without having to deal with the unhelpful attitudes and behaviour of other people at work, whether they are colleagues and managers or clients and customers.

By developing positive and supportive workplaces, employers can create environments which support everyone to be creative, co-operative and productive at work.

Language

The words we use reflect our attitudes, and influence and reinforce other people's views and behaviour. Negative and stigmatising disability language is no more acceptable than racist or sexist language. In the past, the words used to describe disabled people tended to focus on the medical condition or the supposed difficulties of having an impairment. This is no longer acceptable to disabled people and nowadays the language of disability emphasises a social perspective that reflects people's individuality and humanity.

Disabled people are first and foremost people. The general principle in terms of appropriate language is one of respect and individuality.

Language usage may change over time and differ from person to person,

so be open to individual preferences and respect the wishes of those referred to. Some guidelines follow for talking to or about disabled people:

- Avoid phrases which emphasise a medical condition or impairment over the humanity of the person - for example, use "people who have impaired vision" rather than "blind people".
- Do not use the word "handicapped" which has a disempowering connotation.
- Avoid phrases that lump people together as though they were an homogenous group. For example, words such as "the disabled" assume that these people constitute a group without diversity, difference and individual experience.
- Never use derogatory terms such as "cripple", "spastic" or "retarded". Although once in common usage, such words are likely to cause offence, whether or not a disabled person is present.

- It is better to say someone has learning difficulties than that they are mentally handicapped.
- Don't speak to or about disabled people as though they are victims. Phrases such as "in spite of her disability" and "a victim of" perpetuate attitudes of misfortune, frailty and dependence. For many people their impairment is a fact of life not a tragedy.
- Don't be concerned about using common expressions which might relate to a person's impairment, such as "see you later", "did you hear about?" or "I'll be running along". Disabled people don't want excessive attention brought to them, but neither do they want self-conscious avoidance.
- When addressing a disabled person offer the same respect to them as to anyone else in the same situation. For example, refer to them by an appropriate title (Mrs, Mr, Ms, Professor, Dr), avoid patronising over-familiarities, and do not treat adults as though they were children.

- Don't describe someone in terms of a condition, like "Hinemoa is a spastic" or "Fred is an epileptic". Rather, say "Fred has epilepsy" or "Maria has multiple sclerosis".
- Wheelchairs give people freedom, so just say "Aorewa uses a wheelchair", not "Aorewa is wheelchair-bound" or "confined to a wheelchair".

Organising meetings, conferences and seminars

When your organisation arranges an event that includes people outside your organisation, a number of factors need to be considered. Note that any arrangements made for disabled people should be made tactfully and without singling them out for unwanted attention or comment.

The following are suggestions of good practice:

- On the invitation, meeting notice or letter inviting attendance, ask people if they have any requirements to help them participate fully.
- Only use venues that are wheelchair-accessible (including the toilets).
- Check that there is suitable parking and provide necessary directions in advance.
- Ensure the room is set up to allow a person who uses a wheelchair to move freely around and participate in any group activities.
- Use venues that have a hearing loop. If not, the sound system should provide good sound enhancement.
- If any participant is hearing impaired and uses sign language, arrange an interpreter (unless they wish to bring their own), and set up the room so they can clearly see each other.
- Reduce or remove any background noise.
- Clearly sign suitable toilet facilities and inform staff so they can direct people accordingly.
- Presenters or facilitators should speak clearly and not cover their mouths or talk to the whiteboard. A microphone helps.
- Ensure any written material is sufficiently clear to meet the needs of any attendee with a visual impairment (if they usually work with print and not alternative formats).
- Ensure attendees with a visual impairment are seated to maximise their vision and not, for example, facing a bright window.
- Check for special dietary requirements in advance.
- If someone has a personal assistant to take notes, provide the facilities they require, such as a clipboard or a table for a laptop, good lighting, appropriate seating etc.
- Offer clipboards or an accessible table to people using wheelchairs.
- Ensure staff are well briefed to meet particular requests and provide assistance if necessary.
- Advise disabled people in advance of the arrangements made to meet their needs.
- During discussions ensure only one person speaks at a time.
- Written notes might be helpful to present complicated information at meetings or seminars.
- Offer minutes of meetings or any other written communication in the person's preferred format (on disk, in large print, on audio-cassette or in Braille).
- Check if anyone would prefer to tape the meeting or course rather than take notes.

One-to-one meetings

Consider the following when setting up a meeting with a disabled person:

- Ask them in advance if they need any special arrangements. If you are meeting a person with a hearing impairment, for example, it may help to meet in a quiet place. Or have an extra chair ready if they have an interpreter.
- Do not rush in and assist a disabled person before asking them if they need help. Most disabled people are good at

Staff with hearing impairment an asset in Napier factory

Napier electrode factory Weldwell New Zealand has two deaf staff whose main means of communication is by sign language. This has helped the way the whole company communicates and also has definite advantages in a noisy work area.

"They work on the production line, where the work can be quite repetitive. One works on the wire-cutting and straightening area and runs two machines. It's a noisy area, so the disability is not a disadvantage, and their presence creates a good atmosphere," says production supervisor Bill Symons.

Symons says everybody jokes and laughs with them, not at them. "They express themselves well. People know where they are with them. They're very honourable men and they really appreciate having a job.

"Our deaf staff bring out the best in people and they're fun to have around. We've worked out our own system of communicating with them. They indicate with a gesture and their facial expression what they require. Somehow they always find a way around any communication issue.

"They're really tenacious. They put in an average 40-hour week and overtime as well, when it's required. Their work effort would do credit to someone who didn't have a disability and that's because they give 110 per cent."

Wheelchair to the top

Donna Case excels in her job. She also uses a wheelchair. Donna is customer services team leader at Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT), where she manages a team of eight people.

Customer services is the public face of NMIT. Donna may well be the first person visitors see. “Sometimes they’re a little nervous, however, a big smile and a confident approach tends to win people over. I’m very confident about the programmes we offer and this also helps to lower the barriers and help people to relax when talking to me.”

Donna began work at NMIT in early 2001 as a customer relations agent, before she was promoted to her current position.

A former student at the NMIT for two years, Donna graduated with a New Zealand diploma in business, as well as a New Zealand Institute of Management diploma in management.

Donna says she had applied for jobs previously at NMIT and not been considered. “I was thrilled to get that first job. It’s so hard to get employment when you’re in a wheelchair; people just freak out when they first see you. You might be the best person for the job on paper, but when they meet you it can be a different story. Employers worry about OSH issues, about the changes they might need to make. But once I started working with people here they soon forgot that I’m in a wheelchair - it’s simply not an issue for them.”

Donna has partial paraplegia. A tumour in her spinal cord was discovered in 1986 and removed in 1994. Then in 1997 she broke her back.

“Donna gets on with things just like everybody else,” says Human Resources Advisor, Donna Schofield. “She dispels any preconceptions and prejudices because she’s so friendly and competent.”

asking when they need assistance and will do so in a straightforward way.

- Just as with anyone, physical contact should be appropriate to the situation and relationship you have to that person. For example, offer a handshake, a touch on the arm or an arm around the shoulder as appropriate and do not impose familiarity on a disabled person.

People with a mobility impairment

- If you are talking for more than a few minutes to someone using a wheelchair, sit down yourself, or at least put yourself on the same level so they avoid a stiff neck.
- Move around to the front of high counters or desks.
- Be aware of obstacles to mobility such as deep-pile carpets and heavy doors and offer to help as appropriate.
- A person’s wheelchair is usually considered as part of their body space so don’t lean on or interfere with it unless this is appropriate.

People with impaired vision

- When you first meet, identify yourself clearly and introduce others who are present, indicating where they are in the room. When talking in a group, name the person you are talking to.
- When moving around in unfamiliar territory, establish if the person wants help and of what type. For example, they may just want verbal cues such as “you are approaching three steps down”, or they may request a guiding arm. In this case try not to propel or lead them.
- When offering a seat, place the person’s hand on the back of the chair.
- It may be helpful to adjust the lighting in a room, either up or down. Ask if they have any preferences.
- When your actions relate directly to the person with impaired vision, try and develop the habit of saying what

you are doing or what you intend to do. For example, “Shall we shake hands?” or “I’m just leaving the room for a moment”. Don’t leave them talking to an empty space.

- Treat a guide dog as a working animal not a pet.

People with hearing impairments

- When you first meet someone with a hearing impairment ask how they prefer to communicate. There are different degrees of deafness and different ways to communicate. Remember that shouting doesn’t help.
- Attract the person’s attention by a light touch on the arm or by a wave of the hand.
- People who use sign language will probably have an interpreter with them but be sure to speak directly to the person with the hearing impairment.
- Even with a signing interpreter it may be difficult to communicate technical terms or very complex information. Written notes may be helpful.
- Someone who is lip reading will probably be concentrating hard, which can be very tiring, so ensure the environment is as conducive as possible. For example, minimise interruptions by other people and telephones, and try and make the lip reader feel welcome and at ease.
- Be aware of the lighting in the room. If you are sitting in front of a bright window or other light source you will be back-lit and the lip reader may have trouble seeing your face clearly.
- When you talk, look directly at the person and speak slowly and clearly. Cut out unnecessary words and phrases and emphasise your words with facial expressions, gestures and body movements.
- If you smoke, eat or drink, or have your hands near your face while speaking, the lip reader will find it hard to read your lips clearly.

- Some people with hearing impairments use hearing dogs. As with guide dogs they are working animals not pets so treat them accordingly.

People with speech difficulties

- A person's slowness or difficulty with speech is no indication of their intelligence. Be attentive and encouraging and try to put them at their ease.
- When meeting or interviewing a person with a speech difficulty select an environment where you are not distracted or interrupted and where the other person feels comfortable and welcome.
- Be patient. If someone speaks slowly resist the temptation to butt in or finish sentences for them, and try not to correct what they say or speak for them.
- Where possible ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.
- If something is unclear, repeat what you have understood and let the person's reaction guide you.
- Do not pretend you have understood if you haven't. Try rephrasing questions so that it may be easier for the person to respond and for you to understand.

People with learning difficulties

- Start by assuming you will be understood but be prepared to explain something more than once.
- Break down complicated information to give one piece at a time and check that each stage has been understood.
- You may need to write your message down so that the person can show it to a family member or friend. Include your name and contact details.

People with a mental illness

- Remember this is not the same as having a learning or intellectual difficulty. It is often a temporary condition and most people will recover fully.

- People with mental illness may find everyday activities confusing, distressing or difficult. Try to be kind, non-judgemental and patient.
- Give the person plenty of time if there are decisions to be made.

People with a facial disfigurement

- People with facial disfigurements may have difficulty facing social situations, meeting new people or getting work. They may also have to deal with bullying and harassment. In Britain severe disfigurement has been included as a provision of the Disability Discrimination Act. In New Zealand employers can include disfigurement in disability awareness training.
- Don't stare or ask personal questions about how they acquired the disfigurement, and if you are uncomfortable try to keep that to yourself.

Blind staff add value at Wellington engineering firm

"I work on the basis that I'm prepared to give anyone a chance if they're willing to help themselves, and that includes disabled staff," says managing director and founder of Barclay Engineering, Arthur Barclay. "I'm compassionate, but they must be good workers too."

His company has had positive experience of employing two blind men. One worked for the company for almost 12 years, the second for five years.

"In many ways, blind people can be more aware than other people," says Barclay. "We found that these men could tell when tools were getting blunt and needed sharpening better than some with full vision, because they had a more refined sense of touch."

Their work involved operating a capstan lathe. A highly developed sense of touch enabled them to check that the thread and sizing on the products was correct.

The lathe was set up for repeat work to manufacture plumbing fittings such as brass nipples and sockets.

Based in Naenae in Wellington, Barclay Engineering does product engineering, machining various types of fittings supplied mainly to the plumbing industry. The company has 22 staff. The blind staff were sourced through the Blind Institute, which assisted the company to train the men and help them settle into their jobs. The Institute sent along one of their blind staff, a former engineer, who checked that the men were working well and were happy in their work.

"The other staff were as good as gold with our blind men," says Barclay. "We viewed our blind staff as equals with the rest of the staff."

Where to next?

National employment agencies

ASENZ

The Association of Supported Employment is a not-for-profit organisation committed to promoting Supported Employment Services for disabled people. Go to their website for a list of accredited employment agencies around New Zealand.
www.asenz.org.nz

CCS

CCS runs a supported employment programme known as Accomplish, funded by the Ministry of Social Development. This service exists in Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Marlborough, Canterbury and South Canterbury. For more information contact 0800 227 200
www.ccs.org.nz

IHC

Ignite is a new IHC service offering a mixture of supported employment, supported living, and family/whanau services, depending on local needs. So far Ignite has been established in New Plymouth, Waitakere, Wanganui, Christchurch, North Canterbury and Wellington.
Tel: 04 472 2247
www.ihc.org.nz

Mainstream Employment Programme

The Mainstream Employment Programme offers a two-year, subsidised employment programme for people with significant impairments. The programme is provided by the State Services Commission and aims to assist participants into meaningful, long-term employment within selected state sector organisations. Mainstream provides a 100% salary subsidy for year one, and 50% for year two, and monitors and supports each placement.
Tel: 04 495 6726
mainstream@ssc.govt.nz

Royal NZ Foundation of the Blind

The RNZFB offers vocational training and support for members wanting to gain employment or keep or adapt a job following sight loss. Vocational advisors work with employers to make any adaptations or identify any new equipment and liaise with Workbridge. The Foundation recently produced a DVD profiling employers which are successfully employing blind, deafblind and vision-impaired staff.
Tel: 0800 24 33 33
www.rnzfb.org.nz

Deaf Association of New Zealand

The Deaf Association works with employers to tap into the skills of deaf people and provides advocacy and support for deaf people in the workplace. It recently produced a DVD and booklet on hiring deaf staff.
Tel: 09 828 3235
TTY: 09 828 3282
national@deaf.co.nz
www.deaf.co.nz

Work and Income

Work and Income New Zealand provides job assistance and advice for disabled clients. It administers a modification grant directed at removing any physical barriers for disabled people seeking work or already working. The grant can cover special equipment or modifications to the workplace or access to the building. The Skills Investment programme is also administered by Work and Income. This provides help with training and wages.
Tel: 0800 559 009
information@msd.govt.nz
www.workandincome.govt.nz

Workbridge

Workbridge assists disabled people to find employment and also administers government funding to help with workplace accommodations etc.
Tel: 0508 858 858
www.workbridge.co.nz

Websites and resources

Deaf-Quip

Offers a range of equipment and products.
www.deafquip.co.nz

Department of Internal Affairs

Allocates grants for mobility and communication equipment to help disabled people achieve independence and gain access to the community.
www.dia.govt.nz

Employers' Forum on Disability

The Employers' Forum on Disability is a UK employers' organisation focused on the issue of disability in

the workplace. Their site contains some excellent resources.
www.employers-forum.co.uk

Enable New Zealand

Enable administers government funding to improve the quality of life for disabled people.
www.enable.co.nz

Kia Rangatu moving forward

This training resource will help improve employees' awareness of disability issues. It includes a workbook, two videos, and a number of related publications. Cost \$100. Available from Auckland Disability Providers Network, bjlunny@xtra.co.nz.

Lomak International Ltd

Lomak is a New Zealand company which has developed a light-operated mouse and keyboard for anyone with a physical impairment that prevents them from using a standard keyboard.
www.lomak.co.nz

Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation aims to improve the mental health of all people and communities in New Zealand.
www.mentalhealth.org.nz

Mind and Body Consultants

Mind and Body is an Auckland-based organisation promoting the interests of people with experience of mental illness.
www.mindandbody.co.nz

Ministry of Health

The Government's principal agent and advisor on health and disability.
www.moh.govt.nz

Ministry of Social Development

Family and community services has a directory of support services divided into disability issues, ethnic support and education/training categories listed according to region.
www.familyservices.govt.nz

New Zealand Federation of Vocational and Support Services Inc (VASS)

VASS supports and works on behalf of organisations who provide employment, training and support services for disabled people. It can also provide information about vocational services.
www.nzvass.org.nz
Email: tess@nzvass.org.nz

Office for Disability Issues

Promotes and monitors the implementation of the New Zealand Disability Strategy in government and wider society.
www.odi.govt.nz

HumanWare

Pulse Data offers assistance with technological equipment and products such as Auto-Reader and BrailleNote PK.
www.pulsedata.com

Ripple Trust

Ripple Trust is a not-for-profit organisation which delivers services for disabled people by disabled people in the Auckland and Northland regions. Ripple Trust offers awareness training to businesses.
www.ripple.org.nz

TalkLink Trust

TalkLink provides assistive technology services to disabled people.
www.talklink.org.nz

Vehicle Association of New Zealand

The main objective of VANZ is to ensure that transport for disabled people is safe.
www.vanz.co.nz

WorkSite

A website focusing on employment issues with links to relevant sites. It includes a section on organisations which can help disabled people with employment issues.
www.worksite.govt.nz

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